

PASTORAL LETTER

(To be read in or distributed to all congregations on Sunday May 25, 2003)

To the clergy

We are all immersed in the current debate about the handling of sex abuse. It would be very helpful if you would read the enclosed pastoral letter at all services tomorrow. Please remember the independent, outsourced, hot-line in case any person at worship ask you about it: 8305 9383.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I know that each of you will be deeply concerned at the reports that have appeared in the media in recent days about sexual abuse of children by Anglican clergy and church workers. To those affected by abuse I express, once again and on behalf of the Diocese, my deepest regret and compassion. Our first concern will always be for them, their families and those who are closely associated with them. As we have reflected on our processes we have discovered that, at times, they may have been too slow and cumbersome and at times may not have been completely adequate for the task. On behalf of the Diocese, I express my regret that people who have sought help from the church may not have received the help they needed and in the way they expected

In recent years the Diocese has been continually developing and revising its procedures for dealing with complaints and we have learnt a great deal. Last year we contracted an independent hotline service from outside the church to receive and provide initial support to anyone reporting abuse and seeking help. We have processes which will ensure that victims who seek care and support will receive it. In addition, we have a small group meeting to review our processes in light of advice we received from the Standing Committee of General Synod in April this year.

In recent days there have been calls for an Inquiry into the way complaints of sexual abuse and misconduct have been handled by the Diocese. You will have seen two respected priests initiate this call. We are committed to respond fully to the victims, their families and friends. Hence people like Andrew and Don, and those for whom they advocate, can be kept better informed about what is being done, to help them access the care and support that you, the people of the church, would expect them to receive.

These matters are disturbing. The changes that we are urgently developing are well advanced. I will report to the Synod next week about progress.

I recognise that you, the people of the Diocese, share this great burden as you hear the victims tell of what has happened to them and listen to media reports. You are not alone in your concerns. Please pray for the victims of the abuse and those who are seeking to find positive ways forward.

Yours sincerely

Ian George
Archbishop