

*To the Sisters - it might help
you to know what is happening*

**RESPONSE TO THE ALLEGATIONS MADE IN
MR. KEVIN LINGARD'S MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
13/9/1996**

With respect to what has happened, I have to consider it astounding and dismaying, that such allegations can be made in the parliament of Queensland without any form of notification to our Congregation or to the Diocese, and, of course, without any effort having been made to substantiate the allegations. We heard of the Statement when I responded to a phone call from a reporter from the "Courier Mail" who had phoned this office at about 11 am.

I have since rung Mr. Lingard's office, spoken to him and been faxed a copy of the statement. This leaves me still without any knowledge of who has been accused of what. Consequently I find it impossible to make any realistic response re the allegations. I have been unable to establish any credible motive for Mr. Lingard's actions. I have also tried to contact Mr. Borbidge to establish his views on random allegations being made in parliament by his Ministers.

This Congregation has not been approached by the Police Department . However, we do acknowledge the right and duty of the Police to conduct investigations into any matter referred to them. Should they approach us they will be given every proper assistance and co-operation.

Over the past three or four years some few allegations have been made about Neerkol. At this stage none have been verified or substantiated. All are being investigated to the best of our ability. You will appreciate the difficulties in making a sound evaluation of the truth of matters which are said to have occurred in the distant past, particularly should the people concerned be now deceased.

It is our policy and the policy of the Church to respond as honestly and as diligently as we can to allegations which are made to us. The Sisters have the deepest possible regret for any offence suffered by any child in our care. Many of our sisters worked extremely hard at Neerkol in conditions most of us would regard as impossible. Some remember their years at Neerkol as the happiest in their lives and some remain very close to the children they cared for there. It is devastating to hear of these allegations. Should it be shown that there is substance to them we will do all we can to make amends.

14/9/1996

Bernice

The Above is the substance of the responses I have made to date. It has not been issued in this form as at 14/9 but I might send it to the media if I need to do so.

Tuesday 13/9/1996.

About noon:

(Neerkol, 1885 - 1978 on site. Responsibility for children until 1985)

Had a message to ring back to Fran Metcalfe, a reporter from the Courier Mail, 07-32100846. I was from her that I learned of Mr. Linguard's statement to Parliament. As my only knowledge was what she told me it was very difficult to make any comment.

I contacted Bishop Heenan. Margaret contacted the Neerkol community.

I spoke to a Mr. Norm Alford at Mr. Linguard's Dept. (07-32267111). Told me the Minister (for Family, Youth and Community Care) had set up a Sexual Abuse Hot Line on 16/5/1996. He said at least 6 calls made to the Hot Line alleged abuse at Neerkol. All callers were asking for an enquiry. He said the Minister was informing Parliament that the calls would be referred to a Children's Commissioner when that position was filled. I requested a copy of the statement and asked that Mr. Linguard contact me to explain to me the purpose of his naming us in Parliament and his hopes re our reaction to it.

Mr. Linguard rang at about 12.45 I think it was. He was conciliatory but not apologetic. Stated that since it was alleged to have happened 15 years ago or more he could not see that I needed to adopt any position on the matter. It would be sufficient for me to offer to given co-operation if required. While I thanked him for his advice I assured him that my view of the matter was quite different. He said the Police had advised him that there was an investigation being made, that the person concerned was very sick, that it was possible (or likely, I am not sure which) that charges would be laid, and that the investigation was continuing. I was not able to get from Mr. Linguard any reasons that made sense to me for his mentioned the name of the Sisters of Mercy in Parliament. His best explanation is that with a Police investigation in progress he did not want to be seen not to have done anything about the calls he had received. I told him that I considered the price paid by the Sisters of Mercy for his having "looked good" in Parliament was extremely high. He said he would fax a copy of the statement and did so within a short time.

Bishop Heenan and Fr. John Grace came up to see me at approx. 1 pm. They heard of the matter via my message to them and while they were at another meeting had received phone messages from Win and some other source. I gave them a copy of the statement. We discussed the information we had. They did have some awareness of a Police investigation but had not been contacted by the Police. We agreed on some points which should be made in any response.

c 2pm. Beryl, Margaret and self put together a ring-around message for the Sisters. Beryl undertook responsibility for this.

I rang back to Ari Giatainis, ABC Television who had also left a message about 11 am. I agreed to respond on Television and did an interview about 2.30 pm.

I took a phone call from Mr. Francis Tapin, ABC News, Brisbane, about 3pm. I agreed to his request for a recorded interview. Mr. Tapin was considerate in his approach and offered his own name and that of Samantha Mason as two reporters who might be helpful in presenting a balanced response. Phone 07-33775244. Among other questions he asked if we had contacted our solicitors. I asked with what since we still did not know what was being said and if the allegations referred to were the same as or different from those we already knew about.

I rang Mr. Borbidge's office 07-32242111 and asked to speak to him. He was in Parliament. Mr. Peter - the Principal Private Secretary did speak to me. I asked him to have Mr. Borbidge phone me regarding his policy in having Ministers make this kind of accusation in Parliament. I said I would write if I did not hear back from the Premier.

c 7.45 pm - Bishop Heenan rang. Has now been contacted by the Police to tell him they are making enquiries on one allegation. It was a courtesty call. Bishop Heene regrets as I do the "the Catholic Church was unavailable for comment" on Win news

8 pm My call to Win news was returned. The journalist responsible rang the Bishop's office twice and Centacare once. He did not try the Sisters of Mercy.

14/9/1996

1.40 pm **REDACTED** rang from Brisbane. He and his brothers and his sister **RED** had some years at Neerkol after their Mother was left as a sole parent without support. He was at Neerkol 1945 - 1952 and is about 60 now. His mother is still alive, lives in Yeppoon and is very upset about the allegations which she regards as a slur on her actions in putting the children at Neerkol. She and the family are all very grateful to the Sisters. **RED** mentioned in particular Regis, Assumpta and Damien all of whom he remembers as great women. They were tough but needed to be. He has contacted his brothers and sisters and all would be prepared to appear at any enquiry to speak for the Sisters. He also contacted Peter Beattie and is writing to Linguard.