



DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE

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MEMO

To: All clergy
From: Bishop Michael Malone
Date: Monday 6th December 2004
Subject: Guilty Verdict Re Fr James Fletcher

My dear brothers,

While you will have probably heard this news via the media, I wish to advise you that in East Maitland court today a jury returned a guilty verdict in the case of Fr James Fletcher. Fr Fletcher was found guilty of sexual abuse with a minor. Nine charges were levelled against him and he was found guilty of all nine charges.

As bishop of the Maitland-Newcastle diocese I apologise profoundly to the victims, who cannot be named, and the victims' family and friends for the immense pain and suffering caused by Fr Fletcher's criminal actions.

Sexual abuse is a serious crime and cannot be tolerated. Because of these criminal actions Fr Fletcher will not return to ministry.

While Fr Fletcher has been found guilty, we need to be aware that further legal processes are to be followed before the matters are finalised. There is the sentencing process which in itself is a mini-trial involving the taking of further evidence and submissions on what penalties will be appropriate for the Court to impose. There is also a second matter yet to go before the court.

Just as healing must take place for victims, it must also take place for the entire diocesan community, ourselves included. Your leadership in guiding your people through this difficult situation is paramount. No doubt you and your people will be experiencing a range of feelings – hurt, anger, fear, confusion.

A special toll free phone number **1800 234 050** has been established so that people – either individuals or groups – can discuss their response to this situation with professional facilitators or counsellors.

Should you need this support, I encourage you to access that number. Should your parishioners need this support, can you encourage them to access this resource?

Additionally, persons needing information or assistance in relation to abuse are encouraged to contact the Police or the Church's *Towards Healing* process on Ph: 1300 369 977.

A copy of the statement that I released to media this afternoon is available on our diocesan website at www.mn.catholic.org.au

May God be with us all at this very difficult time.

Yours sincerely,

Most Reverend Michael Malone
 Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle