

MERCY ADMINISTRATION CENTRE

ROCKHAMPTON CONGREGATION
OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE
SISTERS OF MERCY OF AUSTRALIA



THE RANGE,
263 AGNES STREET,
ROCKHAMPTON Q. 4700

P.O. BOX 1576,
ROCKHAMPTON Q. 4700

TEL: 079 - 27 1866
FAX: 079 - 22 3040

23 May 1997

Mr Norman Alford
Children's Commissioner
GPO Box 259
BRISBANE Q 4001

Dear Mr Alford

I am writing to you as Congregational Leader of the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy. My purpose in writing to you is to seek an early meeting with you to discuss the unfolding events in relation to the former St Joseph's Home, Neerkol. I would like the opportunity to update you personally on the work of the Professional Standards Committee we have established and to let you know where we currently are with the process of healing and reconciliation that we have put in place.

The allegations concerning St Joseph's Home, Neerkol have left me personally grieving for the hurt and suffering that these past residents are feeling. All of the Congregation is deeply distressed that the people making complaints have such painful and traumatic memories of their days at Neerkol. Many of our Sisters gave over a greater part of their lives to care for children who knew no other home or family and now to hear some thirty to forty years later that they failed the needs of some of these children is causing incalculable pain and sorrow.

To be accused of abuse against children - and in recent allegations even worse - is abhorrent and contradicts everything that the Sisters of Mercy have stood for in Australia for the past 150 years. But, Mr Alford, the focus of our response is not on ourselves and the sorrow and public humiliation we are experiencing. Our focus is on reaching out in a spirit of love and compassion to those whom we appear to have failed so that we may try to bring about healing and reconciliation.

Some will judge our response as too late, others will say it is too slow and others will undoubtedly label it inadequate. The test that I will apply to the sincerity of our response to the needs of these people is not to merely satisfy human expectations but rather that we act in a way that is consistent with the gospel values left us by Jesus Christ - a much more stringent and difficult measure I am sure you would agree.

I would be really appreciative if you could see your way clear to meet with me in the next week, so that you have a first hand understanding of what we as a Congregation are endeavouring to do, to heal pain, effect reconciliation and help those who are suffering from the past to move forward to a better future.

Thank you for all that your office and you personally have done to advance the process of healing. I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience to organise a suitable time for our meeting.

Yours in Christ

C. Di-Anne Rowan

Sr Di-Anne Rowan RSM
CONGREGATIONAL LEADER