

**NEWS RELEASE**  
**SISTERS OF MERCY ROCKHAMPTON,**  
**CONGREGATIONAL PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE**  
1/4/1997

The Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy have informed the Morning Bulletin that they have in place a process for dealing with complaints concerning St. Joseph's Home for Children, Neerkol, which was conducted by the Sisters for nearly a century.

The Sisters want to be proactive in responding to the allegations which have come to them directly or of which they are aware through the media. They have established a committee, the purpose of which is to receive, process, resolve and review complaints of abuse which are made about Congregational members or employees. The Committee also has the function of developing policy and process for the Congregation in the whole area of Professional Standards.

Members of the Committee are drawn from the public as well as the Congregation as one means of establishing public accountability. Present members are Mr. Geoff O'Driscoll, Mr. Darren Holzberger, Ms Sue Prosser, Sr Anne Slattery and Sr Berneice Loch.

The process caters for investigation of complaints by professional assessors who are independent of Church agencies. Since the complaints heard of to date relate to events of twenty to forty years ago, the Sisters consider it likely that a degree of investigative skill will be needed in attempting to address these adequately.

A further feature of the process is that it is designed to respect the needs of both the complainant and the accused in so far as this is possible. The Congregation is willing to negotiate to provide support for either or both parties.

A Response Co-ordinator, Ms Sue Prosser, working as an independent Social Work consultant, has been retained to see that complaints are addressed and the process followed through within a reasonable time frame. The Response Co-ordinator enters the process as soon as possible after the initial contact is made with the Congregation. The Committee is already acting on the complaints which have reached them, and the Response Co-ordinator is undertaking travel within and beyond the State as required to talk to the people concerned.

Sister Berneice said, "We do want to hear from those with a grievance, and we ask them to ring 041 7751535. If no one answers directly, the caller will be asked to leave a name and number so that one of our contact people can be in touch with them as soon as possible."

The Sisters of Mercy were founded in Ireland over 180 years ago to alleviate pain, want and misery. They are widely involved in health care, education, childcare, social and pastoral work in twenty-two countries throughout the world