



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

Bishop's Office



11 May 2001

Confidential and Urgent

Dear Father

I enclose a Statement I would like you to **read** – but not print – at all Masses this weekend 12-13 May 2001. I am sorry it is coming so late and with your liturgy already well planned. My hope is that you would read it during the Notice time after the Post Communion prayer.

If you have any retired priests living in your parish, would you be kind enough to make a copy of this letter available to each of them.

I request that you do not print it in your newsletter or provide copies, as it is not a document for public distribution. Please God, it will further advance the process of healing.

Would you please pray for Reg who is very ill and distressed. We all remember Martin too, with love and support for both.

Yours sincerely

Brian Heenan
Bishop of Rockhampton



MESSAGE TO PARISHIONERS, RELIGIOUS AND PRIESTS
OF THE DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

FROM BISHOP BRIAN HEENAN

On last weekend, WIN television's '60 Minutes' broadcast a segment entitled "Breach of Faith" which centred on sexual abuse at Neerkol Orphanage. The claim of the program was that there was inadequate response on the part of the Diocese and the Sisters of Mercy. Parts of the '60 Minutes' program were repeated on WIN news in Rockhampton on Monday 7th May.

I was invited to appear on the "60 Minutes" program but declined once I became aware that the program was revisiting again, issues that we have been dealing with over the past few years.

In fact, as the program unfolded, it was characterised by false and inaccurate statements, which were the basis for unfounded judgements about the Diocese and the Sisters of Mercy.

This was evident in the totally untrue and unfair statement at the outset of the program which claimed ... "At the Catholic Orphanage at Neerkol, there was precious little compassion and constant abuse".

It is unfortunate that sections of the media continue to dampen the efforts of the Sisters and the Diocese to foster the healing process which has been occurring over several years.

We have met with victims, listened to their experiences and, on several occasions, given a formal apology, individually and collectively. We have sought to provide a range of support, including counselling. In fact, I would like to say that the Sisters of Mercy have been deeply appreciated and admired for the sensitive and compassionate way they have cared for any who have suffered.

One of our priests, Father Reg Durham, was mentioned in the program. A further News report in Rockhampton later in the week, stated falsely that I had apologised on behalf of the Diocese in response to allegations made against Father Durham, in matters relating to Neerkol. This was totally untrue as I have always refrained from any comments addressing matters that are still before the courts. It is necessary for me to maintain this position. At the same time, I acknowledge and respect fully the fact that Father Reg Durham has always maintained his innocence in all allegations relating to Neerkol.

I issue this statement in the hope that our process of healing may continue and that in the Spirit of Easter, we may all rise to a newness of life.

Yours sincerely

Brian Heenan
Bishop of Rockhampton

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