



# NSW POLICE SERVICE

## STATEMENT OF A POLICE/WITNESS

|                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>In the matter of:</b> | James Patrick FLETCHER  |
| <b>Place:</b>            | Maitland Police Station |
| <b>Date:</b>             | 12 June, 2003           |

|                    |                              |                 |           |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| <b>Name:</b>       | William James CALLINAN       | <b>Tel. No:</b> | 49 301782 |
| <b>Address:</b>    | 44 Kensington Road, Bolwarra |                 |           |
| <b>Occupation:</b> | School Principal             |                 |           |

### STATES:

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence which I would be prepared, if necessary, to give in court as a witness. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.
2. I am 46 years of age.
3. I have worked within the Catholic School Office for the past 25 years. I have worked at St Brigid's Primary School at Branxton for the past four years. I have also been working at St Mary's Infants School, Greta since May 1991. I have been the principal of both those school during the periods aforementioned.
4. I have know Father Jim FLETCHER for about 7 or 8 years when he first started working within the Branxton Parish, which encompasses both schools. From the time he arrived at Branxton I found him willing to become involved with various activities within the schools. He was very supportive of the staff & became a friend of myself.
5. I can remember Sunday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2002, as there had been a story on the 60 Minutes programme concerning Archbishop George PELL. The following morning, Monday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 2002 I started working at St Mary's, Greta. My secretary took a phone call that morning. I presume it was Father Des HARRIGAN & I was

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asked not to leave until he had the opportunity to speak to me. Des arrived & I walked with him in the playground of the school at Greta & he then told me about a telephone call received the previous night by Father Jim FLETCHER. I believe that he said the call was received following the 60 minutes story & that the person alleged that Father had sexually abused him. His main concern was not so much relaying to me the content of the call, but to tell me that Father was very upset & he was concerned for his health. (I knew Father Jim had suffered a stroke a number of years earlier.)

6. I am not able to recall if I saw Father Jim that day or over the next few days. I remember seeing him at some point over this time but cannot be specific as to where & when it was. Knowing Father Jim I really feel that it was probably the Monday that I went to see him, but I really just cannot recall.
7. I remember later that week I was informed by someone, I cannot now remember whom, that the allegation subject of the Sunday night phone call had now been officially made to the police & there was a formal investigation. I much later became aware that the Bishop had been up to see Father Jim regarding this, but I was not personally aware of that at the time.
8. After I was aware there was a formal investigation I believe I went up to the Presbytery to see Father Jim. I was able to immediately see that all this had adversely affected Father's health. He was shaking & looked very depressed. He was crying & visibly upset. I am sure that we would have spoken about the allegation, but I cannot recall specifics about that. I was more concerned with Father's health & caring for him in that respect.
9. Within the next few days Father came to the school & arrived at my office door at St Brigid's. Father looked very upset & dejected & said to me, "Am I still welcome at the school?" I said, "Father they are only allegations at this time & you are still welcome as far as I am concerned." I am also sure that we spoke briefly about the allegation & Father said to me, "I didn't do it Will. I have thought about this & have no idea where or when all this was supposed to have occurred." I told him that as a friend I would support him through this difficult time. We then discussed his role at the school. This was a difficult situation but Father had assisted with reading programmes & supported myself & staff when children were expelled & that sort of thing. These were always difficult times & to have a priest that took an active supporting role was more than welcome & I was happy for this to continue. I do not believe that Father was ever alone with children, the children were always in groups or there would be a parent or teacher about most of the time.

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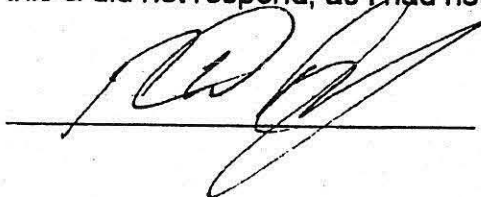
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*William James Callinan*  
William James CALLINAN

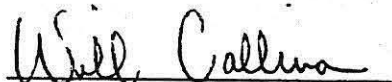
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10. I believe it was Father who told me (& it may have been on this same occasion) who the alleged victim was. I recall being told the victim was AH & that his father was BI who is the AH. I did not know AH but I had known his father for many years through dealing within the diocese. I was also told that the allegation related to events that were supposed to have happened around the Dungog area about ten or so years ago when AH was about 17 or 18 years of age.
11. Since that time many rumours have circulated around about the incident & the alleged victim but it is hard to gauge what is fact & fiction in all of this. For the most part I have decided to stay away from these types of comments.
12. As the week following the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2002 unfolded I was not contacted by any persons from the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese Office or the Catholic Education system to direct me to not allow Father FLETCHER into the schools. I felt that I was only the local principal & that the Bishop's Office or others who were more fully aware of the allegation would take action if they felt it necessary. In view of this I made the decision to allow Father FLETCHER to continue his normal role within the schools, as that is part of the function of the Parish Priest.
13. At 9.00am on Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2003 I received a telephone call from Bishop MALONE. I was in the playground at the time & it is very unusual for me to receive a call from the Bishop & I went straight to the phone & shut my door. I had an idea what this call might be about as I had heard that Father Jim was being removed from his position. I think I had been told about this by Catherine BRIDGE. I was at St Brigid's at the time & he said to me, "I am just ringing to advise you that Father Jim as been stood-down from his position as the Parish Priest. The reason I have taken this action is that I have been told that charges against Father FLETCHER are imminent." He then went on to say, "We would like to try to keep everything quiet at the moment. If anyone asks can you just let them know that Father Jim isn't well at the moment & needed some time away." I agreed with this & he said, "The Ombudsman's Office is also conducting an inquiry into the handling of this since June last year. The Ombudsman is not happy about the way this matter has been handled." I am a bit reluctant to use exact conversation at this point, as I am not certain as to the exact words that were used, but he said to me something like, "We have spoken about the matter when it first surfaced in a conversation through a phone call I made to you at that time. We spoke about Father continuing in his role in his capacity as Parish Priest within the two schools." I was taken back by this & did not respond, as I had not had such a conversation.

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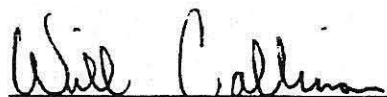
I cannot recall having ever spoken to the Bishop around that time, let alone in relation to Father FLETCHER. I could not believe that he was attempting to put me into a situation I had not taken part in. I had independently made a decision between Father FLETCHER & myself to allow his role within the school to continue, but I had never discussed this with the Bishop.

14. Later that day I received a telephone call from Mr Michael BOWMAN (Director of Catholic Schools) offering support & inquiring what the office could do for staff, the school or myself in general.
15. I am aware that Police charged Father FLETCHER in mid May 2003 & I have continued to speak to Father FLETCHER & offered my support to him through this time.
16. I was concerned regarding the alleged phone call between Bishop MALONE & I. On Sunday following Father being charged I received a Pastoral Message letter distributed at Diocesan Masses. In that message signed by Bishop Malone & dated the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2003 it states, "...I consulted the Director Of Catholic Schools & the local School Principal at the time & informed them of the situation." In the context where that is raised it suggests the Bishop around the time of the allegation first surfacing spoke me to. To the best of my knowledge, no consultation took place between the Bishop & myself.
17. On the Tuesday following Father FLETCHER being charged I received a telephone call off Mr Michael McDONALD. He introduced himself from the Catholic Church Employee Relations branch & generally inquired as to how the school, staff & myself were coping with the overall situation regarding Father FLETCHER. He then explained to myself that he has been tasked with conducting an internal church inquiry as to the handling of the matter by church authorities within the diocese. He told me that he was required to do a report for the ombudsman to ensure that if a similar situation occurred again better procedures would be in place. He told me that he had to ask some questions & we went over a lot of the things I have recorded in this statement. During the conversation he said to me, "Had the Bishop contacted you about the matter?" I said, "The only contact through a phone call I had from the Bishop was on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March this year. I can't recall any other conversations with the Bishop relating to Father FLETCHER's matter."

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18. On the Thursday I received another phone call from Gary MUIRHEAD (Acting Director of Catholic Schools Office) asking as to the welfare of my staff & myself. He also asked about the situation where a number of parents had raised concerns as to the school's handling of the situation. Gary then told me about a meeting he had the previous day with Michael McDONALD & one of the points raised why I had not followed normal school procedure in contacting a number of relevant agencies as per protocol in these situations when I first learned of the allegation in June 2002. I told him that I was led to believe that the allegation related to a single incident outside of the Branxton Parish that occurred ten years ago & related to a young man aged 17 or 18 years of age & therefore was not a child. I also went on to say that the Bishop had the overall say in relation to the situation & had decided not to remove Father FLETCHER or send out any directive to myself (or anyone to my knowledge) regarding any restriction on Father FLETCHER's duties. He stressed to myself that I was not being blamed for anything or held responsible, but they were simply trying to piece the whole situation together. I heard what he said but did not accept it. I really felt that someone within the church was going to try to attribute some of the blame for the poor handling of this matter to myself. I felt very uncomfortable about this whole situation & had real concerns for my future within the Catholic Schools system. He then advised myself to contact Michael McDONALD to clarify this situation.
19. I then telephoned my consultant, Ray HANLEY & told him about the conversations over the past week. Ray then spoke on the telephone (In my presence) with Gary MUIRHEAD about the issues raised with myself.
20. We then telephoned Michael McDOANLD & I raised with him my concern regarding his conversation with Gary MUIRHEAD. I then expanded on what I had previously told him stressing that I was not aware of the full situation at the time the allegation was first relayed to myself. I believed firstly it was only an allegation, that the alleged victim was an adult or at least 17 years old & not a child & the incident was no in the Branxton Parish & happened more than ten years ago. I also told him that I did not feel that it was not my responsibility to take formal action with Father FLETCHER's situation. I told him if the allegation had of concerned a child, or within my school I would have taken much stronger action. He then told me that the matter was not personal, but was simply being looked at to put in place better systems in the future. I have since been to the doctor due to all the stress this has placed me under.

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21. Since Father FLETCHER has been charged I have become aware that the allegation in fact related to a person who may have been in his very early teens at the time & am also now aware that there is alleged to be a number of incidents, not just one. Had I been made aware of this at the time the allegation first surfaced, I am sure that I would have taken much stronger action or at least personally raised the matter with persons in authority as to what action should be taken.

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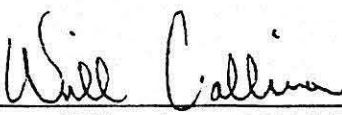
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William James CALLINAN

Witness:

  
Peter Fox  
D/Sydney  
12/10/03

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William James CALLINAN