



Our Ref: JS:BI 71127
Your Ref:

December 27, 1997

Bishop B. Heenan,
Bishop's Office,
Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton,
PO Box 611,
ROCKHAMPTON Q 4700

Facsimile 22 1224

Dear Sir,

RE: NEERKOL - LETTER OF APOLOGY

We refer to your facsimile of 19 December, and confirm that we have no objections to the proposed amendments made by John Britton.

Yours faithfully
SWANWICK MURRAY ROCHE

Per: *B. Jett*

J. J. Shaw

Dictated by J.J. Shaw and signed
in his absence.

U06/1224/70

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19 December 1997

LETTER OF APOLOGY

In October 1997, the Sisters of Mercy formally apologised to you, for the abuse you had 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 abuse at Neerkol, whatever form that abuse took.

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 those sufferings were not acknowledged 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 to hear of the instances of cruelty and abuse, and I sincerely acknowledge the hurt and fear which you, as children at 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*) and I offer to you, a sincere apology.

I am committed, with the Diocese of Rockhampton, and with the Sisters, to continue to seek practical ways, to bring about healing for you.

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 many Sisters of Mercy who cared for all of the children, to the very best of their ability. (*Their best efforts, do not take away the ongoing pain of those who suffered*). We, like the Sisters, have established a Professional Standard's Committee to offer counselling and any other support that you would find helpful. I hope you will avail yourself of that assistance.

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

Brian Heenan
Bishop of Rockhampton