

THE PASTORAL RESPONSE OFFICE

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

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URGENT MEMO

**PRIVATE &
CONFIDENTIAL**

To: Archbishop Pell
cc Vicar General, Monsignor Hart

From: Helen Last, Pastoral Response Office

Date: 20th November, 1996

Re: **Pastoral Concerns.**

Your Grace,

I have just spoken on the phone to Mr Anthony Foster who has, through encouragement from myself, had a formal meeting last week with Professor Ball. Mrs Chris Foster also attended that meeting. As background to raising the current concerns with you, I want to convey the pastoral relationship this office has with the Foster family.

I spoke to you privately in the first of our meetings about the important pastoral needs of this family. As you may recall I have mentioned that their daughter Emma, who is presently the sensitive age of 15, was abused by Fr O'Donnell whilst she was at the Sacred Heart Primary School, Oakleigh. Emma and her family are the only parishioners this Office has encountered with such a young and vulnerable victim.

We have been acting in a sustaining and trust building role with the parents primarily, as they have been delicately regaining some of the faith destroyed through the actions of Fr O'Donnell. They have recently said how much this pastoral relationship has meant also to Emma's recovery.

They are not involved in any legal proceedings, nor at this stage do they intend to be. They decided some time back in discussion with Emma, and in respect of her wishes, that they could not put such a young girl through criminal court proceedings. They have therefore placed their needs and concerns squarely in the arena of the Church.

They have asked the Church to respond to their suffering and believe now that significant help can be found through the pastoral care of the Church. They have been marvellous in their commitment to assisting us in the Oakleigh Parish Program, their involvement has brought them back into a sense of the possibility of "belonging" to the Church.

After listening to you at the Forum, they were encouraged to seek further reconciling by seeking a pastoral face-to-face meeting with you. They were not able to express their deep need at the Forum due to the overpowering stance of Broken Rites members. This is a problem which some victims spoke of post the Forum and which I raised with you, Your Grace.

In my absence on bereavement leave, Chiara Hunter of this Office requested on my behalf your response to the possibility of holding a meeting with the Fosters. The need for this meeting has now been further communicated to me this afternoon by a distressed Mr Foster bringing feedback about the new sexual abuse system.

Mr Foster has issues arising from the recent meeting with Professor Ball, to do with the type and appropriateness of financial provision offered for Emma's recovery needs. But perhaps more importantly Your Grace, Mr Foster has raised with me that he has no faith in Professor Ball because he is from the forensic psychiatry area, a fact he supports with reference to the Transcript of Proceedings against Fr O'Donnell in the County Court, 11th August 1995.

Judge Kellam quotes Professor Ball's expert opinion report therein. Mr Foster is disconcerted by the findings and attitude of Professor Ball quoted in this Transcript and further that Professor Ball did not tell the Fosters of his involvement in a case, where the offender has caused such grievous harm to their daughter.

They also are upset that a specialist from the offenders' treatment area is heading up the victims' care and support service. Mr Foster says this professional background is compromising and conflictual to their rights as parents of a Emma. They are now reluctant to proceed any further with Carelink at this point and do not wish to supply the written background details regarding Emma requested by Professor Ball. They have not given me permission at present to hand over their file to Carelink from this office.

Your Grace, Mr Foster has asked me, who can he bring these concerns before who has a higher authority than the new system? I have agreed with him that we need to seek your guidance in this matter. We are aware that you have asked on the brochure for comments from anyone in the community about the new initiatives. I also trust your word to me privately, that you are attentive and sensitive to the concerns raised by myself through the work of this Office.

I have advised Mr Foster that I will convey his need to speak with you via this Memo today.

Thank-you for the good-faith you have demonstrated in this difficult area.

Yours faithfully,



Helen Last
Co-ordinator.