

DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE

PASTORAL STATEMENT

My dear People of God of the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese,

These words which I address to you today as your new Bishop, while delicate and painful, are I think, necessary.

Allegations have been made against a priest of this Diocese and as a result charges of indecent assault have been laid against him.

In accordance with normal Church procedure, he was immediately withdrawn from active ministry. The proper procedures of the legal system will now take their course.

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

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

Therefore it is essential that we as a Diocese provide help for all who have experienced sexual abuse by Diocesan personnel. The Church cannot tolerate such behaviour and must speak clearly and unequivocally against it.

Accordingly, I have authorised the following initiatives:

1. The Diocese will immediately provide professional, independent and confidential counselling to anyone who has suffered sexual abuse by Diocesan personnel. This free service is available to both victims and their families. Advertisements giving details of this service are now being placed in newspapers, Parish Bulletins and School Newsletters.

2. Any Parishes or Parish Groups who may want to discuss their response to this situation, are invited to approach the Parish Priest who will facilitate that process through Diocesan agencies or appropriate local sources.

As a priest myself I share the pain of my fellow-priests in the Diocese. We are naturally hurt, confused and quite alarmed at the affect such events may have on our Priesthood and on the way some people may regard us. Let me make it very clear that I have the greatest respect and admiration for my brothers in the Priesthood. Recent events may reflect on us but they should not diminish the love you have for your priests. I appeal to you to support us and continue to cooperate with us in proclaiming the Good News in this Diocese.

This is a time for us to come together in loving concern for one another. We need to draw strength from our faith in a loving and compassionate God. I encourage you to deeper prayer during this Advent Season, remembering that God shared the chaos of human life and that in our very vulnerability God's presence is even more evident: the baby in the stable at Bethlehem is witness to that.

I invoke God's blessing upon you all. Please pray for me in my new role as your shepherd.

Lovingly yours in Christ,



**Most Reverend Michael Malone, DD
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle**

13 November 1995