

## MARCH 2024 NEWS

The Trustees of the Benevolent Fund meet six times per year and the most recent meeting was on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024. As this was the last meeting in the Catenian year 2023/24, a summary of the Trustees activities in the year is given below, after a report of the meeting itself.

Seven Trustees were present with two apologies for absence. Four Directors of GBNC were also welcomed, under strict procedures for confidentiality, to observe the working of the Trustees.

Seven awards were made, with grants totalling £33,450 and loans £177,546: total £210,996. There were three applications requiring the attention of the Emergency Committee since the previous meeting.

Six cases were reviewed. These are cases where a loan has been made previously and remains outstanding. The Trustees review such cases at intervals of no longer than two years. Occasionally, a beneficiary might offer to start making repayments; more often, it is appropriate to offer additional assistance; most often the file is put away for a further review in two years time.

A further 15 cases were considered, either as a result of actions arising from previous meetings or correspondence being received.

Three "thank you" letters were received from beneficiaries that the Trustees had helped at previous meetings. The Trustees are always pleased to receive such letters. Sometimes they come from a brother or other beneficiary who has recently received help: some come as a follow up to full repayment, either as a lump sum or in instalments.

It was reported that the Consultation process regarding conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation had started smoothly and some interesting and useful responses have been received. The consultation period ends on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

Concern was expressed about possible adverse effects to the Charity should Motion 1B, currently out for voting by the membership, should be passed. A statement on this matter is attached to this report.

To summarise the activity in the financial year, April 2023 - March 2024 (previous year in brackets):

19 grants awarded - £155,291 (7 - £115,950);  
19 loans awarded - £1,153,504 (26 - £785,254);  
Total assistance offered - £1,308,795 (£901,204);  
6 loans repaid - £178,010 (11 - £504,712);  
47 loans reviewed (66);  
19 thank you letters received (21);  
1515 items of correspondence received in the office (1445);  
1248 items of correspondence sent (1087).

The next meeting of Trustees is on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024.

## ANC MOTION 1B

### A Statement on behalf of the Trustees of the Benevolent Fund

Motion 1B was passed at the recent Australian Conference under Rule 26(b) and in accordance with the said Rule 26(b) was referred by the Acting Association Secretary to every Circle for members to vote on it. The deadline for voting is 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024.

The Motion was discussed by the Trustees at their meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March. It is not within the Trustees' remit to express, as a Board, an opinion on the merits or otherwise of a proposal to amend the Constitutional Documents, unless the passing of such a proposal may be considered to have a potential effect on the operation of the Benevolent Fund. The Trustees considered that this may well be the case with Motion 1B.

The proposal seems to remove the need to satisfy the eligibility requirements in the Rules & Regulations and to allow National Councils unilaterally to change the eligibility requirements within the Circles associated with it without, it appears, the need to call a vote even of its own members.

Rule 1 states:

#### 1. Admission

Membership of the Association is obtained by enrolment in a Circle or Group and is open to practising Catholic laymen and permanent deacons over the age of 18 years **who on enrolment have the capacity to discharge the Obligations of Membership**. Exceptionally, those Members who after enrolment discern a vocation and are later ordained as priests are permitted to remain as Members of the Association. (My emphasis.)

Rule 2(c) states:

#### 2. Privileges and Principal Obligations of Membership

(c) All Members of the Association are bound to pay promptly such amounts as are properly due.

The above Rules are supplemented by section 4 of the Manual of Procedure on the Introduction of New Members. The fourth paragraph of section 4 reads:

*A prospective member should be advised in some detail of the financial implications of membership including his obligations to pay subscriptions in good time, regular attendance at Circle meetings and after Circle dinners where appropriate, reasonable participation in the Circle social programme and inter-Circle visiting. Assurances should be sought that the prospective member's financial standing is such that he can undertake the commitments that will arise from his membership.*

The above Rules and Guidance in the Manual of Procedure are, as well as being good practice for the benefit of the Association, a safeguard for the stability of the Benevolent Fund. It follows that the removal of the above requirements on the decision alone of a National Council could, over time, dramatically reduce the overall financial wellbeing of Catenians within that National Council and cause the floodgates to open on demands on the Benevolent Fund. Should this come to pass, the Trustees may be forced to seek changes to the Fund's governing document in order to protect the health of the Fund and its ability to continue to help brothers in difficulty or need.

21<sup>st</sup> March 2024      **Phil Roberts**  
   **Clerk to the Trustees**