

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*

10th December 1999

The Rt Rev'd Phillip Aspinall
Anglican Church Office
26 King William Road,
North Adelaide 5006

Dear Phillip,

Re: Your memo of 6th December 1999

Thank you for your memo in which you outline what I assume is the present Diocesan position on the recommendations I was invited to make as a result of discussions about the Bob Brandenburg case.

While it is good to hear of the work being done in the development of Codes of Conduct and the provision of staff and volunteer training, I have to say that, in the particular matter of the Diocesan response to the Bob Brandeburg situation, I find the outcomes of the meetings you report on to be frustratingly vague and inconclusive.

The key recommendation I made was that the Church should make a formal statement acknowledging the extent and the seriousness of the harm which has been done. I provided with this recommendation a suggested form for the statement with the thought that this or a similar statement could be discussed, modified and approved by the church, legal and insurance representatives at the meetings. There is no mention of this in your report – simply the offer of an episcopal visit to the Parish of Magill *"to make a statement acknowledging the facts of the particular case in view and expressing the pastoral support of the Church to all who have been affected."* Such a minimalist statement (a statement of the "facts" is irrelevant to survivors – they experienced them) made in a restricted context will not reach most survivors and nor would it help them if it did.

A second major recommendation concerned the provision of seminars in the Diocese to help parishes (particularly those which had associations with Mr Brandenburg through CEBS) and the Diocese deal with the reality of the situation. Again there is no resolution on this recommendation – simply the non-committal response that such seminars *"may be beneficial"* and with the added caveat, which has been expressed to me now on a number of occasions, that *"care needs to be taken not to promote claims which may have the unintended effect of invalidating any Diocesan insurance cover."* This caveat has already inhibited pastoral care and hangs like a threat over any future pastoral initiatives. One of the reasons I agreed to postpone the seminar scheduled for October 28th this year was so that there could be discussion with insurance representatives and agreement about responsible pastoral initiatives. The meetings you report on appear totally inconclusive on this point.

I am most frustrated at the lack of urgency, at a Diocesan level, in taking initiatives that might help toward the healing of the survivors of this traumatic abuse. Survivor statements, the expert opinions of police working on the case and the now well documented psycho-pathology of paedophiles suggest that it is a reasonable assumption that appalling sexual abuse may have taken place over a period of perhaps thirty years and that thirty or forty boys or more may have been abused. Three survivors (two of whom are in their thirties) have stated that they were abused for five to six years each and that they know of others who were abused. One of these young men has stated he is fairly sure that abuse also took place in or through parishes or CEBS branches other than Magill and at Diocesan campsites. The sometimes life threatening and long term impact of this kind of abuse on survivors and their families is well documented. Given all this I would have thought that even the possibility of abuse on this scale should demand the most serious and urgent consideration and every effort to provide pastoral care and healing for those who have been harmed including the undisclosed victims.


I want to assure you that in pursuing this matter I am seeking to act in the best interests of the Diocese as well as the survivors of abuse. I am aware of the potential damage to the good name of the church and the possibility of civil litigation. I am convinced though, that our credibility as a church will be enhanced by openness and transparency in the handling of difficult matters such as this and that the fear of civil litigation should in no way inhibit our care of those who have been harmed in or through the church community. I might add that, in the United States at least, there are cases in which complainants have taken legal action because of their frustration over the lack of realistic response by church authorities.

Could you respond, as a matter of urgency, to the following questions:

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1. Is it possible to obtain, from our insurers, written guidelines on the range of pastoral action available to us. Without such guidelines our pastoral care is inhibited because of the danger of crossing some presently undefined boundary between extending pastoral care and "promoting a claim."
 2. What concrete steps does the Diocesan leadership propose to attempt to provide pastoral care and healing (including spiritual healing) for those who have been harmed (and their families) and when such proposals will be implemented.
 3. Has the Brandenburg situation been discussed at Diocesan Council and, if so, does the Council have any proposals for the management of the situation?

I have included, as an enclosure to this letter, an article by Kevin McDonough, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of St Paul/Minneapolis and a charter member of the Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute (ISTI). It provides useful feedback on the experiences and reflections of survivors of abuse, and those who walk with them, as they have brought their hurt to the Church.

Sincerely,


D. W. Owers

Enc: The Institutional Response

cc: The Archbishop; The Rev'd Dr John Roffey; Mr Andrew Luckhurst-Smith