

SERVING A MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY

**Endorsed by the Catholic Bishops
Conference of England & Wales.
November 1999**

Guidelines for a Review of Catholic Organisations and Institutions in the light of the Macpherson Report

The Bishops' Conference welcomes the Macpherson Report; and, in the light of its useful definition of 'institutional racism', urges all Catholic organisations and institutions to look again at how they could better serve minority ethnic communities in our society. It endorses the earlier statement by the Committee for Community Relations, and asks the Committee to consider ways of facilitating this process of review in the Catholic community. (Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales, April 1999)

The Gospel values which underpin our work call us to the service of all, especially the poor and marginalised. Events surrounding the death of Stephen Lawrence and the Report of the subsequent Inquiry, have highlighted the reality of 'institutional racism' and our common obligation to address it. Institutional racism is a form of structural sin and primarily a sin of omission. The Macpherson Report defined it as

...the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (46.25)

Knowing that institutional racism exists in some of the key institutions of our society, we cannot assume that Catholic organisations and institutions are unaffected. In such a situation, we become culpable if we fail to take stock and examine carefully the nature of the service we offer.

This is, therefore, an opportune time to review our work in order to determine whether it reaches out to the whole community, including minority ethnic groups who might be in danger of being excluded. We hope that Catholic organisations will use the Jubilee Year as the time to undertake such a review.

The review

To carry sufficient authority, the review should normally be initiated by those responsible for the governance of an organisation. They will establish its basic parameters and give someone in senior management the task of ensuring that the review is carried out. As far as possible, everyone in the organisational community should be invited to be part of the process.

The organisation will want to ensure that the perspectives of minority ethnic communities are fed into all stages of the review.

The following are some questions that organisations might ask themselves in order to facilitate the process of review.

1. What is the organisation's mission?

The *Mission Statement* and aims and objectives may be one place to begin a review. Do they reflect the multi-ethnic nature of society and the universal mission of the Church, and include a commitment to serve all with a special care for the poor and marginalised? Do they convey a sensitivity to differences of colour, culture and ethnic origin? How can the mission statement and aims and objectives be made to shape the living reality of the organisation?

2. Is it a diverse community?

Are ethnic minorities included among those who govern and manage the organisation? Do the staff come from diverse backgrounds? What about the stakeholders or funders? Does the organisational community at different levels reflect the ethnic diversity of society?

3. Who does it serve?

What client groups does the organisation serve? Are they an appropriately diverse constituency for the area in which it operates? Would the organisation like to serve a more multi-ethnic group? How could it reach out to others?

4. What services does it offer?

Are the services offered appropriate to the communities the organisation wishes to serve? Do they take into account the real needs of minorities as well as those of the majority community? Are there services the organisation might offer that would help it to address a more diverse constituency?

5. Does the organisation have a multi-ethnic ethos and image?

Does the organisation have an ethos that reflects and values the ethnic diversity of society? Is this communicated in the attitudes of staff, the materials and resources produced and in less tangible ways? How do clients perceive the organisation? How do outsiders perceive it? How do ethnic minorities perceive it?

6. Is it committed to equal opportunities?

Does the organisation have an equal opportunities policy? Are management, staff, clients and outsiders aware of it? Does the policy reflect real commitment? Is it put into practice? Does it include monitoring the ethnic identity of job applicants, appointments, promotions, clients and potential clients? Would such monitoring be useful? How could the results of monitoring be used to set policy?

7. Is training available for management, staff and clients?

The Macpherson Report spoke of 'processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping'. Is there appropriate training to overcome these? Is there training to operate an effective equal opportunities policy?

8. What other positive action might bring about change?

Are there other specific initiatives that could be taken, short of reverse discrimination, which would enable the organisation more adequately to reflect and serve a multi-ethnic society?

The outcome of the review

Ideally, the review will produce agreement concerning a strategy for the future. The strategy will normally take the form of an action plan which includes specific targets, timetables and monitoring of outcomes. The strategy must carry the full authority of those responsible for governance, and management must be committed to its effective implementation.

A report of the review, including an outline of the agreed strategy for the future, will benefit the organisation itself. However, these reports could also be useful to others involved in similar exercises.

To enable an exchange of information to take place, reports can be sent to the Committee for Community Relations. The Committee, while respecting any requests for confidentiality, will undertake to act as a clearing house for sharing information, experience and lessons learned. As part of this process, a Conference will take place in November 2000. The Committee will report back to the Bishops Conference in Low Week 2001.

**A STATEMENT FROM THE COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITY RELATIONS
OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND & WALES
In Response to the Publication of the Macpherson Report (Stephen Lawrence Inquiry)**

It is terrible that an innocent teenager can be murdered on the streets of London because he is black. It compounds the deep sense of injustice when those responsible go unpunished.

The Macpherson Report of the Inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's death has detailed numerous failures in the police investigation. The authors of the Report have concluded that to some degree these failures are linked to 'institutional racism' in the Metropolitan Police.

Since Lord Scarman's Report into the 'Brixton Disorders' (1981), which rejected the accusation of 'institutional racism', different interpretations of this term have led to polarisation and confusion. We accept that it is imprecise and open to misunderstanding. However, it is helpful in suggesting something of the complex nature and scale of the problems which minority ethnic groups face in our society.

One of the most important contributions of the Macpherson Report may be that it has given us a useful, descriptive definition of 'institutional racism' - 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin'.

This definition will remind Catholics of Pope John Paul II's discussion of 'structural sin' which he says is 'the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins...of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so... of those who take refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world, and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required.' (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36)

We welcome the Macpherson Report, and we acknowledge its implications for all of us. The Police are not alone in failing adequately to address 'institutional racism'. All our institutions, including the Church, require a thoughtful review in the light of this Report. It represents an opportunity to take a significant step forward. That opportunity must not be missed. We encourage Catholics and all men and women of good will to reflect on the Report and to make this tragedy into a time for a change of heart and for substantial reform.

24 February 1999

These Guidelines are published and distributed by the Committee for Community Relations of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales. The Committee is an advisory body to the Bishops Conference. Its remit covers the areas of racial justice, urban poverty and community development. The Committee is based at the offices of the Bishops Conference, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX (0171 834 8692). Chairman: Rt Rev Ambrose Griffiths. Secretary: Richard Zipfel.