

FRIENDS OF SUSANNA

PO BOX 13, KINGSWAY WEST, 2208

Thursday, September 29th, 1994

Dear Bishop Heenan,

We are writing to you concerning matters that have been drawn to our attention by a letter written to us by a survivor of sexual abuse. At this stage we do not feel free to divulge his name, for he is seeking redress through the legal system and we do not want to preempt any action he may decide to take. However he has given us permission to raise the matter with you as it concerns a priest and an institution of your diocese.

The letter we received made a disclosure concerning the abusive activities of a priest named Fr. Jack Andersen. The activities occurred while he was parish priest of Neerkol, and the victim was at the orphanage in that parish, around 1950. The letter discloses severe sexual abuse occurring over a 2-3 year period, on at least a weekly basis. There is no doubting the authenticity of these claims. The victim's account is direct and specific and is told with a great deal of pain. He has come to the point where he can now speak about his abuse without shame through the help of a therapist. He is not afraid to go to the media to forward his claim but is waiting on legal advice.

We are aware that Fr. Andersen died around 1987 and that he was well respected in the diocese. We also know that he was parish priest at Neerkol from 1948-1963/4 and as such had unlimited access to around 200 children for 15-16 years. The research indicates that pedophiles have on average 200 or so victims. The damage that could have been done over this period is enormous, with many lives shattered with a legacy of pain and shame.

It is clear that this is a potentially explosive situation for the Church. We know that several complaints have been made about general physical and emotional abuse at the orphanage, but this seems to be the first report of sexual abuse. It is only a matter of time before this story is brought to the attention of the media, and the Church could quickly find itself swamped with survivors coming forward, each with their own story of pain and shame. Unless some proactive stance is taken now, the Church could find itself making the same mistakes as were made by the Christian Brothers over Bindanoon.

We are writing to you in the hope that, by being approached now before the media descends upon you, you will have set in place procedures which will alleviate the suffering of survivors and deal responsibly with the issue. What is utmost here is that survivors be treated with respect and compassion, that their suffering be not minimized or denied and that they receive just compensation. We would make the following suggestions:

- * be proactive; don't wait for the media to come to you, go to them. Reach out to victims and ask them to come forward if they have been abused, as Jesus went after the lost sheep. Set up a telephone help line with offers of counseling for anyone affected.
- * begin discussions with your insurance company about a fund for decent compensation for survivors. Compensation should be proportionate to the suffering incurred, not some cheap way out for the Church.
- * don't be slow to offer a real apology to those affected. Real apologies mean a willingness to make reparation and a willingness to take steps to make sure it does not happen again. An education programme through the diocese would be a good beginning.

Undoubtedly you are thinking this is all too much based on just one report. However the general experience is that there is never just one victim of sexual abuse and in this case,

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given the ease of access, it would be naive in the extreme to think there was only just one. You are also probably thinking that one report is too little to destroy the reputation of a good priest. Of course the media will not be so fussy, especially given he is dead, and this story is clearly authentic. Often it is suggested in these cases that the priest may well have repented of his sin, so he should be left to rest in peace. Yet if he truly repented he would be the first one to want the truth to come out and for survivors to receive justice.

Our interest here is not to cause scandal or destroy reputations. It is first and foremost to help survivors by helping the Church recongise its responsibilities and act according to the Gospel. By writing now we seek to help survivors by drawing your attention to a matter which will soon be landing on your desk in a more legal manner. We would encourage you to act in ways which will make it easier, not harder, for survivors. Certainly the survivor in this case has been totally alienated from the Church because of the actions of this priest and the nuns who ran the orphanage. It is imperative that no one be further alienated by a lack of compassion or concern when other survivors come forward.

We are aware that the Queensland Bishops recent put forward a protocol dealing with sexual abuse by priests and religious. Despite some glaring inadequacies it is at least a start. We would suggest you contact Myolene Carrick (07) 224-3343, on the disclosure team, to discuss ways in which the Church could respond. We have sent a copy of this letter to her.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Ormerod.

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