



NSW POLICE SERVICE

STATEMENT OF A POLICE/WITNESS

In the matter of:	James Patrick FLETCHER
Place:	Maitland Police Station
Date:	20 May, 2003

Name:	William John BURSTON	Tel. No:	49 682428
Address:	58 Church Street, Mayfield		
Occupation:	Catholic Priest		

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 67 years of age.
3. I began my training as a Catholic Priest in 1958 & was ordained as a Priest in 1963. After studies in Rome & Dublin I began working as a priest in this diocese in November 1970 & have been in this area ever since. I first met Father James FLETCHER about 1971 when he was at East Maitland & I was at Maitland. We worked together in Waratah about 1973-4 & have remained friends ever since.
4. I know AM'S family as I had been the priest for the Dungog Parish in the late 80's whilst I was filling in there for the regular priest who was ill. At that time I baptised BJ + BI s youngest son BC I. I did not have a lot more to do with the family from that time but did get to know BI because of his employment with the diocese.

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5. Father Jim FLETCHER impressed me as a priest as I have a very good rapport when we had worked together. I remember a conversation I had with him when I told him, "Don't keep things to yourself, and share them with someone else." I feel that he followed this advice, which is one of the reasons why we got along. I can say that Jim related well to young people & did have a manner with young persons that brought them closer to the church.
6. I remember the first time I became aware of the allegations concerning Jim FLETCHER from AM was following the '60 Minutes' programme on the 2nd of June 2002. I recall the story that night centred on Archbishop George PELL. I believe it was the following day that I received a message off Des HARRIGAN to contact him. I did so later that day & travelled down to see Des & Jim FLETCHER at Branxton. I recall that when I arrived Jim was still pretty upset. He was occasionally weeping & appeared to be lethargic. I greeted them both & said, "How are you feeling?" Jim wasn't that coherent & responded, "I have been better." I cannot recall all the conversation but in short Jim told me that he had received a phone call at the presbytery following the '60 Minutes' story on George PELL. He told me that a young male person had called & had been very abusive. This persons had said something like, "You & your mate fuck little boys." I know there was more to it but it was something like that. I recall the bluntness of the accusation & the caller said something about the offences occurring 50 miles or 50 kilometres or something like that from where the caller was. I just cannot remember the exact contest of this now. I said, "Do you have any idea who the caller was Jim?" He said, "It sounds like AM." I said, "Why would he say something like this?" He said, "I don't know." Jim was finding it difficult to concentrate on my questions that I didn't take that much further. I could see that it was having detrimental impact on him so I then concentrated on care for Jim & his welfare. Des was doing a good job in settling Jim down. We then had some small talk & I told Jim that I would be thinking of him & would pray for him before I left.
7. I returned to Newcastle & it was either that afternoon or the following day that I learned that AM had been to the Police with his allegation against Jim FLETCHER. I cannot recall how I learned of this. I recall that BT AM's father had spoken to Bishop Malone, but I cannot remember now if it was Jim SAUNDERS or the Bishop that told me of this. I cannot recall the conversation that occurred when I learned of this.

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8. Over the next week or two I continued my contact with Jim FELTCHER to monitor his welfare. I do recall that somewhere in the week following the allegation that the Bishop & Jim SAUNDERS travelled up to Branxton to also visit Jim. I do recall that there was an informal process of the Bishop asking Jim SAUNDERS, Des HARRIGAN & myself to stay in contact with Jim FLETCHER & to look after his welfare. He asked to be kept up to date with how Jim was going & to let him know if we needed any further help. During that time I spoke to Jim very little about the call itself or the allegation, I was mainly there to help him along. He had a stroke a number of years prior & I think this was on all our minds & we didn't want to see Jim have another. Mention of the phone call did tend to cause additional stress to Jim; I believe this was partly due to his health following the stroke, & for this reason I tried to specifically avoid raising the subject.
9. I am aware that the Police spoke to Bishop Malone & Jim SAUNDERS later that month confirming that the allegations of AM were being investigated. I am aware that other conversations relating to Jim continuing in the parish were also had & the Bishop later spoke to Jim in that regard. Following this I had a number of further conversations with Jim in relation to what would occur. A number of times Jim raised the subject & on each occasion denied that any offence had occurred. He searched for reasons to explain why AM would raise such an allegation but was at a loss. He told me that he had helped AM through many of his difficult times. I am aware of Jim working with AM when he attempted suicide some years ago. He also mentioned to me that AM had asked Jim to fly to Tasmania some years back to perform his marriage. I don't believe that the marriage occurred but the point he was making was that he appeared to still relate to AM & that being the case the allegation was even more unexplainable.

Witness:



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