



Diocese of Parramatta

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8 July 2005

PRIVATE & STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Most Reverend Luc Matthys
Bishop of Armidale
PO Box 93
ARMIDALE NSW 2350

Dear Bishop Matthys,

Following are my comments in regard to Rev. Father John Farrell's petitioning to be dispensed from all the obligations of priesthood including celibacy so that he may return to the lay state.

I was ordained Bishop of the Diocese of Armidale in 1991. Father Farrell was, at the time, a priest of the Armidale Diocese, but working in the Diocese of Parramatta following arrangements made between Bishop Kennedy of Armidale and Bishop Heather of Parramatta relating to allegations of sexual abuse made against Father Farrell while working in the Diocese of Armidale.

Before I came to the Diocese of Armidale I was well aware of these allegations through the clerical grapevine. At the same time there was general knowledge in the Armidale Diocese of allegations against Father Farrell.

I soon discovered that the Diocesan Consultors had been adamantly opposed to his being ordained and had voted against it. Despite opposition, Bishop Kennedy had ordained him. From my enquiries with the Seminary authorities at the time it emerged that John Farrell had not received a recommendation from them for ordination.

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I first met with Father Farrell late in 1991 and you will find detailed records of such meetings in your archives, because at the time the matter of child molestation in Australia was being taken very seriously and I was the Chairman of the State Professional Standards Committee.

When I presented to Father Farrell the case against him, he was most defensive claiming that the previous Bishop had never brought to his attention the accusations of wrongdoing, or, for that matter, had even discussed it with him. I put to him that there had been incidents with boys in Moree and that the then Vicar General, Rev. Msgr. Frank Ryan, had spoken to the parents of boys involved, who were not prepared to have their children exposed as witnesses in any court case. These incidents were spoken about generally in the Diocese.

I put to Father Farrell the dangers of his re-offending, and proposed he undergo counselling, recommending to him a well-known psychiatrist in Sydney. I also told him that I could not recommend him to another Bishop until such time as he had obtained a clearance from this psychiatrist.

Professor Alex Brazinski, informed me after Father Farrell had consulted with him that Father John did not seem to understand the seriousness of his state and refused the Professor permission to put anything into writing. However, he agreed that the Professor verbally summarise his situation with me.

The general context of the information conveyed to me was that Father Farrell was self-centred and not accepting responsibility for his actions. He had little insight into understanding himself and would be an on-going risk to children even if dispensed from the priesthood. In the interview he had revealed little about himself and there was a high risk that he would re-offend. The Professor advised me to be sensitive in the way that I handled Father Farrell because he would not hesitate to publicly defend his rights. His conclusion was that future counselling was a waste of time, as Father Farrell would not cooperate.

Mid-year 1992, Most. Rev. Bishop Heather, Bishop of Parramatta, advised me that he had withdrawn John's faculties in the Diocese of Parramatta. There were instances quoted where he was under suspicion of having offended with boys. This turned out to be true, as I have only recently paid out \$60,000 in compensation on one offence here in the Diocese of Parramatta.

Following Bishop Heather's report I stood John down from any public ministry and withdrew his faculties. This brought a very strong reaction from John who was going overseas at the time and was also seeking to obtain a Celebret from Bishop Heather, which was refused. John circulated my letter of the

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withdrawal of his faculties to different people in an attempt to have people change my mind.

Later on I again communicated with Professor Brazinski, to assure myself that I was not being unfair or unjust to John. Brazinski confirmed that Father John had a personality disorder, which causes poor judgement, self-assertiveness and an inability to judge the seriousness of his actions. Brazinski couldn't guarantee that it could be established the condition existed at the time of his ordination which would invalidate Father John's ordination on psychological grounds.

Later in the year, and I indicate that you would have records of the exact dates, Father John again asked that his faculties be restored.

He was still as adamant that he would defend himself, but did reveal to me that there had been other incidents other than the celebrated REDACT case and also some dalliances with women.

He reacted to my suggesting that he might seek laicisation using as an excuse that enemies of the Church would then move to have him charged.

Afterwards I referred him to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference "Special Issues Resource Committee" to evaluate his situation and advise him on ways of proceeding.

A report of Father Farrell's meeting with the Special Issues Resource Committee was relayed back to me by Rev. Father Wayne Peters who attended the meeting. (A copy of that Report should be in the archives.) Father John, at that meeting reported that he had sexually interfered with boys when he was an Assistant Priest at Moree. The Special Issues Resource Committee made it quite clear in their report the knowledge of his activity was fairly widespread and was the cause of scandal in the Diocese. He was advised that it would not be possible for the Bishop to restore his faculties in the Diocese of Armidale in order to recommend him to the Bishop of another Diocese for an appointment. There was a suggestion at the time that he be laicised or that he place himself in a therapy programme such as Encompass where he could be monitored.

The Resource Committee held a further meeting with Father Farrell later in the year. Again, I would refer you to reports from this Committee. This meeting suggested, again, to him that he seek laicisation. He didn't agree. It was also put to him that he take a period of long leave with counselling and that he not present himself as a priest. His preference was to do further studies and he was advised that this should not take place in the Diocese of Armidale where he was so well known.

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On the whole, Father Farrell was not cooperative with the Committee. There was a further meeting later that year which, again, seemed to have been inconclusive because Father Farrell was not open to seeking laicisation, nor to live as a layperson, nor to seek secular employment.

Still later in the year I received a letter from him in which he resigned from the priesthood and some financial arrangements were made to help him. I don't remember the details.

There was a further case somewhere around 1996 when REDACTED REDACTED had him charged with sexual assault. I knew the girl well and I believed her to be a sincere and reliable witness. As it turned out, in the Court, it became a matter of his word against hers and the judge did not come to a decision. I have no doubt that the man was guilty REDACTED REDACTED REDACTED REDACTED.

Over the course of those years I consulted with others who were involved with his seminary training. To start with there were mention of parties with naked students while at the Manly seminary. The Rector, at the time, had been under the impression that John Farrell had gone overseas for a holiday after the incident and that he would not return to the Seminary. I later discovered that his spiritual director was a person who was also convicted of homosexual activity.

From my discussions with people in Moree I have no doubt that Father John Farrell was involved in widespread sexual activity with children and that concern about this had been expressed to the previous Bishop.

Through all of my meetings and discussions Father John Farrell never expressed any regret for his actions. As a matter of fact, when confronted with facts he said: "I don't know what you are on about, these kids came looking for it, they enjoyed it."

There was bitterness in the Diocese over the Court proceedings in the REDA case for which the Diocese had to pick up the expenses whereas, the lad was unrepresented. As you know, REDACTED REDACTED but later committed suicide.

To give some idea of the public feeling the local Member for Tamworth, Mr. Park, and the Rotary Club took the matter to the State Attorney General when Father John was found not guilty in the REDA case.

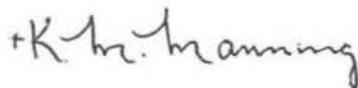
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My own conclusions to the aforesaid is that John Farrell should not have been ordained, for it was obvious that he had problems with sexuality while in the seminary, which would not suit him for the celibate life. From what I now know of the man, there is no way that he could ever be returned to ministry, in Australia, or anywhere, even in a minor way, because the man has no sense of the seriousness of his actions, is stubborn, unrepentant and unable to take any form of advice.

For his own good and for the good of the Church I would have to support him in his application for laicisation.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+K. Manning". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Bishop Kevin Manning
Bishop of Parramatta