



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

30 January 2015

**Message to the People of the Diocese of Rockhampton regarding
the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
Public Hearing into the former St Joseph's Home at Neerkol.**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

On Friday 30 January 2015, Justice McClellan, Chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse announced:

"In April the Commission will travel to Rockhampton where the public hearing will focus on the experiences of children at St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol, which was managed by the Sisters of Mercy. The case study will also examine the conduct of priests attached to the Diocese of Rockhampton who carried out duties at the Orphanage". (end of quote)

The Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton and the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, through their representatives, will be called to appear before the Royal Commission.

Although I understand the pain and distress that may be felt as a result of this announcement, I fully support the work of the Royal Commission. I hope and pray that through the work of the Royal Commission those whose lives have been impacted by child sexual abuse will have the opportunity to be heard and experience some healing in their lives. The victims and their families must always receive our support, respect and compassion.

I am deeply conscious of the pain that has been caused as a result of child sexual abuse by Catholic Church personnel. For those victims whose lives have been hurt and damaged by sexual abuse, I offer my heartfelt apology to them, their families and all those who have shared in their suffering.

Any person with a complaint of sexual abuse by Catholic Church personnel or volunteers is strongly encouraged to bring their complaint forward to the appropriate authority. If the complaint is of a criminal nature, please notify the Queensland Police through your local police station or police link on 131444. You may also wish to contact the Royal Commission Support Line on 1800 099 340.

I have appointed Melissa Davey to the position of contact person for the Diocese for issues regarding sexual abuse by Catholic Church personnel or volunteers. Melissa's contact number is 1800 830 113.

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We have for many years in the Catholic Church listened to revelations of sexual abuse and these revelations have been deeply disturbing.

The hearings at the Royal Commission will be distressing for all in our parishes, communities and workplaces. It will be particularly distressing for all those who have been the victims of child sexual abuse both within the Church and in other organisations. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

If you feel the need for pastoral support and counselling, please do not hesitate to contact Melissa Davey on 1800 830 113 and the appropriate assistance will be arranged.

I appreciate that accounts of the sexual abuse of children are extremely upsetting to hear. I ask your forgiveness for our past failings and for the damage and hurt this has caused so many people.

Part of the work of the Royal Commission is to make recommendations for the future. The Diocese will work closely with the Truth Justice and Healing Council to respond to and implement these recommendations. I assure you that our Diocese has in place policies, procedures and training in the area of child protection for all Catholic Church personnel and volunteers.

I give you my commitment that I will continue to work untiringly to ensure that all people, especially the young and vulnerable, are protected and that those who have been hurt through sexual abuse are offered ongoing support.

I ask for your prayers that we may continue to respond with compassion and courage. May Mary Mother of the Church support and encourage us and our patron St Joseph inspire and guide us at this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael McCarthy". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton