



NSW POLICE SERVICE

STATEMENT OF A POLICE/WITNESS

In the matter of: James Patrick FLETCHER

Place: Maitland Police Station

Date: 12 May, 2003

Name: Joanne Mary HANCOCK

Tel. No:

Address:

Occupation: Shop Assistant/House Cleaner

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 45 years of age.
3. I have been the house cleaner at the Branxton Catholic Church Presbytery since Father Jim FLETCHER came to Branxton in January 1995. He had known my family from the Dungog area prior to this period so I already knew Father Jim before he arrived.
4. Over the time I have been cleaning at the presbytery I have become a personal friend of Father Jim. I do 5 hours work there every Monday & Friday on a regular basis & further work as required. Working in what is basically Father Jim's home for this period over the past 8 years it is difficult not to strike up a friendship & we often spoke about lot of day-to-day thing. He has also helped me with difficulties in my life & just talking through things.

Witness:

Signature:

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5. I was asked today if I could recall a young man having stayed at the presbytery sometime in 1995. I have to say that I cannot confirm or deny this. In the normal course of things a lot of people stay at the presbytery. Trying to think back for 8 years is a lot more difficult & if someone were there one morning & left shortly after I arrived it would not have been a significant enough event for me to remember. I don't mean to give the impression that a lot of people stay at the presbytery every week, its just over the period of 8 years a lot of people have stayed. On average I would estimate a guest would stay a little less than once a month.
6. I do recall that about mid 2002 I arrived for work on a Monday morning. I had heard things in the media concerning child sexual abuse allegations within the Catholic Church concerning Bishop George PELL. It was around this time & I spoke to Catherine & Maureen BRIDGE this morning & they told me that Father Jim was upset about a telephone call he had received the night before. They mentioned that the caller had allegedly accused him of being a child molester. I remember when Father Jim came down he looked very upset. He had looked more upset about this than I had seen him before. I put my arms around him & gave him a cuddle. He said, "I watched that programme last night on 60 minutes. I got a call off a young man accusing me of fucking little boys." Catherine, Maureen & myself all told him that we did not believe that this was the truth. I remember him being so upset someone must have called Father Des HARRIGAN & he arrived with someone else, but I cannot remember who. They arrived to console him & I left them alone & went about my work. I didn't speak to him any further at that time.
7. I spoke to Father Jim over the next month or so & gradually discovered a little more about this phone call. I cannot recall the exact circumstances of these conversations but generally I would be doing the cleaning & we'd talk as usual. He was aware that I knew about the call & he told me that he was not able to figure out who the caller was. He did mention to me that the caller had said something about being 70 kilometres as the crow flies from Branxton. It may not have been that the caller was that far away but that is the distance away where this crime or crimes were supposed to have occurred. Because of this he though it might have been someone from Dungog, which was about that distance away. I know this troubled Father FLETCHER & it was a week or more later that he said to me, "I know who called me & you know this person." I said, "Who?" He said, " AM ". I was startled as I realised that Father FLETCHER had been a close friend with AH'S family for many years. I also knew AH'S family having grown up in the Dungog area myself & mum knowing them.

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I remember that both BJ & BI were heavily involved with the church doing readings, parish council & their four boys at differing times were all altar boys. To hear that the caller was AM left me gob-smacked. I didn't know AM that well but I used to tease my sister Amanda regarding AM, but that was about it. I said, "Why would he have done something like that?" He said, "I don't know how he could say something like this. I have been trying to think of times when I might have been alone with AH for him to say something like this, but he was always with his brothers or parents. When I went to the house it would be the whole family there. It wasn't just AM by himself." I knew from a variety of sources, my mother, Father Jim & other's that AM had been through a lot of things in his life. There had been suicide attempts, a head injury from a fall at Raymond Terrace, a number of failed relationships & at one time he wanted Father Jim to fly to Tasmania to perform a marriage for him. That marriage also failed & Father Jim & I hypothesised as to what effect all these things may have had on AM. At the end of the day Father Jim was still at a loss as to why AM would make such an allegation.

8. I remember at one time I asked Father Jim how he discovered it was AM who had telephoned him. He said, "Bishop Michael called in through the week & told me who it was. He told me he was going to go to the Police with his allegations." I said, "We know it is not going to come to anything. Try not to worry about it." I could see that despite what I said he was still worried sick & I felt very sorry for him, as he was not a well man & it had knocked the wind out of his sails. He was not just worried about the allegations themselves but also what others might think if they heard these allegations.
9. As time went by Father Jim was starting to settle as nothing appeared to be happening in regard to the allegations. I got the impressions, although I cannot recall any exact conversation, that Father Jim had been assured that the Police would not be arriving to drag him off without notice. I don't know who would have reassured Father Jim but I do know that he was initially concerned that something like that might have happened, but as time passed he was more at ease. I also believe he had been told that if the Police did not feel there was enough to substantiate the allegations nothing more may come of it.

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10. I have been asked about cartoon sex jokes & things kept by Father FLETCHER. I can say that Father FLETCHER would often joke; he did have these types of cartoons that he would show to people & they'd get a laugh. These types of things are pretty common around work places. I cannot recall having seen a folder or anything they were kept in. I do remember Father Jim going to show me where he kept them one time, but in the end I don't think he could find where he put them himself. After the stroke he was going to show Catherine & I a lot of things he wanted given to his family if he died. He just thought that if the jokes were found, some persons in the community may have thought less of him & he didn't want that to happen.

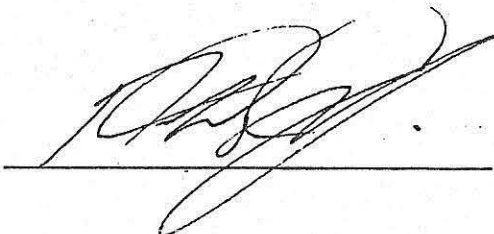
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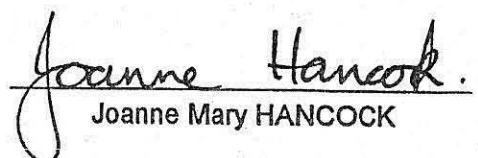
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