

NSW PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS REFERENCE GROUP

Minutes of Meeting held Friday 31 May, 1996

The meeting of the NSW Professional Standards Reference Group was held in the ground floor Meeting Room, Diocese of Parramatta, 10 Victoria Road, Parramatta.

1. The Meeting opened at 11.00am. The opening prayer was led by Father Bob McGuckin.
2. Father Bill Burston was elected as the Chairman.
3. Father Bob McGuckin was elected Secretary for the Meeting.
4. Present at the meeting were: Fr Bill Burston, Fr Bob McGuckin, Fr John Usher, Fr Brian Lucas, Professor Alex Blaszczyński, Mrs Elaine Rickard.

Apologies were tendered for Sr Carmel Curtin.

5. The visitors present were Mr Jim Grainger, Brother Patrick McCarthy. Apologies were tendered from Centacare, Parramatta, for Mr Ray Reid who was overseas on Churchill Scholarship and on behalf of Fr Michael Mullins from the Marist Fathers House at Haberfield.
6. The Agenda proposed was accepted.
7. The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 23 February, 1996, were confirmed.
8. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 23 February, 1996.

8.1 Reassignment after Conviction

This matter was raised in our meeting on 23 February, 1996, at discussion 4.1. Especially at 4.1.2 where it was carried that a recommendation to go to the NSW Bishops. It was asked whether this recommendation had gone. Fr Usher said no it had not gone and recommended that it be sent to the NSW Bishops by the Secretary of this meeting. The meeting endorsed Fr McGuckin sending the Minute 4.1.2 of 23 February, 1996 to Bishop Patrick Power, Secretary of NSW Bishops..

Fr Brian Lucas reported on his attending of a meeting in Chicago on the matter of Reassignment. Eleven Bishops Conferences were represented. Fr Lucas reported that you couldn't have an absolute rule not to reassign, as absolute rules couldn't cover each case. There needed to be a degree of variance and flexibility. There could also be situations where the person was truly contrite; had come to terms with the problem. Each case would need to be looked at separately. The discussion at the Chicago Meeting was similar to our discussion at our Meeting in February.

8.2 Sexual Abuse Conference Report

The Conference was attended by Elaine Rickard, Bob McGuckin also Jim Grainger was there, Ray Reid, Michael Mullins. Jim Grainger reported that the input from the American Psychotherapist was very helpful also that the Seminar given by Geoff Robinson, Angela Ryan and John Usher was excellent as was the contribution by Helen Last of Melbourne. The attendance was very good, some very useful statements made. There appeared a lot of interest and willingness to address the problem.

The question was raised about involvement in working parties flowing from that Conference. Elaine Rickard indicated that she had offered to be involved but then was later told that because she was employed by the Catholic Church she would not be acceptable.

8.3 Bishops' Research Project

John Usher reported that the Professional Standards Research Project was tabled at the April Meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The recommendations were all accepted. The Bishops regarded the Report as a very impressive publication.

Professor Alex Blaszczyński's report of the literature review was praised.

The Report is circulating with every Bishop in Australia and every Religious Institute. The Report has not yet been endorsed by the Major Superiors who will be having their meeting in July in Queensland.

The Bishops moved eleven resolutions at the Conference. Those recommendations/motions are attached to these Minutes, **Appendix 1**.

Motion No 6 There were comments concerning Motion No 6 that each Diocese or Religious Institute was to engage independent persons to make case studies. Fr McGuckin reported that Parramatta was in the process of selecting such a person. Other Dioceses were working these matters out.

Concerning Motion No 12, that is the Committee seeking the advice of victims of sexual abuse. Professor Alex Blaszczyński said that the question of the choice of victims needs to be raised. You need a balanced choice not a biased choice. It could well be that people who have abused have put it aside, have dealt with it, possibly in up to 30% of cases. Others hadn't and are still highly affected, even suicidal. You need to have input from both sides in the discussion.

Concerning Motion 12, Code of Conduct, Bishop Patrick Power is overseeing this project.

The Bishops are going to fund an Executive Officer to coordinate much of the work here.

8.4 Structural Model for NSW

Fr McGuckin asked what was the relationship between NSW Professional Standards Reference Group and the Australian Professional Standards Group. The question concerned working our structural model, if our structural model is not to be at variance with what comes out in the Australian protocol. Fr Lucas pointed out the National Group was an advisory body whereas the State Group dealt with individual cases.

The lessons learnt at National level can be passed onto the State Group.

Fr Usher pointed out that the structure of the Structural Model was really up to us, that the Model being looked at being presented by Fr Patrick was the Model that we were working with. It needed to be underpinned by the National Policies,

There was much discussion on this. Elaine Rickard spoke about the autonomous nature of each Diocese. Fr Usher pointing out that we had been appointed by the Bishops of the Province and empowered to make rules for the State. Fr Lucas questioned whether this was so. Fr Lucas said the structure was there in the National Protocol and that is to assist us to be able to propose a model how to assist. We are to have our own model.

If the National procedures are endorsed then the Mandate will be given to Bishops which will better define the group of people from each state with explicit rolls. We could then advertise our methodology.

Fr McGuckin made reference to the Brisbane Protocol which has been put aside and raised the question about us drawing up a structural model if the National Model was not yet proved. Fr Lucas pointed out that it was the 1992 Draft Model that we were working with.

Fr Usher pointed out our role is to give advice, how we give that is articulated in our model.

Fr Lucas pointed out there needs to be contact persons, persons who take complaints. These would be different persons than from those who investigate the complaints.

It was reported that Tuesday next, June 4, 1996, there will be a meeting of the National Group with the National Bishops and then with the Committee for the National Bishops Conference then this will go the Congregational Leaders in July.

Elaine Rickard pointed out that we always seemed to be waiting for this, yet complaints are coming in. Fr Usher indicated we certainly had begun

our own procedures. Elaine Rickard pointed out our agreed procedures are that the therapist and the complaints person are different persons.

It was agreed after much discussion that we should work through the model that we have.

Professor Alex Blaszczyński said we need to clarify the roles dealing with the victim, looking at how the perpetrator is dealt with. The Committee aptly needs to be more proactive.

Fr Lucas pointed out that at times there had been different responses from different Religious Leaders and Bishops, however our advice is generally followed.

There was much discussion over the nature of the advice which this group gives. The question also of does the advice come from the group as a whole or from individuals in the group. Professor Blaszczyński asked whether it ought not be that rather than two individuals in the group giving advice that perhaps advice be given by the group as a whole. The question was the difficulty in time factors, coming together for a formal meeting when matters being dealt with required immediate response.

Fr Lucas pointed out that when advice is given that at least one other member of the group is consulted rather than waiting for a meeting.

Fr Usher showed how our Structural Model worked by working through a recent complaint which was lodged with the group. How that worked with the victim and also with the person who was the perpetrator.

8.5 Costs of counselling for victims of sexual abuse

The letter from Sr Megan Brock about of cost of counselling was raised. Fr Usher thought it might be appropriate that each of the NSW Bishops, Congregational Leaders contribute to a fund which could be used for counselling. Professor Alex Blaszczyński pointed out there needs to be a schedule of fees to avoid people milking the system. There needs to be an evaluation of each case looking at therapy management.

Fr McGuckin referred to a letter from the Professional Standards Risk Management Service, April 15, 1996, speaking of the Counselling and Support Services (C.A.S.S.) and the documentation that goes with that. Elaine Rickard pointed out that she has been using a counsellor under C.A.S.S.

Our meeting decided that Fr Usher would investigate this matter of cost of counselling for victims of sexual abuse and report at a further meeting.