

Burnie Parish
(Second draft)

~~Third draft~~

1. I have come out of pastoral concern for the parish. The resignation, sudden and unexpected, of the previous Rector, has left an aftermath of rumour, suspicion, distrust, anger and confusion.

There may even be a feeling that there has been a lack of candour in the matter, that the absence of information has meant there has been something to cover up. Something has been "swept under the carpet", it may be felt.

2. All the time the parish is trying to get on with its ministry and mission. To do that it needs to be freed from the past. If there is open acknowledgment of what was alleged at the time it might help to begin a new stage in the life of the parish. Healing needs to take place, feelings need to be brought out into the open - mine as well as yours - and the re-establishment of trust for the church as a whole initiated.

3. I must emphasise that this is not a trial. It is a pastoral meeting concerned with enabling the parish to proceed with its life and work.

No-one has been charged with anything at this time and people are entitled to a presumption of innocence unless and until proved guilty.

Care must be exercised lest we are unwittingly responsible for the denial of natural justice to a person.

There are, too, laws which make the publication of defamation unlawful, unless it is done in a manner which the law permits. Determining whether or not the law does so permit is a matter of difficulty, about which even experienced lawyers often disagree. If the publication is found to be unlawful the award of damages can be very substantial.

This is not a "kangaroo court".

4. But there are other factors to be taken account of. They include:

* people - a victim or victims - who hurt by what they allege happened to them. It is possible for them to be additionally hurt by their perception that the church may favour the clergy at their expense.

* The congregation - confused, angry, uncertain - a whole range of feelings is to be identified.

* Jonathan and Susanne Chambers, trying to lead God's people with a load of hurt and distrust to hamper efforts, especially in ministry with young people.

5. With you I find this very difficult. Let me tell you why I find this so distressing:

* because failure, proven or alleged, in one priest brings pain and grief to all, clergy especially; but the whole church feels it. Distrust rubs off on others. We all sense a feeling of deep betrayal. I feel that.

* because the bishop has a responsibility for the whole flock, a care for the well-being of all. But the demands of justice and the danger of defamation have rendered me unable to name things and to be open with one another as Christians ought to be. I have felt that as an enormous burden.

* because I have been angry at my perception of betrayal of trust and friendship. I have felt let down by one whom I trusted with high office and responsibility.

* because when one of my clergy is perceived to have failed, I know I must accept a measure of responsibility.

* because I weep for all who are hurt and especially that one who acted for Christ seems to have misused position, responsibility, power and trust - to that person's own ends.

6. What I am talking about is paedophilia.

In November, 1994, I received a telephone call with a complaint that Lou Daniels had allegedly sexually abused a child and that the matter had been reported to the police. I did not disbelieve the allegation.

Enquiry confirmed that the complaint had been made and that Lou had been interviewed by the police.

I took immediate action to prevent any further potential for abuse of others and for the potential of further misuse of position and trust.

Confronted with the allegation, Lou chose to resign immediately specifying no reasons. I was advised that I could not prejudice his rights by giving any further details and that I must let the law take its course.

All I could do was to ensure his removal from office and that, in the face of such a complaint, he could not function again as a priest either here or elsewhere.

7. The allegation, if true, is clearly contrary to all that the followers of Christ stand for. If true, it constitutes an abuse of people, of position, of power and a betrayal of trust.

if true would be

The alleged behaviour is intolerable, immoral and illegal.

8. I have tried to speak openly and honestly. I have given such detail as I think I can within the restraints already referred to.

But I have said sufficient, I hope, to serve the purpose of this meeting - to name the allegation - to help in the identifying and acknowledging of our various feelings and, principally, to help the parish to go forward pastorally.

Some may need more personal counsel. I offer that especially through the Reverend Dr Jim Young, who is present. He is a priest of our church and a clinical psychologist. Jim will speak to us shortly and I know that he will be of help to you as he has been to me.

9. Please pray for all who have suffered and continue to suffer. Let us be sure to love one another and to pray for one another.