

THE AUSTRALIAN THURSDAY APRIL 12 2007

THE NATION 

Anglican abuse payout 'an insult'

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IN a compensation deal condemned by child protection advocates as woefully inadequate, the Anglican Church has offered a total of \$825,000 to 41 former residents of an orphanage who say they were sexually and physically abused by clergymen and staff at the church-run facility.

NSW police are investigating allegations of sexual and physical abuse of children at the North Coast Children's Home at Lismore in the 1950s and 60s.

Anglican Church spokesman Pat Comben yesterday said the church had referred to police allegations by former residents of the home against two retired clergymen.



Crusader: Richard Campion on the Gold Coast yesterday

Another clergyman, Alan Kitchingman, pleaded guilty in April 2002 to five counts of sexually assaulting a 13-year-

old boy at the home in 1975. Judge Ralph Coolahan told Newcastle District Court that Kitchingman had digitally raped the

boy, masturbated him and performed oral sex on him.

Kitchingman, who was 69 when he pleaded guilty, was sentenced to 2½ years' jail.

The Australian understands 38 of the former residents have accepted the church's compensation offers.

Former residents have claimed they were sexually assaulted, savagely beaten with belts, electric cords, straps, horse whips and tree branches, forced to go without food and water for up to 24 hours, and made to lick food off the dining room floor if they dropped it.

Richard Campion, 59, a retired Gold Coast photographer who lived at the home from the age of two until he left as a 15-year-old in 1962, said that if children soiled

or wet their beds, they were forced to parade around their dormitory with the dirty sheets wrapped around their heads as punishment.

The compensation bid was launched after Mr Campion placed public notices in newspapers across the country, calling on former residents of the home to come forward with their stories.

Mr Campion said he saw countless children physically assaulted during his time at the home.

He said one of the clergymen expected to be investigated by police was particularly vicious in his beatings.

"He used to wear a black cassock and he had this big thick belt," Mr Campion said.

"He used to take his belt off and he would hold it by the buckle and he would belt us around the legs and around the head.

"Sometimes when he was very angry he'd hit us with the buckle."

Hetty Johnston, spokeswoman for child protection group Bravehearts, said the offer of \$825,000 was an insult.

"It's absolutely disgraceful," she said. "It's appalling."

Ms Johnston said the benchmark should be the \$830,000 payout awarded by a jury in 2001 to a former female student at a Toowoomba school in a sexual abuse case that led to the resignation of former Anglican archbishop of Brisbane Peter Hollingworth as governor-general.

The amounts offered to the Lismore residents range from \$16,000 to \$22,600, compared with \$40,000 to \$75,000 granted by the Catholic Church in 2002 to 16 former residents of Brisbane's Nazareth House who were subjected to a similar regime of abuse.

Mr Comben, a former Queensland cabinet minister who is now the registrar of Grafton diocese, said senior counsel had advised the church it was not liable for compensation.

"We have made that offer on the basis that the church is a church of compassion and wants to make a passable approach to people who had apparently been damaged in a place that had some sort of connections with some church people," he said.