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Ref. 4.15

TO : CouncilFROM : AJSDATE : 18/3/93PROPOSED PUBLIC STATEMENT RE FORMER CHILD MIGRANTS

1. The attached is my attempt at rewording and improving on the first version circulated to VOICES. I am not absolutely wedded to everything in it, and it is very much on the table for reaction.
2. Gerry said that he'd like it shorter. This is no shorter than the previous version, though shortening or omitting the detail in n.4 would shorten both versions. I'm not sure how much shorter one can make it without seriously limiting what we can say. Maybe our PR adviser would help us on this point.
3. However, I think that it is somewhat different in its emphases. I hope it is a bit less defensive in tone. I also hope that the wording and sequencing of the points is clearer.

What do you think?

4. A few points occurred to me in drafting this that I have not attempted to address here, but that we may need to look at during this controversy:
  - \* do we mention our commissioning the history as evidence of our desire to seek the truth?
  - \* do we address the allegation that boys were lied to about family and the existence of parents. Is there any substance in this? Have we something to answer for? Can it be readily dealt with in a document like this?
  - \* do we mention the generally positive record of our Provincial executive in responding to complaints about or evidence of misbehaviour regarding abuse?

A STATEMENT FROM THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS CONCERNING  
CLONTARF, CASTLEDARE, TARDUN AND BINDOON

PREAMBLE

Over recent years, controversy has arisen over the treatment of residents in the institutions named above, referring particularly to the late 1940's and the 1950's. Many allegations of ill-treatment and abuse have been made. The allegations are serious and disturbing.

These matters have received wide publicity in the media, especially in Western Australia. Much of the publicity has been quite biased, thereby encouraging ill-informed judgments and emotional reactions.

Many former residents of the institutions in question claim that allegations of cruelty and abuse are substantially true; many other residents of the same era relate quite a different experience and claim that the allegations are exaggerated and are not broadly representative of life in these institutions.

Responding to these allegations in a way that does justice to all concerned has been a complex process. This statement from the Christian Brothers addresses this controversy. It does not attempt to pass legal or moral judgment on any individuals or groups.

1. The Christian Brothers acknowledge with pride the dedication and generosity of all who worked with care and integrity for the approx. 4000 boys who passed through Clontarf, Castledare, Tardun and Bindoon as orphans, State wards placed by government agencies, child migrants and neglected children. We also acknowledge the support, devotion and practical assistance of many co-workers and benefactors.
2. We also acknowledge the limitations in the sort of institutional care current in the 1940's and 1950's. Resources were scarce; personnel were untrained in child care as understood today, and were often overworked; numbers made a degree of regimentation inevitable; boys often came from disturbed backgrounds; and the specialist consultants available today were almost unknown.

However, it should be pointed out that regular inspections of the institutions were made by government agencies. These reports do not confirm the picture of generalised abuse alleged by some.

While many boys were provided with the care and training that gave them the opportunity to make their way in life, institutional care could not satisfactorily meet the needs of some boys, for whom this time in their lives was an unhappy and even hurtful experience.

The Christian Brothers acknowledge these shortcomings in the child care practices used, and deeply regret any hurts that children may have suffered, as well as whatever long-term suffering may be attributable to the experience of these institutions.

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3. Many of the most serious allegations made concern cruelty and abuse beyond the understandable limitations in child care practice of the past. In weighing up these allegations it is important to bear in mind that
- \* allegations concerning events 30 to 45 years ago are in many cases impossible to prove or disprove - many of the persons named as accused, victims or witnesses are dead or not available.
  - \* in particular, most of the Brothers accused of cruelty or sexual abuse are now dead.
  - \* no criminal charges have ever been laid against anyone named in these allegations.

While the evidence available to us does not support the picture painted by some of general and systematic abuse and cruelty, we accept that some instances of physical and sexual abuse were committed in these institutions. Such abuse can never be condoned. It violates the child's dignity and sense of self-worth, and can leave enduring wounds of guilt, self-reproach and insecurity.

The Christian Brothers unreservedly apologise to anyone who was a victim of such abuse in our child care institutions.

4. We further publicly reiterate our willingness to find appropriate ways in which to assist former residents of our institutions who now need assistance. We believe that practical assistance should be offered to meet the variety of needs among these former residents, e.g. to trace relatives; to travel to meet family members; to provide counselling.

We have already expressed our goodwill and concern in recent years by providing help in a number of ways:

- support of the Child Migrant Friendship Society by paying rent for its office for 4 years
- support of Children from Catholic Institutions
- payment of a Social Worker in England to assist search for families of former child migrants
- offer ~~to contribute to the employment of a Social Worker in Perth to assist in search for relatives and counselling for former child migrants.~~
- offer to subsidise counselling or therapy fees on an agreed basis
- establishment of a computerised register of all available admissions information for the institutions
- offers of personal help as requested by individuals

These are modest steps in themselves, but are a pledge of our desire to work to assist those who have been disadvantaged by the circumstances of their early lives.

5. We do, however, reject the implication in many of the allegations made that present suffering or difficulty can be blamed entirely on the period spent in one or more of our institutions. Many factors influence the lives of people, and the boys who came to these institutions
- = came mostly from wartime Britain and Malta, many having been abandoned early in life, knowing little or nothing of mother or father or normal family life.
  - = were brought by governments as child migrants to Australia and placed in institutions and environments foreign to them
  - = often experienced the disappointments and social pressures

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arising from both childhood and later life experiences

There is no one cause of present life difficulties, and it is almost impossible to quantify the part played by the many complex factors that have brought life to its present point. We reject the attempt to make our institutions scapegoats for all of life's troubles.

6. The Christian Brothers do not claim to be perfect, and we admit and apologise for our Brothers' failings that have hurt their students. But we also look for a sense of justice that will acknowledge the good done for many boys. We appeal for a respect for the complexity of the truth of this matter. We insist that practical compassion now is what is most needed. We hope that a spirit of cooperation will allow prompt implementation of measures to help those who need it.