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*CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON*

*Bishop's Office*



February 1998 2000

**LETTER OF APOLOGY**

In October 1997, the Sisters of Mercy formally apologised to you, for the abuse you suffered during your time at the Neerkol orphanage. At the time of that apology, I fully supported the Sisters in their honest and compassionate response to your pain and ongoing suffering. At this time, I would like to add my apology and that of the Diocese, to those of you who suffered spiritual, psychological, sexual and physical abuse at Neerkol.

In a letter I wrote to the Diocese in September 1996, I described the allegations of abuse as 'scurrilous' and some statements about the conduct and conditions of the orphanage as 'slandorous'. After hearing of your experiences, I am now much more aware of your suffering, and I regret that I did not acknowledge those sufferings when you first raised them and that my first reaction was one of disbelief.

I have now had the opportunity to meet with you directly and hear of the instances of cruelty and abuse, and I sincerely acknowledge the hurt and fear which you, as children of such a tender age, had to endure. Having heard of these experiences, I am better able to understand and acknowledge the real suffering you endured and which continues now. I acknowledge and respect your right to raise these matters and seek redress.

I offer to you a sincere apology from both the Diocese of Rockhampton and myself.

I am committed, with the Diocese of Rockhampton, and with the Sisters, to continue to support your aim to seek healing.

I will send a copy of this apology to the parishes of the Diocese of Rockhampton and request the Parish Priests to read it, or publish it in their parish newsletters. I will send a copy to the Catholic Leader, where my original letter was published.

While I am painfully aware of the particular sufferings some of you have endured, I am now more aware of how difficult it was for everyone in the orphanage at that time; children, Sisters and staff. I wish to acknowledge again, the efforts of the Sisters of Mercy who cared for all of the children. I realise this does not take away the ongoing pain of those who suffered. We, like the Sisters, have established a Professional Standards Committee to offer counselling and any other support that you would find helpful. I hope you would avail yourself of that assistance.

I ask that we use this time to continue the dialogue, not only to bring about genuine reconciliation, but also genuine healing which will help to restore the dignity of everyone involved.

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**Brian Heenan**  
**Bishop of Rockhampton**