



Little Company of Mary's spirit at risk if sale proceeds

The great healthcare worker, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, was well-known for her wisdom. At various times she was advised that by adhering to the Church's moral teachings in certain situations her projects would end in failure. Her reply: "Jesus did not command us to be successful, just to be faithful." Mother Teresa had very few failures in this regard, if any.

Perhaps the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary and their LCM Health Care organisation might take a lead from Mother Teresa. The proposed purchase of Calvary Public Hospital by the ACT Government, apart from proffered unconvincing fiscal reasons, seems to be driven by a hidden agenda on the part of the Stanhope Government. Aided and abetted by the Greens, to which it is beholden, the Government is determined to usurp the role of a Catholic hospital facility in the ACT.

One might ask: are the LCM Sisters not aware of the incongruity of building a Catholic private hospital abutting a state public facility where some activities which violate Catholic personal, moral and religious beliefs will inevitably be performed? It appears that too little consideration of these matters has prompted the Sisters and LCM Health Care to enter into an "in principle" agreement with the ACT Government.

The Little Company of Mary has rendered wonderful and significant service in healthcare without discrimination since its foundation by English-woman Mother Mary Potter in 1877. The spirit with which she endowed her "Little Company" is in danger of being lost in the ACT if the sale of Calvary Public proceeds.

Father Kevin Brannelly, parish priest, St Jude and St John Vianney, Weston Creek

In response to widespread criticism of the Government paying \$77 million for an asset it's already paid for (Calvary Hospital), the chairman of Little Com-

pany of Mary says "the ACT Treasury accepts that the contributions made by government in the past are 'sunk costs'", payment for the company's past services (Letters, October 13).

Nonsense. That's true of the part of the annual grants to the company to meet operating costs, but the grant for capital expenditure is precisely that – to build or buy assets for future use.

And there's no escaping the fact that the Government (taxpayers) paid for those assets already, and logically shouldn't have to pay again to transfer formal ownership to the Government.

In fact, it may be that it's not necessary to "buy" Calvary at all to bring about government ownership – because the hospital is merely an improvement on leased land owned by the Government, and not an asset that has a title separate from the land itself.

In other words, because the Government owns the land, why doesn't it automatically own the hospital?

Perhaps the company's chairman is wrong when he says the hospital is "the property of (the company)".

However, if the deal is to go ahead, morality, equity and fairness (and I would have thought the church well up on such things) dictate that taxpayers shouldn't have to pay for the hospital a second time, and give the Church a "windfall" of \$77 million. And the way to avoid that is for the company to "sell" the hospital for a nominal \$1.

R.S. Gilbert, Braddon

I understand there is a consultation period for the future management and ownership of Calvary hospital until 12 November.

The concept of having a Catholic brand in public hospital care in the ACT, modelled on Catholic managed hospitals such as St Vincent's in Sydney, the Mater and Calvary in other centres, was seen as desirable in adding to the mix of public hospital management options available in Canberra.

The construction of Calvary happened when there were already two public hospitals in Canberra run on the secular model, and Canberra was administered by the Commonwealth Government.

If we still had three public hospitals, I doubt this issue would have become so polarised, as Calvary could continue as it was and the two secular hospitals could be developed to arguably become "models of efficiency".

There are complications in the fact that the Commonwealth provided ongoing funding or under-funding, continued by the ACT Government.

The latter now sees a need to reimburse Calvary for its capital investment and human resources component to become the hospital owners, able to make the significant investments it sees necessary for Calvary to become seamless with the services provided at Canberra Hospital.

What has not been spelt out is, will the name "Calvary" be retained for the public hospital?

It seems that Calvary (or the Catholic brand) will no longer be paid to manage Calvary as a public hospital, and that Calvary will be sidelined to manage the private hospital and Clare Holland House, in return for \$77 million from the ACT Government.

The public will need to decide whether it sees a value in retaining Calvary as a public hospital.

While spirituality and faith can be ignored by many when life is bountiful, it is usually at times of birth and death, or when health breaks down, that many begin to yearn for the spiritual and a sense of faith.

Whether a secular approach can respond to these needs as well as an experienced Catholic provider in the public sector is a matter for contemplation.

Gabrielle Wright, Kingston