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Police ended priest probe

By BRETT STUBBS

19may02

THE Tasmanian Anglican diocese found a retired priest guilty of pedophilia despite police dropping the charges due to insufficient evidence.

The Bishop of Tasmania, the Right Reverend John Harrower, said the former priest was found guilty on all charges brought by two separate complainants by a diocesan tribunal last week.

Bishop Harrower said the first complaint concerned offences of pedophilia while the second revolved around matters of sexual misconduct with an adult.

He said the accusations of pedophilia were immediately handed over to police who, after three months' investigation, ceased their inquiries due to lack of evidence.

"When it is pedophilia it went straight through [to police] but when it is an adult issue of sexual misconduct, this is for the person [complainant] involved and they are considering their options," Bishop Harrower said yesterday.

He said once the second complainant came forward against the same priest, the church combined the accusations and pushed ahead with the charges through its disciplinary tribunal.

"In a criminal court you have to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt but in a church court it is a lower level," Bishop Harrower said.

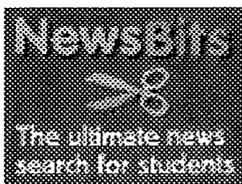
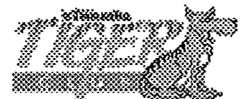
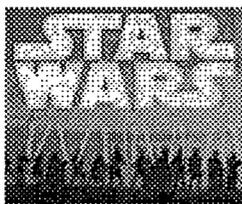
"It is like the difference between a criminal court and civil court."

The three-person tribunal, made up of a lawyer, a sex abuse counsellor and an Anglican priest, found the accused guilty on all charges and made a recommendation towards penalty.

Bishop Harrower said the tribunal had no legislative powers but could enforce penalties ranging from counselling and education through to suspension or cancellation of licence and finally the withdrawal of holy orders.

Though the priest was retired, having his orders withdrawn would have a significant impact.

"Certainly other priests I have spoken to have said it would be a nightmare because for them that is the withdrawal of who they are," Bishop Harrower said.



"They saw their calling as a calling from God – that becomes a very, very serious thing."

He said he was awaiting details of the decision before setting the penalty, which the retired priest has the right to take to the church's appellate tribunal.

Both sides at the hearing were legally represented and Bishop Harrower had sought his own legal advice before naming the priest at the Synod in Launceston.

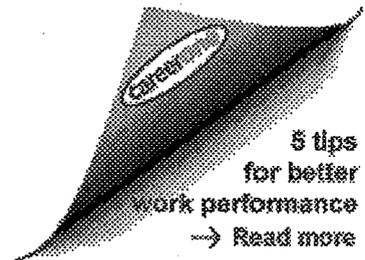
"Here [at the Synod] the people have felt it is absolutely right to name him because everybody would have been thinking 'Who was it?'," he said.

"Can you imagine the damage that does to the pastoral family? How can we be a healthy church if we are all walking around wondering who it is?"

Bishop Harrower named the priest on the same day he called for a royal commission into child abuse.

The call comes just before the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Phillip Aspinall, is expected to announce details of a child abuse inquiry.

The inquiry was called by Dr Aspinall, who succeeded Governor-General Peter Hollingworth, following claims the Governor-General and other senior figures in the church failed to act properly on child abuse allegations.



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