

Sam Beeney

From: Margaret Goddard
Sent: Wednesday, February 20, 2002 1:31 PM
To: Sam Beeney
Subject: FW: Media Statement

For the 2002 Lynch file or perhaps it is better placed in the Linkplus file

-----Original Message-----

From: Elliott, Rosslyn [SMTP:RElliott@anglicanbrisbane.org.au]
Sent: Wednesday, February 20, 2002 10:55 AM
To: Waters, V (Pr)-St Margarets; Watt, T (Pr)-Forest Lake; Wain, G (Pr)-Cannon Hill; Vincent, A (Pr)-Matt. Flinders; The Secretary-St Francis; Spiller, K (Pr)-St Aidan Girls; Sly, Mark (Hm)-Coomera; Scott, David (Hm)-ACGS; James, J (Pr)-St Hildas; Hunter, N (Pr)-Hillbrook; Howden, B (Pr)-Toow. Prep; Goddard, Margaret (HoS)-St Pauls; Ginn, G (Pr)-Fraser Coast; Edwards, Sue (Pr)-Glennie; Croft, S (Pr)-St Lukes; Cook, Bruce (Hm)-Southport; Claridge, P (Pr)-West Moreton
Subject: Media Statement

Included in this email is a copy of the Media Statement I made yesterday, for your information.

This is a difficult time for us all. I want to emphasise what I have said in the Media Statement - that I place on record my confidence in and my deep appreciation for the vast majority of decent, selfless, loving clergy and people who give so much of themselves not only to the life of the church but to the life of the community as a whole.

In dealing with this pastorally, and particularly with young people, it is important to face the facts of the situation without trying to hide anything, but also without unnecessary speculation.

People in our congregations, schools and agencies also feel hurt, anger and frustration, as well as the victims. They need time to face the reality and express their feelings, and time for healing to take place.

We are already taking constructive steps to move on, and the Diocesan Council will be working at this at its meeting on Thursday 21st. I would ask you, in your situation, also to take whatever constructive steps you can to help your people deal with these matters. If I or the bishops can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

Please also remember Dr Peter Hollingworth, Ann and the family in your prayers, as this is a very distressing and trying time for them too.

+Phillip Aspinall

MEDIA STATEMENT
 by The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall
 19 February 2002

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming this afternoon

Events which have led to this conference concern very grave matters and it's important that I indicate the manner in which I intend to approach and deal with them.

VICTIMS

From the outset let me say that child abuse of any sort is totally abhorrent and not to be tolerated.

That some children in the care of the church and its schools have been abused causes me great pain and shame. I wish with all my being that it were not so. Yet I have to face the reality that it has happened.

To those who have been abused I offer my deepest apology. I believe I speak on behalf of the whole of the Diocese of Brisbane when I say we sincerely apologise for the immense pain and harm suffered by victims of abuse.

This applies of course to victims of any age and to victims of any sort of abuse, but it is especially true of children and of child sexual abuse. I recognise that the damage caused is profound and long-lasting.

I want to assure any victim of abuse that I will do all in my power to ensure that they receive the best support, care and counselling possible. It's my hope and prayer that with compassion and understanding and care, the resources of the church might reasonably assist the process of healing and contributing to victims of abuse surviving and then thriving in the rest of their lives.

COMMUNITY

I recognise that the serious allegations which have filled media reports recently have undermined the confidence the community at large has in the church.

I want to assure the people of Brisbane and Queensland that I will do all in my power to regain their confidence and trust. I understand that that will involve being honest, open and transparent about how the church deals with serious allegations of abuse. It is my intention to be accountable to the community we exist to serve.

I have already said publicly and I repeat again now that the church will cooperate in all possible way with the police and other relevant authorities in investigating and responding to any allegations of misconduct in the church.

CHURCH

The events of recent weeks have also had a significant effect on members of the church themselves and on our parish communities, schools and other organisations. They have been shocked and shaken.

I want to place on record my confidence in and my deep appreciation for the vast majority of decent, selfless, loving clergy and lay people who give so much of themselves not only to the life of the church but to the life of the community as a whole.

The truth is it is only a very small number people indeed who do the wrong thing and bring hurt to their victims and shame on us all. Their behaviour will not be tolerated.

ACTION TAKEN

It's one thing for me to give these assurances. I realise I will be judged by my actions, so let me outline the steps that have already been taken and indicate the course I have in mind for the future.

I was installed as Archbishop of Brisbane on 2 February.

In the address at my installation I acknowledged the confronting reality that children in our care have been abused and that we have failed to respond decisively with care and compassion. I also said that that realisation had given rise to a new resolve to learn from past mistakes and not to repeat them.

On Monday 4 February I spent the morning in a meeting with the heads of Anglican Schools in Queensland and the chairs of school boards and councils. That meeting canvassed a range of issues related to ensuring the safety of children in our schools including the most important matters of preventative education for staff and students. Several schools shared their policies and procedures for dealing with complaints and each school went away determined to review its practices to ensure they are the best possible. The Anglican Schools Office will continue to monitor and support the schools as this work is undertaken.

The Diocesan Council has set up a task force to review the current protocols around these matters. There's no doubt that they can be improved. I'm hopeful that we can make them more readable and less legalistic and more user friendly. Part of the task force's work will also involve revisiting insurance arrangements so that in future we will unreservedly offer care, support and counselling to any person wishing to make a complaint of abuse, while that matter is thoroughly investigated. Those tasks are being tackled as a matter of urgency and I expect to receive a report by April this year.

In the two weeks I have been Archbishop I have spent quite a bit of time in conversation with victims of past abuse. I have sought ways to offer care and support to those people. Some have taken up the invitation to access

counselling.

I have also spent time meeting with representatives of victim support groups and the media to outline the approach I intend to take to these matters, to assure them of my desire to cooperate with them to achieve the best possible outcomes for victims, the community and the church.

FUTURE ACTION

I have indicated that I will approach these matters honestly, openly and transparently and that I will be accountable to the church and to the wider community.

Clearly there is grave community concern about how some allegations of sexual abuse have been handled in the past and those processes have given rise to serious allegations in themselves.

I intend to propose to Diocesan Council this week that an independent inquiry be conducted into those and associated matters. The Terms of Reference have yet to be drafted and naturally I will need to take further advice about that. All I can do at this stage is outline my intentions and objectives.

I intend to invite to conduct such an inquiry an eminent, skilled, independent and utterly trustworthy and reliable person. The person will be, and will be seen to be independent from the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane. He or she will be asked to assess all the available information and to report and make recommendations for action without fear or favour.

I would expect the inquiry to recommend referral of appropriate matters to the civil authorities.

The inquiry would not be conducted in public because of the sensitive nature of the allegations, the need to protect victims from further harm and the inherent presumption of innocence on the part of any person accused.

Outcomes of the inquiry which do not become the domain of civil authorities or which must remain confidential will be sealed in the report.

All other aspects of the inquiry, including its outcomes in general terms, will be made available to the community through the media.

While the inquiry is under way I will not speculate or comment or engage in hearsay or innuendo on any matter before the inquiry nor do anything to hamper the work of the inquiry in any way.

I believe this is an honest, open, transparent, accountable, legitimate and fair way of dealing with the grave matters before us.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion let me say that abuse of any sort, but especially abuse of children will not be tolerated. I am sure that the whole church will stand with me in ensuring the best possible care and support is extended to people who have been harmed and to ensuring that we do all we can to see that it never happens again.