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# THE ANGLICAN PARISH OF MAGILL

*St George's Magill with St Barnabas' Firlie*

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*Rector: The Rev'd Dr Don Owers BTh (Hons) DMin*

13/3/00

The Most Rev'd Dr Ian George,  
Archbishop of Adelaide  
Anglican Church Office  
26 King William Road  
North Adelaide 5006

## CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Archbishop,

**Re: Allegations of sexual abuse – Robert Brandenburg**

I write to bring before you some concerns about the Diocesan response to the above matter and to ask you to give urgent consideration to further action.

In October 1999 both you and the Diocesan Solicitor spoke to me by telephone to request that the Parish of Magill postpone a second seminar (originally scheduled for October 26<sup>th</sup> 1999) designed to help victims of the alleged abuse by Mr Brandenburg. The reason given for this request was to allow Diocesan management of the situation.

While some constructive steps have been taken since then to prevent further cases of abuse little, so far as I know, has been done to acknowledge the harm done by Mr Brandenburg and to encourage victims to access appropriate care, should they wish to do so. Further, initiatives planned by the Parish have largely been stalled by an apparent lack of urgency at a Diocesan level.

The trauma associated with sexual abuse has been well documented. In the Final Report of the Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service, Vol 5 (The Paedophile Inquiry), August 1997, the Commissioner, the Hon. Justice J.R.T. Wood concluded:

. . . difficulties the victim can experience in adulthood include psychiatric disorders, marital and sexual difficulties, abuse and neglect of their own or other children, depression and eating disorders, low self esteem, suicidal behaviour and substance abuse. (Page 1175)

All of the victims (three) I have spoken to have experienced a number of these disorders – including serious contemplation of suicide.

In his report on the response of Churches to those who had suffered abuse within the Church Mr. Wood comments that this response has been characterised largely by denial, minimisation and avoidance (page 995):

Often Churches reacted with fear, 'for the good name of the diocese or institute, fear of the victim and of the emotional and financial demands that might be made, fear for the financial assets of the diocese or institute, fear of how many other cases might be there to be uncovered.' A defensive response of this kind, however, risks doing more damage to the institution than the abuse itself, particularly in the light of the public awakening to the problem. It was never appropriate for any church to place its reputation ahead of its responsibility to the community. It is not appropriate now. (Page 997)

The Report is similarly disturbing in its comments about the support offered to victims:

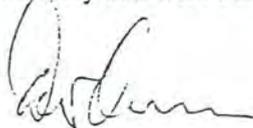
This is an area where the Churches have provided a response which at best has been patchy and at worst uncaring. In part the absence of any consistent policy to repair the harm done to victims of sexual abuse has been due to fear of the consequences of civil litigation, and in particular the possibility that an offer of assistance might be regarded as an admission of liability. (Page 1031)

In the light of all this I write to ask you to give further, urgent consideration to our response as a Church. I have two proposals in particular. The first is the matter of acknowledgement of harm done. There is substantial evidence to suggest that the first step toward healing for many victims is an acknowledgement of the reality of the harm done to them. Because of the numbers involved in this particular case such acknowledgement will, it seems to me, require some form of public disclosure. It has occurred to me that this could possibly be made through a resolution of Synod – in a similar way to our apology over the Stolen Generations - I would be very willing to discuss with you the best way to go about this. Secondly, because of allegations of sexual abuse in CEBS branches in other parishes, I believe we have a duty of care to offer, in those parishes, seminars which may help possible survivors and their families to deal with the trauma they have experienced.

I have to admit a good deal of frustration over the handling of this matter. As I look back over my correspondence I find that I have received only one reply from the Diocese – and that an e-mailed memo from Bishop Phillip sent on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1999 after I had made a telephone enquiry as to progress made by committee formed to consider the Diocesan response. The outcomes reported by that memo were vague and inconclusive. I refer you to my reply to the memo, along with its enclosure (which were copied to you), in which I again put the arguments for a more pro-active response. So far, our response appears to me to be disturbingly consistent with the comments made by Mr Justice Wood and Father Kevin McDonough (The Institutional Response).

Because the closing date for motions for Synod is 20<sup>th</sup> March I would appreciate your urgent consideration of this matter. I will telephone you in a day or so to hear your views.

Sincerely and with best wishes,



D.W. Owers, Rector

cc. Bp Phillip Aspinall