STATEMENT FROM BISHOP BILL WRIGHT
Re: Fr Thomas Brennan

Thursday 30 August, 2012

It is with profound sadness that I advise you that on this day, Thursday 30 August 2012, retired priest Fr Thomas Brennan has been charged with the sexual assault of a child during the mid 1980s. Fr Brennan has also been charged with misprision of felony or failing to report a felony and with common assault, dating back to the late 1970s.

These charges represent most grievous crimes. However, as with all citizens, Fr Brennan is afforded the presumption of innocence.

This is the beginning of a legal process that will be of unknown duration. As Catholics we are called to maintain that difficult balance, between compassion and understanding for all those who may have been harmed and showing care and support for a priest of the Diocese who stands accused. We must also find the strength within us to support those who will look to the church to again explain the inexplicable.

I ask you to pray for all those who have been harmed by the trauma of child abuse, for Fr Brennan that he may find the grace to repent if he is rightly accused or to endure the burden of being wrongly accused and for the families and friends of all those involved.

I also ask you to pray for all the dedicated personnel throughout our Diocese who faithfully serve the people: our clergy and religious, our staff, volunteers, students and families.

I urge all the faithful not to rush into judgement and accept the wisdom and justice of our legal system.

As this matter will now proceed to court, the diocese will not be issuing any further comment.

Bishop Bill Wright,
Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
30 August, 2012

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Zimmerman Services provides child protection services throughout the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. Zimmerman Services operates under the direction of the Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle and works collaboratively with a number of statutory authorities, Church and community agencies to assist the diocese to:

- meet its moral and legislative requirements to protect the children of the diocese from abuse, and
- address the enduring legacy of historic child sexual assault that occurred within the Diocese.

Zimmerman Services includes three separate parts -

1. The Diocesan Child Protection Unit provides relevant services such as child protection training, investigations of alleged abuse, pre-employment checks and requests for professional advice and support.
2. Co-ordinator of Healing and Support works with individuals who have been adversely affected by child sexual assault perpetrated by members of the diocese, to support and promote their personal and unique journey towards healing.
3. Insights explores the deep, lasting effects of child sexual abuse on the faith communities within the diocese.

All allegations against diocesan personnel are taken very seriously and investigated with processes in place to ensure the diocese meets its moral and legal requirements to promote the safety, welfare and well being of children.

For more information about the child protection services offered by Zimmerman Services (the Diocesan Child Protection Unit, Healing and Support Services and Insights), please contact (02) 4979 1390.