

13 April 2012

The Right Reverend Keith Slater
Bishop of Grafton
Anglican Church of Australia
PO Box 4
GRAFTON NSW 2460

Dear Keith,

In recent months I have offered you compassionate and trustworthy ways both to answer Mr Richard 'Tommy' Champion's pleas and decisively discharge your pastoral obligations to him.

Tommy suffered brutal abuse over 50 years ago, while at a home that bore our Church's name and whose workers included clergy, religious and lay church members. The signing of a deed of release some years ago did not and cannot, in my view, extinguish the pastoral obligations Tommy's abuse created for Grafton Diocese. Only a narrow legal view would consider that the end of the matter. That is not a sustainable view from a pastoral perspective.

My guidance was based on your assurances that Grafton has done everything your abuse protocols required for Tommy and that your legal advice and conclusion about who had the duty of care for the Church of England North Coast Children's Home was *unequivocal*.

I acknowledge that you did agree to my suggestion that Tommy meet with you and Mr Garth Blake SC, who I understand provided legal advice to Grafton, to answer Tommy's duty of care questions. I was relieved that you understood why this step should be taken and its pastoral importance. Mr Blake assured me that he would not use legal jargon and that he would answer Tommy's questions in a straightforward, plain manner.

While Tommy rejected, outright, this offer to meet with you and Mr Blake, saying he had lost trust, he still insists that his questions be answered. Tommy insists that if he receives a straightforward, transparent explanation of who was running the home and how it was managed, he will be satisfied.

I then took advice on how to proceed in a way the victim could implicitly trust, from a retired senior jurist and a nationally regarded psychiatrist specializing in abuse victims' needs. My subsequent suggestion to you, Keith, was to have a senior legal person, known and trusted in the wider community, meet with yourself and Tommy to explain the duty of care matter and answer Tommy's questions.

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In formulating this proposal I accepted your advice, Keith, that several years ago Grafton had attempted to explain to Tommy its duty of care position. However, given the time that has elapsed and Tommy's continuing need, I believed another effort was surely required, one that acknowledged Tommy's shattered trust and the Church's need to be accountable both to Tommy and the wider community. I believed that would have been a good thing for both Tommy and the Church. By this one action, Grafton Diocese could have been assured it had done precisely what Tommy has asked for. It would have enabled Grafton to be certain it had acted in a way that was morally sound, compassionate and publicly credible, regardless of any subsequent claims to the contrary.

In the lead up to Easter and since, it has become clear that my views have not persuaded either you or your Chancellor, and that you have rejected my proposed way forward.

Moreover, you have not provided Tommy with copies of the Home's constitutions relevant to his period of residence, as I recommended. Nor have you responded to my questions to clarify the actions previously taken by Grafton in relation to Tommy. You have consistently expressed your reticence about engaging further with Tommy, repeating that everything that can be done has been done. Your Chancellor told me over Easter that "the Christian thing" to do is "not to reopen the matter".

Clearly the matter is not closed for Tommy. He continues to express to me, and publically, his ongoing distress and anguish and his criticisms of Grafton and the Church more widely.

It is clear I disagree with some of the decisions you have taken. It is equally clear that the powers of the Primate are limited to persuasion and guidance only. Given this situation, I believe Tommy is entitled to know, without delay, that you are unwilling to move forward with the approach I have suggested. I believe Tommy is also entitled to know how you intend to deal with his ongoing duty of care questions.

Your decisions have potentially serious implications, Keith. Some will hear Tommy's cries for help and incorrectly think that nothing has changed since the days when so many victims' cries went unheard. That has the unacceptable potential of deterring any remaining victims from coming forward, as well as casting doubt in the minds of those victims we have already worked so hard to help. The hundreds of abuse victims we have assisted over this past decade, and the thousands of Anglicans who have worked to change things for the better, do not deserve to have these real reforms questioned by instances where the Church could have done better.

Keith, I acknowledge the efforts you have made to assist Tommy and other victims over these past seven years. I know there are times when nothing you do makes any significant difference to the pain a victim has suffered. I know that, when trust evaporates, even attempts to do right can be misconstrued. Given your assurances about actions previously taken to assist Tommy, the one remaining pastoral obligation seems to be a further comprehensive attempt to respond to Tommy's questions.

Though my initiatives in this regard have not won your support, I trust you will find a way forward. If I can be of any assistance, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Yours in Christ



The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall
Primate