June, 1997

To:

All Former Students of Christian Brothers’ Schools
in Western Australia and South Australia

This letter is addressed to all former students of the Christian Brothers' schools in South Australia and Western Australia, and in particular to anyone who has experienced sexual or physical abuse at those schools, or has had other distressing or hurtful experiences. The information in this letter also concerns those who may be family members, friends or acquaintances of former students who have had such experiences.

My reason for writing this is a concern that some people may not be aware of what they can do if they, or someone they know, has had abusive or distressing experiences at a Christian Brothers’ school.

Publicity about this subject in recent years may have given some people the impression that the apologies the Christian Brothers have made, and the steps they have taken to assist those who may have been victims of abuse, apply only to those men who went to the childcare institutions the Brothers used to run in W.A. This is certainly not the case, and in a public statement circulated last year via Catholic Schools and Parishes, I invited any person who felt hurt or distress because of contact with the Christian Brothers or their schools to contact me directly and/or to avail of independent professional help funded by us.

I am particularly concerned that former students who may have been victims of some abusive conduct at one of our schools may not be on the mailing lists of Old Boy Associations or readers of the Catholic press, and so may not be aware of what they can do about any grievances they may have in regard to their time at our schools. This is where I need your help - even if the information below does not apply directly to you, you may know someone you think would benefit from having this information. Please make every effort to pass it on, whether to someone who may have been a victim of mistreatment or to concerned relatives or friends of such a person.

What can you do?

◊ If you wish to speak to an official representative of the Christian Brothers about your experiences or your concerns in this regard, you are invited to contact me or another member of our Leadership Team on REDACTED. You will be listened to sympathetically and in confidence.

◊ Confidential, professional assistance in the form of counselling, therapy, or simply a listening ear, is available for victims of abuse and related persons. These services are free.
* If you are in W.A., call 1800.621.805, to contact the Helpline which has been set up at CBERS (Christian Brothers' Ex-Residents' Services), an independent service staffed by trained counsellors.

* If you are in South Australia, call the Christian Brothers' Helpline at Centacare on 08.8210.8200.

It is important to emphasise that anyone who contacts us or uses these services still has every right to take any legal action they may wish, whether it is making a complaint to the police about criminal conduct or initiating civil proceedings.

◊ You should also know that the Catholic Church in each State has set up special committees charged with responding to any complaints of sexual misconduct by priests, religious brothers and sisters, or church personnel. Another option you have is to contact the committee in your State and ask it to respond to your complaint. The contact people are:

* In W.A., Father Walter Black - [REDACTED], Mrs Jane Pilkington - on [REDACTED]
* In S.A., Call 08.8210.8200 and ask for the manager of the counselling unit.

As followers of Blessed Edmund Rice, the Christian Brothers and their schools have sought to put into practice Edmund's deep care for the young and his absolute respect for the dignity of each person. As human beings, all of us are fallible and sometimes fall short of these high ideals.

However, sexual molestation, physical cruelty, and emotional abuse go well beyond what we would all acknowledge as ordinary human fallibility. The tragedy of abuse has been compounded for us Christian Brothers by the painful awareness that some of our Brothers have betrayed the trust placed in them by abusing students.

I urge anyone who has suffered some form of abusive or hurtful experience during their formative years to take appropriate action to deal constructively with the consequences of this in their lives. It is never too late to act, and it is all too easy to shrug off such experiences and pretend that "it hasn't really affected me".

The Christian Brothers have always endeavoured to maintain friendly and supportive relations with their former students and it is in this spirit of pastoral concern that I renew our commitment to listen compassionately to any complaints from former students or their family or friends, as well as our offer of confidential professional assistance to anyone who needs it.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Br. Tony Shanahan, cfc
Province Leader