

11 March 2002  
(see also Daniels  
File)

For Courier Mail

Questions have been raised about a reference I wrote specifically for use by the court in sentencing Lou Daniels in May 1999. This reference has been a matter of public record since then.

The fact that I provided such a reference has given rise to other questions. I have been told by the Courier Mail that there is political pressure from Canberra and from victims groups to disclose the existence of the reference.

The facts in relation to this matter are:

I have known Lou Daniels since I was about 10. He prepared me for Confirmation. Over the following nearly 30 years I knew him and worked closely with him in youth work and, following my own ordination aged 28, in 1988, as a colleague in the Tasmanian diocese.

In my mid twenties, while a theological student in Melbourne in the mid 1980s, a woman told me that she had reported her concerns about misconduct by Daniels to the Bishop of Tasmania.

In the mid-1990s Daniels resigned suddenly from all church positions. He informed me of his resignation by telephone, but despite my questioning did not give any reason.

Several years after his resignation, he was charged with offences of sexual misconduct against a teenage boy. The charges followed a police investigation of which I was not informed either by the police or by Daniels.

Daniels pleaded guilty to charges.

I was contacted by Daniels' solicitors, informed of the guilty plea and asked to provide a reference to be used by the court in sentencing.

I provided a reference indicating that I was aware of the nature of the charges, that Daniels had pleaded guilty and outlined the positive contributions I had seen Daniels make during the years I had known him. I indicated that in all those years – including as a child in his care – I had not seen any inappropriate behaviour nor any behaviour which suggested to me that abuse might be occurring.

At no time did I or will I condone or defend Daniels' misconduct. Nor will I attempt to minimise the enormous consequences of his actions. I didn't do so in the reference, I will not do so now.

There is an important postscript.

Recent media attention to matters of sexual abuse in the church prompted an old friend to telephone me. He reminded me of a conversation we'd had some 20 years ago when I would have been in my early twenties. He told me then about another priest who had ruffled his hair and made an inappropriate approach to him. At that time I did not hear warning bells. I am now deeply distressed to hear that he was subsequently abused.

I will do all I can to support and care for my friend and to see that he receives the best assistance available. I will try to help him see that the allegations are dealt with thoroughly and promptly, by the law and by the Church.

I have sought and received my friend's permission to raise this matter, to

this extent. The media has not contacted me about it and until now have been unaware of it. raise it now because I am determined to be as open and honest as I possibly can be.

I have strengthened my resolve to do all in my power as Archbishop of Brisbane to support victims of abuse on the road to healing, to ensure that the church is made a safe place for all, especially children, and to do what now can be done to set right past errors.

And I do not intend to be deterred from the inquiry I have called.

Phillip Aspinall  
11 March 2002