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# Confusion over false action

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The withdrawal of sexual assault allegations against The Revd George Parker has created confusion and concern among many in the diocese and the greater community. Rumours and fears that the matter has not been fairly dealt with are unfounded.

The reality is the Crown did not have a case against Fr Parker and was heavily criticized by the Judge for attempting to bring action against him under those circumstances.

Claims were made and widely reported by the Department of Public Prosecution that the Dean's office was uncooperative. These claims are strenuously denied by Dean Graeme Lawrence. Without going into detail and a complete chronology of events, as Registrar of the Diocese, I can say that on both occasions when the complainant contacted Dean Lawrence, information about the several options for making a complaint were given to the complainant, including both the Diocese's sexual harassment process and the civil process. On both occasions arrangements were also made for the complainant to meet with the bishop, and on both occasions the appointments were not kept.

The complainant contacted the police, who then interviewed Fr Parker. In that interview, and in subsequent pre-trial hearings, Fr Parker denied all allegations. After each occasion the Crown changed the nature and timing of the allegations. The defense subpoenaed information from the

Registry and this was not only given to them, it was also made available to the Crown.

It was only after the trial had started that the Crown began to ask specific questions of the Registry. In response to our advice, particularly about the information contained in Service Registers, the Crown withdrew all charges and the Judge discharged the jury, as there were no facts for them to consider.

The facts show the Crown did not have evidence to bring any action against Fr Parker. Sadly, this seemed to become apparent to them only when the matter had been taken to court and covered by the media. If a positive can be taken from this tragic incident, it is the effectiveness of the Diocese's Sexual Misconduct Principles and Procedures in dealing with allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment and abuse allegations against anyone holding an official position within the diocese.

The community should be reassured the Diocese of Newcastle has, for some years now, required rigorous psychological and physiological profiling designed to ensure that those seeking ordination are suitable for the positions that they hold. Fr Parker is a free man; with no criminal record and many years of dedicated service to the church and the community behind him. While he cannot comprehend the actions of the complainants, he bears them no ill will.

Our prayer is now that the community will pray for Fr George Parker, his accusers and all who are wounded.

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