

# Priests now screened for position

NEW CATHOLIC priests were now subjected to thorough psychological and character assessment to make sure they were suitable to take on a position of trust, Bishop of Rockhampton Brian Heenan said yesterday.

He said the screening process was brought in about four years ago after a number of priests had been charged with sex crimes against juveniles in past decades.

"It's a testing process to make them aware of any personal traits or problems in their lives," he said.

When allegations first started to surface about sexual abuse by priests, Bishop Heenan admitted he

had no idea of how serious the matter would become.

At first he suspected the guilty parties had performed "one-off acts" or had suffered "an aberration in their character" but he has learnt since they were "suffering from a sickness or a disease".

"I don't think we had any idea," he said.

"I'm just shocked by it.

"This illness is something that people can't deal with unless they get some kind of treatment."

He said the church had learnt from past mistakes and wanted to help all victims through its Towards Healing Helpline 1800 337 828.

## Victims chose to avoid court hearing ordeal

## Vietnam vets get advice

From Page 1.

Bishop Heenan, who was appointed in 1991 after McArdle's retirement, was first contacted by McArdle's alleged victims in 1996.

"I was deeply distressed by these allegations and immediately contacted Michael McArdle," he said.

"He did not deny the allegations and agreed to attend a specialist centre for comprehensive assessment and treatment."

Bishop Heenan said he had explained to the alleged victims — there are believed to be four — it was their right to report the matter to the police, but they had chosen not to.

They had indicated to him they did not want to go through the ordeal of the court process.

Bishop Heenan said at the time he had not taken the allegations to the police as without a formal complaint they could not conduct an investigation or press charges.

He said there was no documented evidence to back up reported allegations by McArdle that the late Rockhampton Bishop Bernard Wallace had transferred him to Farleigh in 1970 after a victim had made a complaint in Rockhampton.

"During the period 1996 to 2000 he was monitored to ensure that he was not involved in any ministry with young people," Rockhampton Bishop Heenan said.

In 2000, Bishop Heenan told McArdle to stop all his involvement in private prayer groups due to his persistent radical interpretations of bible scriptures.

BRISBANE — Vietnam veterans facing marital difficulties would soon have a government-funded escape mechanism, Veteran Affairs Minister Donna Vale said on Saturday.

Speaking at the opening of the RSL Annual State Conference, she said within six months the government would begin trials on three "time-out" short-term accommodation centres in Queensland, where veterans could receive the help they needed to get their marriages and their lives back on track.

"The centres are designed to provide the support a family needs to get help," Ms Vale said.

Ms Vale said the centres, earmarked for Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Townsville, would not cater for drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

Instead they would focus on the psychological damage caused to veterans and their families as a direct or indirect result of the war, she said.

Ms Vale said if the trial was successful the centres would be soon located throughout Australia.

Aged care was also a major priority on her ministerial agenda, Ms Vale told the meeting on Saturday.



Carol Twigg, Vince Pheely and Carmel Thomasson celebrate a big win for the Heart Foundation on Saturday. Picture by RHODES WATSON. rw 15/602/11

## Lady luck on charity's side

LADY luck and some good tips put \$890 in icing on the Heart Foundation's Rockhampton Winter Racing Carnival fund-raising cake last week.

Lady luck duo, Carol Twigg and Carmel Thomasson, were entrusted with \$1000 to bet on Newmarket Day on Thursday and they came up trumps,

mainly thanks to a couple of 10 to 1 winners.

Lady Luck Fundraiser organiser Garry Thomasson said a total of \$2890 was handed over to the Heart Foundation's Vince Pheely on Saturday.

A donation of \$1000 from Garry Thomasson Beta Electrical and \$500 each from Bre-

ville and Sharp for a total of \$2900 had allowed half to be put aside for the foundation while the other half went to the Lady Luck punters who didn't let the side down.

Mr Thomasson said some good tipsters, including racing commentator Wayne Wilson, had helped them out.

## Govt gives doctors an insurance lifeline

THE STATE Government yesterday threw a three-pronged lifeline to rural doctors to fend off the looming medical indemnity crisis.

Premier Peter Beattie said the strategy, expected to be ratified by cabinet today, would extend medical indemnity protection to rural doctors and medical specialists who used public facilities.

Coverage would also be guaranteed to Queensland Health doctors relieving in rural areas who treat private patients.

And the consent process for private specialists who referred their patients for treatment as a public patient in a public hospital would also be indemnified.

Health Minister Wendy Edmond said the new reforms were particularly viable for general practitioners who performed obstetrics, surgery and anaesthetics.

"It means that people (in rural communities) can have babies with safety and the knowledge that their medical team will be covered," he said.

"It's really about giving the doctors confidence to do their

late to save 11% of rural doctors who had already shut up shop, he said.

"I can't see them coming back to work after something like this," Dr Faint said.

He said the new coverage for medical procedures was a financial and emotional boon for rural families who would have been forced to travel to metropolitan centres to seek medical services.

Ms Edmond said the procedures still had to be performed in a public hospital or a Queensland Health approved facility to maintain quality control over the process.

Mr Beattie said the new laws, which would come into effect on July 1, significantly resolved a number of the issues raised by the Australian Medical Association in Queensland (AMAQ) and the RDAQ.



Peter Beattie: the strategy would extend medical indemnity protection to rural doctors and medical specialists who used public facilities.

Rural Doctors Association of Queensland (RDAQ) immediate past president Dr Roger Faint said the association was overjoyed by the news.

But the rescue package had come too

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# SEX SCANDAL

## Catholic Bishop of Rockhampton Brian Heenan makes an 'unreserved apology' to parishioners at church services



□ LEFT: Bishop of Rockhampton Brian Heenan. "Our church is divine and human."

□ RIGHT: Guilty. Father Reg Durham, who was convicted and jailed in 1999.

□ FAR RIGHT: Guilty. Father Michael McArdle. He admitted to sexually abusing young boys. Picture courtesy of The Courier-Mail.



By FRAZER PEARCE

MORE revelations of sexual abuse by Central Queensland priests have rocked the Catholic Church.

Bishop of Rockhampton Brian Heenan yesterday, in a letter read out to parishioners at Church services throughout the diocese, issued "an unreserved apology" to those sexually assaulted by former priest Michael Joseph McArdle.

Southern media on the weekend reported McArdle had admitted to masturbating

10-year-old boys in Farleigh and Mackay parishes in the 1970s.

McArdle, 66, who served in Mackay, Biloela, Rockhampton, Longreach and Monto districts between 1962 and 1985, retired from pastoral ministry in the Rockhampton diocese in 1988.

"My apology and heartfelt sorrow goes not only to those who have suffered abuse by Michael McArdle but to all victims of abuse perpetrated by members of the church," Bishop Heenan said.

He also extended the apology to their

families.

The alleged admissions by McArdle follow the conviction and jailing of Rockhampton Catholic priest Reg Durham in 1999 after he pleaded guilty to sexually abusing a young girl in the 1970s.

Durham is facing further charges of sexual abuse but has been found by the Mental Health Tribunal to be unfit to stand trial.

Bishop Heenan said the diocese was shaken by these latest revelations but he was confident its faith would survive the test.

"I want to affirm the vast majority of our priests whose integrity is beyond question," he said.

"Our church is divine and human and I know that God will always be with those who love and serve the church."

He appealed for any other victims affected by sexual abuse to call the Towards Healing Helpline 1800 337 928.

PAGE 3: Continued.

PAGE 3: Screening process for priests introduced.

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