

Tribunal of The Catholic Church Diocese of Armidale

25th November, 1992.

Most Rev.K.M.Manning D.D.,
Bishop of Armidale,
Chancery Office,
Dangar Street,
ARMIDALE. N.S.W. 2350.

Dear Bishop Manning,

I wish to communicate to you a report on the meeting that took place at St.Mary's Cathedral Presbytery Sydney N.S.W. on 12th November 1992 between Father John Farrell and members of the Australian Bishops Conference Special Issues Resource Committee. I attended the meeting as your representative.

The meeting commenced at 7.40 p.m. Present were Fathers Brian Lucas, John Usher, John Farrell and Wayne Peters.

The following is an outline of what took place:-

1. John Farrell told the meeting that neither voluntary laicisation nor the five year plan that involved his voluntary return to secular living, secular employment and on-going therapy was acceptable to him. He wished to find some other acceptable way of proceeding.
2. At some length, Brian Lucas again explained to John Farrell the seriousness and the difficulty of the situation. Possible harm to the Church, harm to the Diocese of Armidale in particular, harm to the priesthood, harm to John Farrell himself were emphasised again. Brian Lucas emphasised that there were young men out there who could still come forward and lay charges through civil proceedings. Experience from similar situations showed that the betrayal felt by the victims of sexual abuse was often centred on the fact that the trust they had placed in a priest had been abused. If they saw John Farrell continuing as a priest it was more likely they would press charges so as to prevent other children from being hurt. If the victims knew that serious measures through therapy and the removal from ministry that involved contact with children were being taken so as to remove the dangers to other potential victims, then the likelihood of further charges being brought forward in the civil court was significantly reduced.

3. John Farrell indicated that he was fearful that if he was laicised or no longer seen to be a priest, the chance of the young men he had offended against bringing civil charges against him was greater than if he remained a priest in the public forum. He indicated that he had heard that the reason the families of the victims did not bring charges back in 1984 was because they did not wish to publicly hurt the Church by prosecuting a priest. John Usher explained that the hurt to the victims in these situations was particularly painful because the victims' trust in the person of the priest had been abused by that priest. John Usher believed that there was less chance of John Farrell being further prosecuted by the victims if he was not a priest than if he continued to be seen in the public forum as one. Brian Lucas agreed but also pointed out that no one could give any guarantees to John Farrell that the victims would not bring charges in the future whether he was a priest or not. There was no statute of limitations in the State of New South Wales in regard to sexual offences against minors.
4. It was pointed out to John Farrell that the situation was that he had a choice between voluntary application for laicisation or the five year plan of voluntary secular work, secular accommodation with on-going therapy. It was the expectation of the committee that he would come to this meeting and indicate the choice he had made. The committee was to assist him in putting into operation the choice he had made. It was further pointed out that at the meeting of 24th September last, John Farrell had agreed to take one month to think about this and make his choice, discuss with and inform if necessary his parents and family of the situation. It was now one month and three weeks since that meeting. So it was the expectation of the committee that he indicate his choice at this meeting. It was also the expectation of Bishop Manning.
5. John Farrell asked what was the situation if he chose neither of the two options being offered. Brian Lucas advised that would place Bishop Manning in the situation where he would have to consider initiating canonical proceedings against John. The difficulties this would bring to all parties were discussed. The possibility that the young men who had been offended against might have to be contacted in a canonical process was mentioned. John Farrell said quite definitely that he would want to avoid any canonical proceedings against him.
6. Discussion continued on the seriousness of the situation. It was again pointed out that there was no possibility of any appointment ever to ministry in the Diocese of Armidale. Even if John Farrell chose the five year plan, there was no guarantee there would be a return to ministry for him. At best, any return to ministry would be in a very limited way that removed as far as possible the risk of re-offending.

7. John Farrell requested of Brian Lucas some background reading material on the whole subject. He said that he just did not view the situation as seriously as the committee obviously did. He thought that if he did some background reading it may help him to view the situation with something of the same seriousness as the committee.
8. John Farrell indicated that he needed a further two weeks to reach a decision.
9. The committee members indicated that they did not have the authority to extend the time. Bishop Manning expected a decision to come from this meeting. I (Wayne Peters) indicated to the meeting that although I was representing Bishop Manning, the Bishop had not empowered me to extend the time.
10. It was suggested that I ring Bishop Manning to place John Farrell's request for a two week extension to the Bishop.
11. As you know Bishop Manning, I rang you and placed John Farrell's request to you. After our conversation I returned to the meeting and conveyed your position on the matter which was:

you expected a decision at this meeting

you were not happy about a further extension of time

but you agreed to the extension of two weeks if the committee members believed that would be beneficial to the situation.

12. John Farrell expressed his gratitude for the extension. He indicated that we all knew what his choice would be, that the choice would be for the five year plan. The committee members then asked what was the point of prolonging the whole situation for another two weeks if the decision had been made. John Farrell said that he needed the two weeks to tell his parents of his choice before formally advising Bishop Manning.
13. John Farrell agreed to write a letter to Bishop Manning by Thursday 26th November 1992 in which letter he would advise Bishop Manning of : -

His choice for the five year plan

Put forward his proposal with regard to secular employment

Put forward his proposal for secular living

Put forward his proposal for on-going therapy

As a gesture of goodwill, agree to make an attempt to meet some of the legal costs so far incurred

Seek from the Bishop a person to whom John could regularly report to and monitor the situation on an on-going basis

Brian Lucas agreed to assist John in the final formulation of the letter if assistance was required. John Farrell was to come up with a draft and Brian Lucas would assist in the final submission if requested.

14. John Farrell asked me (Wayne Peters) if I had spoken to Bishop Manning about payment of his salary. I said I had not. I indicated that John should raise the subject with the Bishop himself. I indicated that in line with advice from a previous meeting, I would support to the Bishop the payment of his salary for a period of say two months to assist during the implementation of the five year plan or voluntary application for laicisation. However, John needed to raise the subject with the Bishop.
15. John Farrell spoke of some financial difficulties he was having including an impending Bankcard account at the end of the month. Under questioning from Brian Lucas, John Farrell indicated that he did have some savings.
16. John Farrell indicated that his father had suffered a stroke that morning of the 12th November. He was not sure what was happening with his father back in Armidale. However, John indicated that he would not be returning to Armidale immediately but staying on in Sydney for a few days and staying with Father Lou Breslan of the Parramatta Diocese.
17. John Farrell indicated that other people had supported him in not seeing the same seriousness in the situation as the committee saw. John Usher asked if these people knew the full story. John Farrell said they did. John Usher stated that it was understood that only John Farrell, Brian Lucas, John Usher, Wayne Peters and Bishop Manning knew the full extent of the story at this stage. John Farrell said that those people were indeed the only ones who knew the full story. The committee members were left uncertain as to how many people John Farrell has talked to, how much he has told them or what he has told them.
18. Brian Lucas advised John Farrell to immediately apply for unemployment benefits. Bishop Manning would be advised of this so that if the Department of Social Security contacted Bishop Manning, he would be able to confirm that John was a legitimate applicant for unemployment benefits at this stage.
19. Emphasis was again given to the fact that John Farrell was to have a letter to Bishop Manning by 26th November 1992 advising of his acceptance of the five year plan with appropriate proposals; or alternatively

seeking a process for laicisation. It was clear to all that the deadline for this letter was 26th November.

The meeting closed at approximately 9.40 p.m.

With best wishes,,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wayne Peters". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

(Rev.W.J.Peters)