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Dear Archbishop

### **Re Child Sexual Abuse in the Anglican Church**

Thankyou very much for your letter of 8 April, providing comments by the Bishops on our draft report on child sexual abuse complaints in the Anglican Church.

While it was not always possible to discern from the brief comments what individual bishops may have had in mind, overall, we found the bishops' comments very helpful. We have endeavoured to take them into account. We have decided to omit the first table, giving a breakdown of complaints diocese by diocese, from the report which is to be published. For reasons that I explain further below, we have also decided to delete the data on theological colleges. We have also made various textual emendations to clarify matters in different parts of the report, including the Executive Summary. We have done more to emphasise, as we did at length in the introduction to the report, that child sexual abuse occurs in all sectors of society and that all organisations working with children and young people are vulnerable.

There were a few comments which seemed to us to have arisen from a difficulty in accepting the findings which we have reached. We acknowledge that some of the findings are challenging, and that one way of dealing with that is to try to find reasons for casting doubt upon them. It would be most unfortunate if that were a public, as well as a private, response, because a defensive reaction will undermine confidence in the church leadership much more than it will undermine confidence in the findings of the study.

We also acknowledge the concern that publicising these findings will in some way result in parents having a lack of confidence in the Church's ability to protect boys in its youth programs. We could not offer an assurance to any parent in relation to any youth organisation whether run by a church or by a secular organisation, that children and young people would be protected from abuse if that organisation does not have proper safeguards in place. It follows that we consider that the best way to address this

concern is to announce, at the time the report is released, what the Church has done and will do in the light of this report, to give parents that confidence. Policies are not enough. There has to be reason for confidence that their implementation is a high priority and is being monitored.

It may be of assistance if we comment on the specific issues you raised in your cover letter, as we agree these do seem to reflect some of the issues raised by individual bishops or groups of bishops.

### **1. The sample size and its significance**

The sample that is required in order to provide a reliable picture of that which is being studied depends on the purposes for which the study is being conducted. Two methods that could be used as you note, are:

- a) a comprehensive survey (all data in scope is captured)
- b) a randomised sample (a smaller number of cases in scope is analysed but the number is sufficiently large to be representative and was chosen randomly, thus avoiding selection bias).

If we were trying to estimate the total incidence of reported child sexual abuse in the Anglican Church over the 18 year period, then we would either have needed a comprehensive study, or a randomised sample with extrapolations to the whole country based upon the advice of expert statisticians. Such a study would, however, not have been complete. A proper 'incidence study' (a study of reports to the authorities) would need to include the records of the police, child protection services and Victims' Compensation Tribunals as well as the dioceses (while avoiding double counting). Such information, while interesting, would not be very useful for comparison purposes unless there were similar studies that had been conducted in relation to other churches or organisations working with children. There are not such comprehensive incidence studies. It was not the aim of this study to find out whether the problem of child sexual abuse is greater in the Anglican Church or less than in other churches; greater or less than in schools; greater or less than in the general population. No such claims are made in the report.

The purpose of the study was to see what can be learned from a large sample of reported cases about the patterns of abuse and of complaints. This was the study that the Professional Standards Commission invited us to conduct. The sample does not need to include every single reported case to present a very reliable picture of the patterns of child sexual abuse in the Anglican Church and the characteristics of complainants. If we had conducted a carefully randomised sample involving a much smaller number of cases than we did, no doubt we would have been able to discern similar patterns despite the smaller sample size; however, the larger the sample, the better. Capturing the great majority of reported cases of abuse in parish contexts in the Anglican Church of Australia over an 18 year period, the patterns are very clear.

Because we were not aiming to conduct a study on the total number of cases, but rather what they revealed about patterns of abuse and complaints, the issue of needing statisticians to assess whether the findings properly estimate incidence of reported cases

for the Church as a whole, simply does not arise. That would have been an entirely different kind of study.

We have added sentences to the report to make more explicit that the report did not aim at an incidence study. Having said this, we are conscious from the verbatim comments you sent us that at least one group of bishops would have liked us to have given some kind of message that the problems of child sexual abuse in the Anglican Church were not all that serious, or only the same as other organisations working with children, or a drop in the ocean compared to the number of clergy and volunteer children's leaders working in the life of the Church over a 40 year period.

The only assurance we can offer as researchers is that the 191 cases we have analysed in this report do not represent the entirety of reported cases in the Church over that period, nor the entirety of cases that might have been reported to other authorities such as the police. Child sexual abuse cases that are reported to the authorities also represent only a fraction of the number of cases that adults report in research studies which ask them to talk about abusive sexual experiences they had as children. This is because so much child sexual abuse goes under-reported to any kind of authority. There are more cases 'out there'. As we explained in the latter part of the report, we expect that the Church will continue to receive complaints of child sexual abuse for many years to come, because there is such a time lag for men in particular, between the time that sexual abuse occurs and the time that they feel able to come forward and report it.

## **2. The proportions of clergy and youth leaders who abuse children**

The same answer needs to be given to the second main query as to the first. Nowhere in the report do we say whether clergy are more or less likely to abuse children than volunteer youth workers, paid youth workers, CEBS leaders or others. This was not the purpose of the study and we could only begin to make that assessment if we had reliable data on the overall numbers in each category over a 40 year period. We did not attempt this, and for volunteer youth leaders, no such data could have been gathered.

Examining reported cases would, in any event not be a very reliable means of assessing this. It is reasonable to assume that the Church is more likely to get reports on clergy than on volunteer youth leaders because of its particular responsibility for its continuing paid employees. We have amended a sentence in the Executive Summary which might have led readers to think we were making some kind of comparison between groups, and have also added sentences to the report to clarify this also.

## **3. The Morpeth issue**

There was much discussion at the Bishops' conference, quite rightly, about the apparent overrepresentation of Morpeth. We were careful in our draft report just to point it out without drawing any inferences. We made efforts to try to find out the numbers of ordinands from each theological college over the last 40 years or so, but were informed by the General Synod Office that no such records exist. We also did not have identifying information on alleged offenders. The data was supplied, on a de-identified basis, by dioceses. It was not possible, for that reason, to examine whether a number of alleged offenders were all at Morpeth at the same time. There was also a lot of missing data on the theological training of the accused clergy.

The points in your letter are of course entirely correct and we were aware of these limitations. However, for the reasons given, we were not in a position to provide more clarity on the matter with the information available to us.

The figures for Morpeth certainly *look like* a significant overrepresentation, even though the College was producing substantial numbers of ordinands in its heyday. It was only one of many theological colleges around the country, some of which, like Moore College, have long been of a substantial size also. Having presented the information that we have to the Standing Committee of the General Synod and to the Bishops' Conference, we consider that we have fulfilled our responsibility to draw this matter to the attention of the Church. As I indicated both at Standing Committee and in the Bishops' Conference, we are content for it not to form part of the final published report.

It was important, however, that the information be presented to the Church and not buried by the research team. It is a disturbing statistic. We do think it warrants some form of further inquiry, if only to determine whether there may have been some kind of network that had its origins in that theological college. Such a finding might at least provide further insights into the patterns of child sexual abuse in the Church and shed light on cases that currently might be seen as disparate events without any connection between them. This is a matter that the Professional Standards Commission or the Bishop of Newcastle might wish to consider further. Consultation with former Principals or lecturers at the College might also shed some further light on the matter, particularly if the names of the alleged offenders were able to be shared.

#### **4. From here**

This important study has revealed some surprising results which are of considerable significance to the Church, and which will be analysed with some interest by other Churches both in Australia and around the world. The findings offer important insights into where the efforts of the Church should be in terms of prevention. The Church has come a very long way in a short time in terms of improving its policies concerning child protection and in putting in place the kinds of strategies that should be the norm for all organisations working with children. Managing such a large turnover of volunteers is a particular challenge that churches face.

Some bishops wanted us to recite the amount that has been done by way of developing child protection policy. We have certainly included more on this. However we are not in a position to know the extent of implementation of those policies or their effectiveness, and so what we can say is necessarily only a matter of affirming the significant efforts that have been made to develop policy. Of course, having policies on paper can never be enough. It is the quality of implementation, diocese by diocese, parish by parish, that is the true measure of the Church's success in promoting a child-safe environment in all of its activities.

We would not want concerns about managing the short-term media reaction to the findings of this study to divert attention away from the important long-term issues that we have addressed in our recommendations. The bishops' comments from the conference do not entirely give us confidence in this regard. The concern about the short-term is certainly understandable; but the Anglican Church of Australia should, in

our view, present this report as a sign of how seriously it takes child protection – an indication of its commitment, not a revelation of its failures. The Anglican Church of Australia has shown great leadership in exploring this dark aspect of its own history. The study is a world-first, as far as we know, outside of the Catholic Church.

The most important question now, in our view, is to ask how the Church can maximise the benefits that could accrue from a careful reflection on the findings of this report, and how, as far as possible, to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in our church communities in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Parkinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Prof. Patrick Parkinson

(on behalf of the research team)