

STATEMENT TO ST JOSEPH'S PARISH, CESSNOCK

4/5 November 1995

As your Bishop, I come tonight/today, to be with you in solidarity.

On Wednesday, 11th October, 1995 allegations of sexual abuse with minors were made against your former parish priest Fr Vince Ryan.

The allegations refer to an alleged incident 20 years ago. Since the initial allegations further charges have been made against him.

In accordance with normal Church procedure, Fr Ryan was immediately withdrawn from active ministry and the proper procedure of our legal system will now take its course.

Until then I cannot enter into the details of the allegations, since the matters are before the Courts and it is therefore inappropriate for me to make any comment.

I would like to pay tribute to the sensitive manner in which the police handled the matter.

In any situation of sexual abuse, a matter which is totally deplorable, we must all feel deep compassion for those who have suffered because of it; and the community will naturally feel anger, shock and grief.

I know you, too, may need to express and work through your feelings about this situation.

We are all hurt by situations like this and I pray that you will remember the good relationships you have had, and continue to have, with those priests and religious who continue in good and trustworthy ministry.

Our primary concern must be the victims who have suffered such indignities, many of whom, if not all, still carry the scars of sexual abuse.

The Diocese is putting into place a number of initiatives:

- a) I am negotiating with an organisation known as Counselling Support Services to provide professional, independent and confidential counselling to anyone who has experienced sexual abuse by Diocesan personnel. This free service will be available very soon.
- b) I will issue a Pastoral Letter to the Diocese expressing our response to this situation and emphasising our need to act justly and swiftly.
- c) Special opportunities will be offered to groups of people to help identify issues of concern.

- d) This is a difficult time for all of us. We need to draw strength from our faith in a loving and compassionate God, and come together in our parish family in prayer and reconciliation.

St Joseph's Parish has had its difficulties in the recent past over the closing of two churches and the remodelling of the parish church. At the time Fr Vince Ryan was your Parish Priest and he endured severe criticism from some quarters.

His present predicament may be seen by some of his critics to vindicate their stance at the time and to give them dubious "courage" to attack those loyal to Fr Vince both then and now.

Such a response in your community would be a gross injustice to Fr Vince and the entire Parish. It would be churlish and totally un-Christian to engage in such destructive tactics. I would be appalled to hear of any such abuse.

This is a time for us to come together in loving concern for one another. I earnestly pray for God's blessing on all of us in this very difficult time.

With my love and prayerful wishes,

Most Reverend Michael Malone, DD
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle