

Letters

TMB. Monday Oct 7, 1996



□ Bishop Tyman with the first group British migrant children to come to Neerkol in 1951.

NOT BISHOP
FLYNAN
MARTIN
DURHAM

Bishop defends Neerkol's work

□ I write this Pastoral Letter to address the issue of St Joseph's Orphanage at Neerkol, which closed its doors in 1978 after caring for children for almost 100 years.

It was conducted by the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy, with a full time chaplain from the Diocese of Rockhampton as Parish Priest.

Over recent weeks, scurrilous allegations have been made against the Sisters and the Priests, in the form of claims of physical and sexual abuse.

Slandorous statements have been made about the conduct of the orphanage, the conditions that prevailed there, and in general about the care that was given to the children.

Acknowledging that discipline was much stricter in family life and all aspects of education, that conditions were often harsh for the Sisters and the children, and that human weakness and frustration are always part of every

institution, as Bishop of the Diocese, I deplore the insult that has been offered to the Sisters, the Chaplains and the children who were cared for and educated at Neerkol.

I am fully conscious that when individual allegations of abuse are made, they must be investigated, and both the Sisters and the Diocese will give every assistance to the appropriate authorities, for justice must be done.

Yet I will not remain silent while the immeasurable benefit that has come to many children through the dedication of the Sisters, is destroyed by sensationally written media articles or TV programs which do not speak the truth.

I wish to emphasise that many former pupils of Neerkol have made contact with the Sisters and myself, distraught at the denigration of what they regard as their home.

Not only do they reject the false pic-

ture that has been presented, but they resent the suggestion that the home, in which they were cared for and educated, can no longer be spoken of with pride.

To these good people, to the Sisters and the Chaplains, may I offer a reassurance of our gratitude and the thanks of those who cannot respond at this time.

St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol, established by Fr Bucas and supported by Bishops, Sisters, Priests, Parishioners, Service Clubs and the people of Rockhampton and Central Queensland, will live on with its fine reputation in spite of what has been published.

We can be justifiably proud of St Joseph's Orphanage Neerkol and of the Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy.

Brian Heenan.
Bishop of Rockhampton.