

File Note – Meeting held 3 December, 1998 at 12 noon between Bishop Roger Herft, Messrs Greg Hansen and Peter Mitchell

The meeting was called to discuss the allegations made by Farraghers removalists concerning sexually explicit material found in a Priest's possession (N).

Greg Hansen had been present with N when the Bishop and N spoke about a possible meeting to discuss the matter. N's response was that he would want his lawyer present. GH has not practised law for a decade and advised that he was present as a friend and was prepared to meet with the Bishop as "an honest broker" rather than as a lawyer, if that would help facilitate the matter.

GH spoke of N's remorse regarding possession of explicit material, its discovery, the offence it had caused to the removalists and the distress it had caused the Church and the Bishop. GN spoke of N's unwillingness to meet with the Bishop or acknowledge the ramifications of his actions as a mix of initial shock/dismay, arrogance and denial and that he was now more repentant and was prepared to work with the Bishop to find a resolution.

+Roger spoke of the offence caused to the removalists, the uncertainty of whether the material involved children, was classified or unclassified material. The legal issue needed to be resolved so that the Church knew whether it was dealing with a legal matter or an ecclesiastical/spiritual issue. N's refusal to show all the material to Bishop Robert Beal compounded the uncertainty.

GH challenged the Bishop on the issue of morality and privacy. +Roger responded that the nature of the material was of itself not at issue. If the material did not involve children or predatory behaviour and was not illegal, then the Church would not want to go down the legal track. However, the quantity of videos and catalogues, other materials and N's attitude suggested a very serious pattern of behaviour of addiction, presumably over a long period of time, which pointed to a much deeper spiritual problem. +Roger spoke of theological training which warned priests (of a Catholic nature) of the temptations of sex, money and alcohol. That priests should recognise warning signs of such influences and should speak with their spiritual director or resolve the conflicts in some other way. Not to do so raised huge questions about N's priesthood, its authenticity and integrity.

GH undertook to visit N and to view the material and to advise the Bishop in writing on the nature of its classification and ownership.

+Roger would meet with N, Robert Beal and Greg Hansen on Friday 4 December. If the material was not illegal, +Roger would need to consider his course of action. This ranged from offering "time out", counselling, seeking a new Spiritual Director, or if the Priest was not sufficiently repentant or could not assure +Roger that no other persons were involved the commissioning scheduled for 10 December would not be able to proceed, or may proceed without the Bishops presence, depending on N's responses.