

9 May 2013

Mr Martin Drevikovsky
General Secretary
Anglican Church of Australia General Synod
Suite 2 Level 9
51 Druitt Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

Re: National Register

I refer to the above matter.

The National Register was discussed by the Professional Standards Directors at their most recent national gathering in Melbourne last week. They have asked that I write to you about the Register, and I have circulated this letter to them for their comments prior to sending it to you.

At the previous two gatherings in Sydney and Canberra, presentations were made to the Directors about the current comprehensive update and overhaul being carried out on the Register, and the Directors had an opportunity to provide their input into the same. The Directors are optimistic that, when completed, the Register will be greatly improved by this process.

The Directors remain very concerned however that, at present, the Register does not fulfil the role which the Canon requires that it perform. The Directors are also concerned that the public perception, drawing on the General Synod website and statements from within the Church, is that the Register is effective and functional in carrying out the aims of the Canon, or at least that there are no significant difficulties. As has been advised previously, that is not presently the case. As noted on past occasions, there are real problems with the operation of the Register software, and those problems have in turn led to a significant number of relevant matters not being presently listed on the Register.

The Directors are particularly concerned about that situation at present for a number of reasons. First, submissions have been made to the present Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations about the Anglican Church's response to past abuse, which included the Register as part of that response. There would likely be some adverse comment if that Inquiry came to learn about the extent of the present difficulties in operating the Register.

Second, the Directors are likewise concerned about how the present situation would be viewed by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Directors note that the Commission has the power to subpoena information, and may indeed seek to access the Register itself. It is unlikely that the practical difficulties in the Register's operation can or should escape scrutiny by the Commission.

The Directors are aware that little can be done to improve the situation other than the update which is already underway. The Directors are anxious however to emphasise that the improvements to the Register need to be accorded the highest priority if the Church is to continue to make reference in its public statements to the Register as an example of improved practices.

In the interim, the Directors will continue to share potentially adverse information about licence applicants between themselves, as they are authorised to do by their various Ordinances and Canons. The Directors do so in an effort to ensure that the overall goal of the Register is fulfilled, and that persons of concern do not escape scrutiny simply by moving between dioceses.

It should be noted that the Directors have no criticism to make of the National Register Officer, Sue Harvey. She has been greatly helpful throughout in assisting us with the Register and in seeking to address difficulties. As has been recognised by the present update and overhaul, however, there are more fundamental matters which need to be addressed. We look forward to continuing to work with Sue on Register matters in the future.

We note your letter of 7 May 2013 regarding the update to two of the National Register Protocols. We especially welcome the change to the Protocol for Inclusion of Information, and thank you for informing us of the changes.

Yours faithfully

Peter Caporaso
Professional Standards Director, Adelaide and The Murray