



NSW POLICE SERVICE

STATEMENT OF A POLICE/WITNESS

In the matter of:	James Patrick FLETCHER
Place:	Maitland Police Station
Date:	21 May, 2003

Name:	James Joseph SAUNDERS	Tel. No:	49 791111
Address:	Presbytery - Hunter Street, Newcastle		
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 was born into a Catholic family & commenced my training as a priest in February 1955. I was ordained as a priest on the 22nd of May 1963. From this time to 1976 I was a priest & teacher at St Pius High School at Adamstown. From 1977 to 1985 I was the parish priest at Belmont & from 1985 to 1988 at Cessnock. I also during this period was involved with 'Ministry to Priests' work. From 1988 to 1989 at Rutherford. 1989 to 1995 at Branxton & from 1995 to 2001 at Bulahdelah/Tea Garden & since that time have performed the role of vicar General at the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese.
4. I have known Father James FLETCHER since he was ordained about 32 years ago. I knew him casually & I got to know him better after he succeeded me at Branxton in 1995. After I took up the position as vicar General in 2001 Bishop Malone appraised me that there had been some vague assertions in relation to Father Jim FLETCHER.

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I understood that these assertions were examined but did not amount to anything significant that required further investigation at the time, but he was making me aware of the assertions should anything further ever come to notice.

5. I remember a programme on the '60 Minutes' programme concerning Archbishop George PELL on the 2nd of June 2002. I did not personally watch the programme but remember the period it was on. I believe that Father Des HARRIGAN telephoned myself a day or two later to inform me that Father Jim FLETCHER had received an abusive telephone call. He also told me that the caller had alleged that Jim had been a child molester & that the call had adversely affected Jim's health. I cannot recall now the exact context of the conversation but that was the general gist.
6. I know that soon after this I had a meeting with Bishop MALONE at Newcastle. I believe from this meeting he had spoken to BI who had disclosed to him that his son AH had approached the police regarding allegations of sexual abuse by Father James FLETCHER. I cannot recall if I told him about the call I had received from Father Des HARRIGAN.
7. I do not remember the day we travelled up to see Jim FLETCHER, it may have been that week or it could have been later. We saw Jim in the presbytery at Branxton & the Bishop told him that an allegation had been made by a person, specifically AH that Jim had sexually abused him. I cannot recall now the first-person conversation but I do remember that Jim was very upset & immediately denied the allegation. I was more concerned for Jim's health as the meeting had a very noticeable effect on his health. Jim had not been a well man up to this time & had suffered a stroke some years earlier. I was concerned that he may have another stroke in view of this allegation & from the look of Jim I was very worried this could happen there & then. I telephoned Des HARRIGAN for someone to stay with Jim when the Bishop & I left. I believe Des turned up but had to leave for some reason & Bill BURSTON then remained with Jim. I also recall that Kay INGOLD (A member of the Branxton parish who is also a registered nurse) also attended to help care for Jim.
8. I later spoke to Bishop MALONE who had spoken to Detective Sergeant FOX & a meeting was organised at the diocese office in Newcastle for the 20th of June 2002. Detective FOX attended with Detective Ann JOY & we discussed the overall situation with Father FLETCHER. He confirmed that there was a Police investigation.

Witness:



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9. It was either the 20th of June or the following day I again travelled with Bishop MALONE to Branxton & again met with Jim FLETCHER. The Bishop discussed with Jim that there was a police investigation & asked if he would like to be relieved whilst this was occurring. I remember the Bishop told Jim that he had already made inquiries at the Cathedral at Hamilton & accommodation there. Jim didn't rule out this possibility but indicated that he would very much like to stay on at the Branxton parish.
10. Following further developments with the police investigation I went with Bishop MALONE to the home of Jim FLETCHER's mother at Mayfield sometime in March this year. It was during this meeting that Jim was advised that the police investigation was drawing to a close & possible charges pending. He was then formally advised that he would have to step aside from his work in the Parish. This caused considerable distress to Jim but agreed this was the best course of action. That day I drove him to Branxton to collect his personal effects & we returned that evening.
11. I later became aware that Jim was required to attend the Maitland Police Station on Wednesday the 21st of May 2003. It was organised in advance that Jim would attend with solicitor & myself. I remained with Jim throughout that day, during his being placed into custody, interview & charging.

Witness:


Signature

James Joseph SAUNDERS

Witness:


Peter Fox
Def Sgt
21/5/03.

Signature:


James Joseph SAUNDERS