



*Speaking the truth in love*  
Eph 4:15

**STATEMENT OF BISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP, 17 JANUARY 2013,  
TO THE FAITHFUL OF PARRAMATTA CONCERNING THE WHITLAM REPORT**

My Dear People,

In July 2012 it was alleged that a former priest identified as 'F' had committed acts of child sexual abuse in his home Diocese of Armidale and in our Diocese of Parramatta and that these accusations had been mishandled by both ecclesiastical and civic authorities. You will recall that Bishop Michael Kennedy of Armidale and I commissioned the Hon. Antony Whitlam QC to conduct an inquiry into these matters.

Having been received by the New South Wales Police, the Whitlam Report is now available for public circulation. The document will be posted on the Diocesan website [www.parra.catholic.org.au](http://www.parra.catholic.org.au) today. I attach a summary of its key observations.

Bishop Kennedy and I accept the report and thank Mr Whitlam for bringing his expertise and sound judgment to these complex matters. Both dioceses provided Mr Whitlam with full access to diocesan records and he was free to interview anyone he deemed relevant to the inquiry. I give my heartfelt thanks to all those who participated in this inquiry.

Our hearts go out to the victims of child sexual abuse. Some members of the Church have committed grave sins and some leaders of the Church have made grave mistakes. I renew my undertaking personally to pray and do penance and my call to the Catholic clergy, religious and laity also to engage in prayer and penance for the victims and for the necessary purification of the Church. I repeat my profound apology to all victims of child sexual abuse and my continuing commitment to work to bring them justice and healing for their pain.

The Diocese of Parramatta is committed to ensuring the safety of all children and vulnerable people in our care. I encourage all victims of abuse to contact the police; assistance will be available from the Diocese (ph 8838 3411), including the Catholic Education Office (ph 1300 661 015). Counselling is available to victims and their families from the special service that has been established by CatholicCare (ph 9933 0233). I will continue to co-operate fully with the police and all other relevant authorities in any related inquiries or investigations.

You are very much in my prayers in these difficult times. May the Child Jesus, Whose Coming we have recently celebrated, guide us in our struggles to protect all young people and to remain ever-faithful to His call to conversion and holiness.

Yours sincerely in the Good Shepherd

(Most Rev.) Anthony Fisher OP  
BISHOP OF PARRAMATTA

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT OF INQUIRY INTO PROCESSES RELATED TO MANAGEMENT OF "F"**

This summary is produced by the Diocese of Parramatta for issues that involve Parramatta although it does include the initial and critical background information. Mr Whitlam has found the following:

1. "F" commenced his appointment as assistant priest in the parish of Moree on 11 November 1981, his appointment being abruptly terminated in 1984 by the then Bishop of Armidale, Bishop HJ Kennedy. "F" went on "what was euphemistically described as 'sick leave'". [33]
2. "F" was then appointed as assistant priest in the Tamworth East parish at the end of July 1984 [3].
3. In August 1987 "F" was arrested and charged with serious sexual offences. He was stood down from all parish duties [4].
4. The charges were dismissed due to insufficient evidence and a possible ex-officio indictment was not filed [4] [25] [29].
5. "F" wrote to Bishop Heather of the Parramatta Diocese seeking to "discuss the possibility of going on loan for your diocese". Bishop Heather spoke to Bishop HJ Kennedy who said "F" had made a "great recovery" and that he would like him back in Armidale in 12 months. [34] He based this on the professional opinion of psychologist Gary Boyle.
6. It appears very likely that Bishop HJ Kennedy did not provide Mr Boyle with the information which caused "F" to be removed from Moree [161]. At no stage did Bishop HJ Kennedy tell Fr Hanna, Parish Priest at Tamworth East, the real reason for "F"'s move from Moree to Tamworth East, that there had been written protests from parishioners regarding his appointment to Tamworth East or that "F" was seeing a psychologist following his removal from Moree. [15] [18] [31]
7. Further, although the charges against "F" were dismissed, Bishop HJ Kennedy did not seek to make the requisite inquiries into the allegations.
8. With this lack of critical information "F" was appointed assistant priest at Kenthurst on 10 November 1989 for 12 months. [37]
9. In October 1990 "F" wrote to Bishop Heather asking to stay in the Parramatta diocese. Bishop Heather asked "F" to assist in the parish of Merrylands from mid-November whilst another priest was on holidays.[49]
10. It appears that Bishop Heather then arranged with Bishop HJ Kennedy that "F"'s stay be extended for a further year.
11. Bishop HJ Kennedy did not advise Bishop Heather of the contents of a letter he was advised of from Fr John Usher to Fr Wayne Peters. In the letter Fr Usher states that after meeting with "F" he recommended a further assessment be made of "F". Further, it appears that Bishop HJ Kennedy did not take the advice of Fr Usher that he seek further assessment of "F" by Dr Blaszczyński [45] – [48], [168]
12. Bishop Heather then appointed "F" as assistant priest at Merrylands commencing 1 January 1991 until 30 November 1991. The Parish Priest, Fr Rod Bray, was unwell at the time and Bishop Heather arranged for Fr Zvonimir Gavranovic, to administer the parish for the first half of 1991. [50]
13. Fr Gavranovic recalls that, only a few days after he arrived at Merrylands, Bishop Heather called at the presbytery and spoke to him and Fr Bray privately for about an hour. Bishop Heather told them that "F" was from Armidale, that he had been accused of "some misconduct", that there

had been “no conviction” and that he was being given “a chance to work in our diocese” although he wanted to be advised if anything “untoward” occurred. [51]

14. Unfortunately, Fr Gavranovic left in the middle of the year to travel and it appears that “F” “seems to have had the run of the place”.
15. In July 1991 Bishop Kevin Manning took over as the new Bishop of Armidale when Bishop HJ Kennedy retired and he soon became aware of “F”’s situation. [53]
16. Bishop Manning recalled the rumours about “F” connected with the magistrate’s decision in Narrabri and the general feeling that a grave injustice had been done. He did not speak about these matters to Bishop HJ Kennedy because he was “fairly sick”. In order to try and find out what had happened in the case, Bishop Manning sought information from Tamworth solicitor, Harry O’Halloran. In Mr O’Halloran’s absence, Fr Hanna received a letter from the firm on 25 July 1991, saying that all the relevant court transcripts and documents relating to the case had been destroyed after the charges against “F” were dismissed. [54] However, this was later found to be incorrect when a transcript and some exhibits were referred to by insurance investigators in May 1996. [108]
17. In that same month “F” wrote to a priest in the cathedral parish of Armidale to arrange to celebrate mass for a reunion in October. Bishop Manning on 30 July 1991 wrote to “F” denying him permission to celebrate the reunion Mass or to “perform any public liturgical functions in the Diocese of Armidale”. [55]
18. On 11 February 1992 “F” wrote to Bishop Heather expressing interest in the vacant parish of Dundas in the Parramatta diocese. On 21 February 1992, “F” called on Bishop Manning in his office in Armidale and informed him that Dr Blaszczyński wanted to see him “every month for a full year”. On 27 February 1992 Bishop Heather wrote to “F”, stating that, as he was a visitor in the diocese, he could not be considered for a vacant position. Bishop Heather also asked “about where things are in your discussions with Bishop Manning”. [64]
19. In March 1992 “F” was observed taking a young boy to an ordination on his own. [72] This boy was later to make serious allegations of sexual assault from when he was a boy by “F”. [137]
20. On 1 April 1992 Bishop Manning spoke by telephone to Dr Blaszczyński who said that he would not give a favourable report or recommend an appointment at this time. Bishop Manning wrote to “F” requesting a report from Dr Blaszczyński. [66]
21. At this stage Bishop Manning had already forbidden “F” from performing public liturgical acts in Armidale. [55] [170]
22. “F” deceived Bishop Heather into allowing him to minister in Parramatta after November 1991. If Bishop Manning had known of this, he would have informed Bishop Heather of adverse advice that he had received concerning “F”. [171]
23. If Bishop Heather had been given the full picture regarding “F” he would never have taken him on. Without this information, no matter how conscientious other priests may be, “a dozy or indulgent parish priest was putty in the hands of “F”” [174]
24. “F”’s career as a Catholic priest effectively came to an end on 1 July 1992 when Bishop Manning withdrew his faculties. “F”’s career was over. [175] Bishop Manning’s successor, Bishop Matthys, told “F” on 10 September 2003 that he would never be allowed to minister as a priest. [175]
25. “F” received no support from the diocesan funds after February 1993 except for the fee for the Encompass program in 2003 with aim of commencing the laicization process. Apart from the

circular issued in 2000 banning "F" from schools, no decisions of a management nature were made by church authorities. Statutory reporting obligations remain ongoing in respect of complaints about "F" as they came to attention even though he was no longer a priest. [176]

26. Frs Lucas, Usher and Peters did not "cover-up" any admissions by "F" allegedly made at a meeting on 3 September 1992. [157] Although Fr Peters had written a letter to Bishop Manning dated 11 September 1992 stating that the "F" had made admissions of sexually interfering with five boys, neither Fr Lucas nor Mgr Usher (now a Monsignor) had ever seen a copy of that letter until after the *Four Corners* program was broadcast. [151] Frs Lucas and Usher understood what "F" said at the meeting of 3 September differently from Fr Peters. [154] [155]
  27. Mgr Usher would have reported any abuse had any "real admissions" been made [154]. Although the specific admissions described in Fr Peters' letter of 11 September 1992 cannot be reconciled with comments that Mgr Peters (now a Monsignor), Mgr Usher and Fr Lucas, gave to *Four Corners* in 2012 [156], Mr Whitlam QC did not disbelieve Fr Lucas and Mgr Usher [157] and there was "nothing sinister" about this inconsistency. [156]
  28. *Towards Healing* is a document setting out the principles and procedures in responding to complaints of abuse against personnel of the Catholic Church in Australia. Mr Whitlam QC said that for his purposes "it is only necessary to remark that, had the procedures for reporting child abuse laid down in that document been in force in 1984 and observed in Moree at the time, "F" would have been stopped in his tracks". If the current procedures regarding transfer of priests "had been in place in 1989 and followed in "F"'s case, there is no chance that Bishop Heather would have agreed to take him on". [177]
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