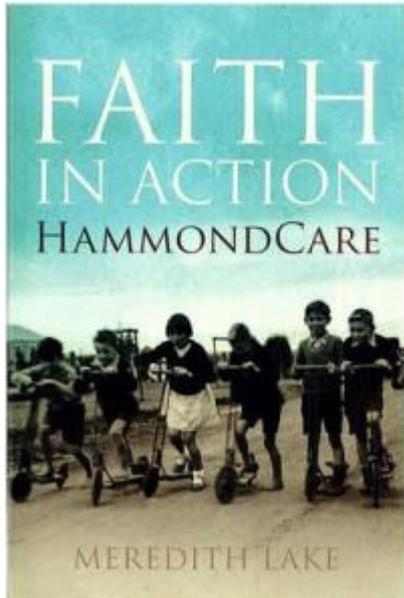


Meredith Lake, *Faith in Action: HammondCare* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2013)
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Neither the maverick Archdeacon Robert Hammond, Minister of St Barnabas' Church, Broadway, nor HammondCare, the organization that was established as a result of his ministry, is well known outside Sydney. Yet the story both of his ministry and the growth and development of HammondCare are important and deserve to be much more widely known than they are within the Australian Christian community. This is particularly the case since there is a prevailing presumption that Evangelical Christianity in Australia has not had much concern with issues of poverty and social welfare, while Hammond's life and ministry is a testimony to the contrary.

In *Faith in Action*, the historian Meredith Lake provides us with a detailed and insightful account of both the Archdeacon, his life and times, and the organization that grew out of his passion to help the poor, in an account that is well-researched, clearly narrated and theologically informed.

Archdeacon Hammond's involvement in responding to homelessness as a key issue in the experience of families during the Great Depression resulted in the establishment of Hammond's Pioneer Homes during the 1930's to provide affordable homes for struggling families. As a result of Hammond's initiative, by 1940 Hammondville, then on the outskirts of southwest Sydney near Liverpool, had 110 homes, a school, general store, post office and church, and was a nationally recognised model for small-scale land settlement.

In the early 1950s, the organization under the Rev Bernard Judd (another strong, independent, evangelical clergyman) moved on to tackle an emerging need and established Hammondville Homes for Senior Citizens, one of Australia's first integrated facilities for disadvantaged elderly people. From that initiative, it moved on to develop specialist services in dementia care. Today HammondCare serves a wide range of people with complex health and aged-care needs, through dementia-care and aged-care services, palliative care, rehabilitation, and mental health programs.

While this history was commissioned by HammondCare, the author was given a free hand and the account shows few of the symptoms of hagiography in dealing with the leading figures in the organization. Nor does the author avoid dealing with difficult periods of conflict and problems of management in the organisation's history. The author strives for, and largely achieves, a measured tone and balanced assessment in her treatment of these episodes.

What is of particular interest is the recent efforts by HammondCare to rearticulate its mission and reaffirm its Christian identity while remaining independent of the Anglican diocese of Sydney. The last three chapters in the book pay particular attention to the theme of what it means for such an organization

to be professional while remaining “unapologetically Christian”. The author has managed to provide an important case study into how HammondCare has engaged deliberately and reflectively with the issue of how to maintain its Christian identity and its mission of serving “the least of these”—with respect particularly to governance, staffing and sources of funding.

In telling this story and unpacking how the agency has grappled with the issues of Christian identity and mission, Meredith Lake displays a surefootedness and ease in engaging with theological issues. This is particularly the case in her account of Archdeacon Hammond’s approach to practical Christianity in which social service was seen as an act of Christian discipleship; action that was not in the end determined by judgements over whether or not the poor were ‘deserving’.

This is an interesting and important story that should be of wide interest, particularly to Christians in management. Boards of church-related agencies find themselves in an environment in which the government is placing increasing reliance on the contracting out of social services while pressing agencies into becoming merely an agent of the state implementing policies that may be in conflict with the founding vision of the agency—they may also find insight on questions of how Christian identity can be expressed.

Faith in Action stands up well when placed in the company of *Divine Discontent*, a history of the Brotherhood of St Laurence another church-related agency which over a similar period (though in a different location and ecclesial and theological context) struggled with similar issues.

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