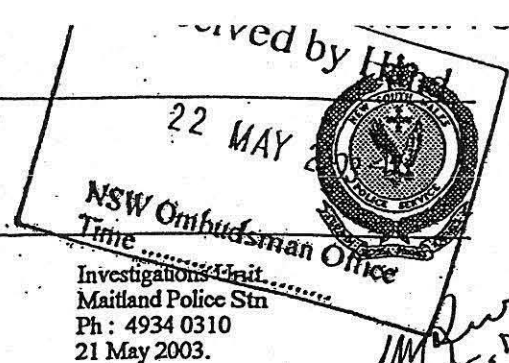


NSW POLICE SERVICE

Local Area Command, Lower Hunter.



ISSUE.

Ombudsman notification involving Father James Patrick FLETCHER &

AH

BACKGROUND.

It is alleged by AH that over a 6 years period from 1989 to 1995 Catholic Priest Father James Patrick FLETCHER sexually abused him. These assaults were alleged to have occurred in & about the Maitland Diocese when the victim was aged 12 to 18 years. Following the offences the victim led a very turbulent & volatile life marked by excessive drinking of alcohol, failed relationships & suicide attempts. In 2000 he first began to disclose aspects of his abuse to members of his family, which culminated in his reporting the matter to Police in mid 2002.

COMMENT.

On the night of the 2nd of June 2002 AH watched a '60 Minutes' programme on Archbishop George PELL & child abuse within the Catholic Church in Australia. He became distraught & telephoned his father, BI & mother BJ (Who were separated) disclosing to them that he had endured similar abuse to that depicted on the programme. He then made an abusive telephone call to Father FLETCHER at the Branxton Presbytery.

The following day (3rd June 2002) AH spoke to a family friend (Crown Barrister with the Newcastle DPP Wayne CREACY) who in turn spoke to myself & requested I investigate the matter. AH attended my office on Tuesday the 4th of June 2002 to officially commence the police investigation. (It should be indicated that AH's family had encouraged him to report the abuse earlier & wheels had been put in motion for this to occur prior to the 60 Minutes Programme). At the time AH briefly outlined his allegation to myself & it was recorded on COPS entry No. E 14348559 & a case created being C 16128387.

BJ advised me the following week that she had been contacted by Bishop MALONE on the evening of Wednesday the 5th of June 2002. In that call he advised her that he had spoken to BI & as a result approached Father FLETCHER. In his conversation with Father FLETCHER he disclosed the police investigation & the name of the complainant. BJ then goes on to say in her statement,

"The call ended & I was still stunned. I was very angry with BI for having told the Bishop what was happening. I don't know his reasons for doing this but I don't believe it was malicious. I was angrier with Bishop MALONE for having gone near Father FLETCHER & alerting him to what was going on. He had no legitimate reason to tell Father FLETCHER. I didn't accept he just approached Father Jim as pastoral support, Father Jim didn't know about the allegations at that time so I didn't believe he needed any support. I feel that this was the guise to tell Father FLETCHER & the three other priests what was going on."

This action seriously impacted on the police investigation & denied investigators a number of options in relation to Father FLETCHER. A comprehensive list of statements have been attached hereto that will further assist, in particular that of Bishop MALONE & other members of the clergy. My own statement & other issues will be addressed in a report to follow in the next week.



Peter R Fox
Detective Sergeant
Lower Hunter