



Q: Who's behind Calvary poll? A: LCM

By Victor Violante

The Little Company of Mary has owned up to conducting a recent phone survey about its plans to sell Calvary Public Hospital to the ACT Government, but rejected allegations of push-polling.

The ACT Government recently commenced community consultation on its proposal to buy Calvary Public Hospital from the Catholic health-care provider for \$77 million and sell palliative care facility Clare Holland House for \$9 million.

The Little Company of Mary recently conducted its own consultation, however, its phone survey sparked allegations of push-polling.

Several letters to *The Canberra Times* in the past week raised concerns about the poll, especially after some of the surveys were terminated when participants replied that they were not Catholic.

One letter said. "What type of survey excludes respondents based on their religion or lack of religious beliefs?"

Little Company of Mary chairman

Tom Brennan said yesterday this had occurred because the survey had sought to poll a statistically significant number of Catholics and others.

As the non-Catholic quota had been reached first, only Catholics had been sought towards the end of the process.

"When they got to a point where they had enough to fill the [non-Catholic] sample they did not need to ask anyone else who did not identify themselves as Catholic any questions," Mr Brennan said.

"We are part of the Catholic Church and it was important to us to understand what the general public thought of the transaction and what members of the Catholic Church thought of it."

A spokesman for Calvary Health Care ACT was not able to provide the list of survey questions yesterday but said they would be included when the poll results were made public, which would happen as soon as the data was collated.

Another reader, who believed the

questioning had been deliberately misleading, said one question had been, "Who would you rather own and operate a public hospital, the Government or the Catholic Church?". She added, "This question is invalid. This choice is not being offered to ACT citizens. It should have said: 'Who would you rather own and operate a public hospital, the Government alone or the Government in partnership with the Catholic Church (as is the status quo)?'"

But the Calvary spokesman rejected suggestions the survey had asked leading questions, saying, "I'm certain there was not to be any misrepresentation or deception involved."

Opposition health spokesman Jeremy Hanson criticised the poll based on representations to him from members of the public. "The way the questions appear to have been framed appear to be leading, and it's provoking an emotional and rather simplistic response," he said.

