



DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE

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PUBLIC LETTER RE FR DES HARRIGAN'S REINSTATEMENT & SUPPORT FROM BISHOP WRIGHT

To the Catholic People of Taree Parish

As part of the Special Commission of Inquiry into matters relating to the Police investigation of certain child sexual abuse allegations in the Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, Fr Des Harrigan was called to give evidence related to a claim made by DCI Fox, a claim which turned out to be unsupported by other evidence.

On Friday 27 July 2013, Fr Harrigan restated evidence he had given Police back in 2003, that he had been the owner of pornographic material left at Lochinvar Presbytery in 2002. That material involved only adults and was completely legal. Nonetheless, it was entirely unacceptable for a Catholic priest to own it or watch it. Fr Harrigan recognised this. In his evidence he said "I'm just totally ashamed, totally ashamed, and very guilty about it." and "It is below the standards that I would expect of myself and I think other people can expect of me."

I am also aware that there have been other issues raised about Fr Harrigan's ministry that are separate and unrelated to this matter, issues of temperament and style.

Fr Harrigan has acknowledged that there needs to be changes. Where people fail to live up to the expectations of their position but are forthright in acknowledging their responsibilities and truly repentant, our faith tells us there is forgiveness and we are given second chances.

While I am sure there are some of you who are concerned and distressed about Fr Harrigan's conduct, I have asked him to return to ministry in Taree. I ask you to give an honest, if flawed, man the opportunity to redeem his ministry. Fr Harrigan has been willing to work with professional help to see that there is no recurrence of the past behaviour to which he has admitted. If you have any concerns or issues, you are able to contact my Vicar-General, Fr Brian Mascord (P. 4979 1111) or the Manager of Zimmerman Services, Sean Tynan (P. 4979 1390).

Finally, I ask you to look at these matters not with the mind of those who demand nothing less than perfection from anyone professing to be Christian, but according to the mind of Christ who teaches us that there is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine just people. If there are standards by which we judge one another, let them be the standards of Christ, the Good Shepherd who rejoices to bring the sheep that was lost back to the fold.

May God bless you all.

Bishop William Wright

13th September, 2013



YEAR OF FAITH 2012



What does this have to do with Jesus?