



Catholic Communications

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MEDIA RELEASE

Statement from Bishop Michael Malone

For Immediate Release

Wednesday 14th May 2003

It has come to the attention of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle that Fr James Fletcher, a priest of this diocese, has been charged by Police today (14th May 2003) with sexual assault involving a minor.

In accord with normal procedures, Fr Fletcher has been withdrawn from active ministry.

I would like to convey my deep sense of concern to the complainant in this matter and to the complainant's family and friends as the case is dealt with by the criminal justice system and beyond.

Sexual abuse is a crime and cannot be tolerated.

The Catholic Church in 1996 established the process known as *Towards Healing* which sets out the principles that form the basis of the Church's response to complaints of abuse and the procedures to be followed in responding to individual complaints.

Persons needing information or assistance may contact the Church's *Towards Healing* process, Ph: 1300 369 977. Alternatively, they may wish to report these matters to the Police or myself.

Any parish or school communities who would like the opportunity to discuss their response to this specific situation are invited to contact the diocese, their parish priest or principal who will set in motion a process through professional facilitators.

*Most Reverend Michael Malone
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle*

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