



A MOTHER'S STORY

Figtree Anglican Church: abuse of the Dobbs family

THE STORY TOLD BY MACHELLE DOBBS

This is Machelles Dobbs' story of how the response of clergy, staff and parishioners of Figtree Anglican Church, Wollongong, NSW, Australia to a fabricated complaint by Lee Nicholls, mother of OCD-affected Emma Nicholls, resulted in shunning and abuse of the whole family including her husband who was innocent of the complaints. As a result, all of the family, down to the youngest aged 10, were 'excommunicated' and banned from attending church, not only Figtree but other Christian churches near their home, because Yvonne Gunning and the Rev. Bruce Clarke had spread the lies they had developed to friends, neighbours and the surrounding community. And the effect of this on the family of enthusiastic Christians who had loved Figtree Anglican Church.

Louise Greentree

Edition 1 2013 revised 2017

About the Parish of Figtree Anglican Church

A Mother's Story

Introduction to revision published 21 May 2017:

When this article was first written, compiled by Louise Greentree from writings by Machelles Dobbs in an attempt to understand what had happened to her, her husband Dr. Scott Dobbs and their six children at the hands of clergy, staff and parishioners of Figtree Anglican Church, Wollongong, NSW Australia, it was hoped that there would be a fast resolution of the complaint to FAC by a Lee Nicholls that her 20-year-old daughter Emma, neither of them FAC parishioners, had 'fallen in love' with Dr. Dobbs. There was no evidence that Emma, suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and other mental as well as physical illness was loved in return, nor even credible evidence on the face of it that she had been in any way induced to believe this. Her mother Lee Nicholls also suffers from the same mental disorder.

This was not to be the case, and even now, a few months over 10 years after the Dobbs were first advised about the existence of a complaint, even though the 'charges' were withdrawn and dismissed on the recommendation of the Anglican Church Disciplinary Tribunal, the damage - financial, spiritual and reputational - inflicted on the family by FAC clergy, staff and parishioners and Sydney diocesan officers and staff remain open wounds. Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, diocesan and FAC personnel involved in the case are unrepentant and, in the case of FAC, maintain that they acted in good faith in inflicting shunning and disfellowship resulting in banning all of the family, down to their then 10-year-old youngest, from the church they loved.

As it is, this Mother's Story still stands as a dreadful warning about what can happen to a sincere and enthusiastic Christian family when confronted by claims by and about two people suffering from mental illnesses and disorders that are taken up by self-righteous church personnel acting without any intelligent thought and competence.

Here is the original story with an update at the end. Machelles Dobbs is now working on a second revised edition of the story looking back over the past ten years.

Introduction to the original story:

*For more than 12 months **Louise Greentree** has been chronicling and analysing the story of the behaviour of the clergy and lay leadership and parishioners of Figtree Anglican Church concerning the allegations made against Dr. Scott Dobbs, and the abuse of the whole of the Dobbs family by clergy and members of that parish and by some of the diocesan staff and by senior clergy over in all some 18 months. This is set out in the articles referred to at the end of this article. The previous anonymization of the identity of the complainant and the family and others involved in the matter has now been discontinued because diocese is now required to refer the matter to a public Tribunal hearing of the relevant material.*

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Part I

Particularly for new readers, the following is a summary of some of the relevant events:

This is a story of the actions and failures to act of the Figtree Anglican Church leadership, staff and many parishioners in a gross overreaction by these people, self-described Christians, to a complaint made, not by the 20-year-old Emma Nicholls, but by her mother Mrs. Lee Nicholls, that there was child and adult sex abuse of her daughter by Dr. Scott Dobbs. At the time of writing the Archbishop has still failed to appoint a person to lay the charges to be heard by a Tribunal, this delay of over 2 months in itself all of a piece with the gross abuse of child and adult that has been perpetrated by the parish with the knowledge and consent of senior clergy and staff members of the diocese against Dr. and Mrs. Dobbs and their 6 children.

There is no suggestion that Mrs. Dobbs or any of the children were involved in any way in respect of the alleged incidents that Mrs. Lee Nicholls complains about.

Of the original 11 isolated incidents over a period of 6 years (the first three within a total of 5 years), none of which involved any sexual contact, all but 4 have been abandoned by the diocese after 18 excruciating months of investigation. Thus, there are just a few alleged instances of what the diocese now calls low-level sexual harassment - by unwelcome touching (even if unintentional) of an adult woman by an adult man. Instead of ranging over 6 years, these are alleged to have occurred, once at the end of November 2006 and the other three in January 2007. They only involve allegations that, once, he put an arm around her waist for a short time (while, she says, she stroked his hair and caressed his hand!), a hug ('all the family hug like that,' Emma Nicholls said in her statutory declaration at the commencement of the 'case'), touching or stroking her hand, and kissing her on two occasions on the back of her neck. There were no witnesses, even when Emma says these actions occurred in the presence of his wife and daughters, or, even more amazingly, in the busy lounge area of the church itself after an evening service. This is a far remove from there being any prima facie evidence of child and adult sex abuse. It gives the lie to the hysterical overreaction and horrible incompetence demonstrated by the behaviour of a great many of the Figtree Anglican Church people.

Dr. Dobbs denies the alleged incidents. The diocesan case in respect of these is a very weak one. Emma Nicholls suffers from a variety of illnesses, physical and mental including Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. She is badly affected to the extent that she is unable to work and she receives a pension. She has had difficulty in keeping up with some vocational training course at the local TAFE. She is the only witness of fact. Her evidence is unreliable not just for the reason of her illnesses but also because she has written about how she started to fantasise about falling in love with Dr. Dobbs, a love that was totally unsuspected and in any event, would not have been returned. For further details please read the article 'A Cautionary Tale Unmasked' (see the last page for details). In any event at long last there is the opportunity for the relevant evidence (and not all the irrelevant garbage gossip raked up by the diocesan investigator) and the evidence for the defence to be considered calmly and competently by rational people exercising a quasi-judicial function in a properly conducted Tribunal hearing, which is therefore more likely to produce a reasoned result. If only the Archbishop would promptly act as required to do by the Discipline Ordinance 2006, to enable this family's ordeal to be brought to a close.

What is interesting, and appalling, is to look at the chronology of the actions, reactions and failures of the majority of the Figtree Anglican Church people. Because they focused a great deal of their malicious behaviour on Mrs. Dobbs and the children, it is fair to say that what we have evidence of here is a deliberate, intentional program of persecution of the very people to whom they should have been offering, firstly, an open mind and the presumption of the innocence of Dr. Dobbs until proven guilty; and, secondly, the proper Christian support and care and concern that Christ Jesus Himself would have offered the Dobbs family (and in fact has done so for this deeply Christ-centred family).

This is Machel's story of abuse, bullying and harassment of herself and her children at the hands of a self-styled 'Christian' leadership and a number of parishioners of Figtree Anglican Church. The matters contained in this article have been taken from the many documents, interviews and the statutory declarations about to be made by Machel Dobbs and others to support a complaint of child abuse and adult bullying and harassment against certain clergy, staff and certain parishioners as well as the documentation prepared by the diocesan investigator.

A poignant letter written by Tiara when at age 13 after she was excommunicated and cut off from all her friends at Figtree Anglican Church follows Machel's story. It is a letter of a young person who is very mature in Christian matters. We hope you will feel as we do - the sense of disbelief and outrage at the awful thing that has been done to her and her brothers and sisters.

At the end of this story is reproduced the words of a Lament written by Evangeline Paterson that Machel found highly relevant to the Figtree Anglican Church, the leadership and many of its people.

And finally, we have given you details of the other stories that have presently been written about the 'case'. Undoubtedly there will be many more as matters unfold even further.

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Machelle's Story

Part 1: who we are and how it all started

My name is Machelle Dobbs and I have been married to Dr. Scott Dobbs for 23 years. We have six children, namely our two sons Christopher and Nathan both of whom are now over the age of 18, and our four daughters all presently under the age of 18 years: Cheyenne now aged 12; Tiara now aged 14; Charis now aged 16; and Ellesha now aged 17 – she will turn 18 in September. All of us had been attending the Anglican Church Parish of Figtree as parishioners for about 12 years up to 2007.

We have maintained an open house policy of hospitality for 20 years or more. I can say that, as a family, we have had people from every continent (apart from Antarctica) stay in our home. Even after Mrs. Lee Nicholls made her complaint, we still have had a flow of people, male and female, child and adult visiting for meals, staying over. We have had a succession of home-stay students in our home. Everything we did and said was Christ-centred. Recently we were entrusted with the late teenaged daughter of an overseas Professor and his wife, who like others dismissed the allegations as nonsense. She stayed with us for over 6 weeks. The young people spend their time with our young people, singing, laughing, joking, going to the beach, the movies, shopping and just hanging out. Because my children are all deeply committed Christians sooner or later the conversations include discussions of why they are committed Christians – nothing heavy, just to explain why they think and live their lives the way they do.

My children are very accepting and we as a family allow people to be as they are because God loves them.

Ours is not a quiet house. There are usually people in various parts, adults in the open kitchen helping with food or standing about talking and getting in the way; having intense discussions or just laughing over some joke; coffee being brought in from the espresso coffee machine; groups in the sitting areas, young people singing and joking or a more serious conversation among people talking together; the girls will go into a huddle in one of the girls' rooms, or the boys seek a place to talk in one of the boys' rooms. And then there are the regular times of praise and prayer together in the sitting room with as many friends as can be there.

Our dining table (a table-tennis table laid over the original dining table) can seat 14-16 at a pinch and frequently seats almost as many.

Ours is **not** a quiet house. It is a joyful house.

About Emma Nicholls

We have known her since she was 14. She is now aged 22. I have had a long-time concern for Emma – for her health and sanity.

She loved coming to our house. She would tell us it was so different from her house. I had to spend a lot of time listening to Emma. She often told us about how she had trouble at home, with problems with her sister and arguing constantly with her mother (perhaps another reason Mrs. Nicholls wanted to make the complaint anonymously and stressed that Emma should not be told it was made by her mother). Emma suffers from tremendous eating problems. We used to take her shopping with us so she could point out what she could eat. Even then she ate very little. At one stage her mother placed her

family under a diet regime involving eating very little actual food and using a muscle-builder called Adult Formula. Emma's behaviour became extremely bizarre around this time, such as saying she was cold and borrowing socks, jumpers and a hot water bottle, even when it was 30°+.

She became very sensitive to light. Even in church, when we started taking her there in late 2006, she would sit under an open umbrella, or wander around trying to find somewhere that the light was not too bright for her.

Emma was delusional, and she does suffer from mental and personality disorders as well as physical illness. My daughter Ellesha sat with her for hours listening to Emma talking in an unbroken stream about how unhappy her life was and how much happier she was in our home. They exchanged many emails about this. She would be constantly begging to come over, and frequently stayed over in one of the girls' rooms, mainly because she did not want to go home. She told us and others that she desperately wanted to leave home because of the problems she had with her mother and sister.

As a family, we were all very concerned about Emma as were others who had met her. We tried to raise her low self-esteem by all giving her compliments, and we all treated her as if she were one of the family and gave her encouraging hugs which she loved to receive from all of us.

She treated Scott as a father and he, very kindly because he was a busy man, treated her in much the same way as one of our daughters. She told me she missed having such a relationship with her father. When she was older she started trying to engage his attention. She would be talking to me and when Scott came into the room she would immediately switch her attention to him. He and I had a discussion about this. Because he was busy, we decided that as a woman I would be the best person to give her the beneficial care she needed. She still kept trying to talk to him and he often did not have the time after he failed to get tenure at the University of Wollongong as he was searching for a new permanent full-time job. This meant that I often listened to Emma during her spiels, but I tried to explain to her that it was not always possible to speak or listen to her.

Once she started coming to church with us she would always try to speak to Scott when he was sitting under the speakers listening to the sermon or reading his Bible. He brought the coffee machine to each service, but only sat in at the 6.00pm service. The services were broadcast into a large lounge area immediately outside the worship area and many people would choose to sit in the lounge chairs and listen, so it was never empty during services.

As she became an adult, Emma was always trying to find a way of talking to Scott and not to talk to me. Even my daughters noticed that she wanted his attention. We as a family knew a lot about Emma and her mental and physical problems, her often weird behaviour, and we tried to treat her demands with patience and Christian loving kindness.

Our relationship with Figtree Anglican Church:

Our family has been deeply involved with Figtree church from the time we moved into the Wollongong district over 12 years ago. In the case of our younger daughters Figtree Anglican Church is the only church they have ever attended. In addition, my children have been home-schooled for their primary school education, and their church attendance was important to them because it was there that they had made friends and met them at the various services and functions at the church, as well as

inviting them home. Apart from the youngest who is still being educated at home, they have continued their education at The Illawarra Grammar School (TIGS) where, again, many school friends and even some of their teachers are part of the Figtree Anglican Church community.

For a period of time up to early 2007 my husband brought to the services our espresso coffee machine and we provided freshly ground coffee beans and milk and served espresso coffee after the conclusion of the service, because he couldn't stand the pale brown liquid usually served and he suspected that others felt the same way. He was usually assisted by our second son Nathan who has also trained as a barista. When he was away for any reason Nathan and I kept this up. My daughters have been members of the Leaders-in-training program of Figtree Anglican Church children's ministry. My sons also were deeply involved in the youth ministry. I attended church services and other functions, often assisting at the functions.

All of my children and myself have suffered most grievously from the abusive behaviour, harassment and bullying from members of Figtree Anglican Church and from diocesan senior clergy and officers as set out in detail below and this is still continuing without intervention or prevention by the Archbishop of Sydney or any of the senior clergy, despite their public statements that they are committed to stamping out child abuse and bullying and harassment of parishioners by clergy and other church workers.

When the bullying and abuse started

It was on 1st and 4th February 2007 that Mrs. Lee Nicholls, the mother of the 20-year-old Emma Nicholls had two interviews with Mrs. Yvonne Gunning, the children's minister at Figtree Anglican Church. Late in the evening of Tuesday 6th February, my husband Scott was called into a late meeting with an Assistant Minister Leigh Roberts and a warden of the church and told only that there had been a complaint of sex abuse against him. Although they could have done so at this stage as they had all the information - they declined to give Scott any details. This accusation without details that he could answer just about drove Scott out of his mind. He is a deeply Christian man and the accusations were an abomination to him.

As early as Saturday 10th February 2007 my daughters were hounded out of the church in circumstances set out below, while that weekend at all church services I was mistreated by parishioners and staff: turning their backs to me and denying me fellowship at church. From then on, we were also shunned in the streets and at the school by parishioners, staff and ordained clergy of Figtree Anglican Church. Although we were not 'formally' banned from attending church until 3rd May 2007 in a telephone call from the Assistant Minister the Reverend Bruce Clark (and the ban was confirmed by letter dated 30 May 2007 from the then Rector, the Reverend Dr. Rod Irvine), the behaviour of parishioners, staff and clergy before then had imposed an effective ban and deterrence upon us coming to church through their cult-like behaviour towards us.

The ostensible cause of the ban arose from the complaint made on 1 and 4 February 2007 against my husband by Mrs. Lee Nicholls the mother of Emma Nicholls, then aged 20 and now 22, who first came to be known in our household when she was aged 14. She was befriended by our eldest daughter Ellesha (although some 4-5 years younger than Emma). Emma became a frequent visitor,

sometimes staying overnight and ringing us up to drive her around. We had started taking her to some of the evening services and other functions such as 'Summerfest' in January 2007 at Figtree Anglican Church. This was not more than about 8 weeks before her mother made her first complaint on 1 February 2007, and expanded it on 4 February 2007 to the Figtree Anglican Church staff member Mrs. Yvonne Gunning whom she knew from recently attending multiple times a one-day child protection course run by Mrs. Gunning.

Mrs. Gunning's notes of the interview state clearly that Mrs. Nicholls wanted the complaint to be treated as an **anonymous complaint** and she was particularly concerned to stress that her daughter Emma **NOT** be told that her mother had made the complaint. I would have thought that this might have raised some concerns about the validity of the complaint, particularly as Mrs. Nicholls was not a witness to any of the alleged behaviour. But none-the-less Mrs. Gunning took up the complaint, and it is clear from what happened next that she had told a large number of the parish staff and even a lot of parishioners in the intervening 6 days. The diocesan investigator comments in his report with concern on how widespread knowledge of the complaint was among particularly church staff, even a casual part-time clerical person.

Abuse harassment and bullying of myself and my sons and daughters from Saturday 10th February 2007:

It was the first Saturday after the complaint was made (unbeknownst to me) and my husband was away from Wollongong with his new employer David MacNeice on a business tour to meet clients. I was so very pleased and relieved that he was again employed. In his absence, Nathan and I went to the Saturday evening service and set up the espresso machine to serve coffee after the service. My four daughters were with me because they were attending the leadership-in-training program. Several things happened at that service and at the three services the following day, Sunday that were deeply hurtful and bewildering at the time which I now realise was the result of a great many people having been told about the complaint (clearly in the most exaggerated terms) while I knew nothing about a complaint having been made.

Child abuse of my four daughters by Camille de Roy, assistant to the Children's minister.

Camille de Roy is a parishioner who was involved with the leadership-in-training program and therefore is a 'church worker'. She ordered my daughters to leave the training session that evening and she marched them out of the room in front of the other participants. The girls came to me at the coffee machine and they were clearly in a state of shock; they were weeping and completely bewildered. They were asking: 'What have we done?'

Bishop Goodhew (former Archbishop of Sydney) expresses alarm that I am at church.

I attended the 8.00am service the next day, Sunday 11 February 2007, and I left home early to buy milk. I got to the church in good time to set up the espresso machine. Bishop Harry Goodhew saw

me there and came over to me in great haste and said to me in an agitated fashion: 'What are you doing here?' I did not know what he meant and I just said that as Scott was away on a business trip in his new job I was setting up for him. Bishop Goodhew said something to the effect: 'Oh, I expect that's alright.' He did not explain what was clearly a matter of concern to him. I found out later he knew about the complaint and he conducted a 'retreat' for parish staff to assist them to deal with their emotions over the complaint. How I wish he had offered the same pastoral concern to me and my family.

Strange comments by other parishioners.

Other parishioners came over to Nathan and me at each service, saying such things as 'we're praying for you', to which I was replying: 'Oh, but we are really happy that Scott has got a job'. No-one said anything that made sense to me but left me wondering why they were doing this. At the 10am service, I was told by a parishioner H-H- that J-M-, another parishioner and a few other people 'have been asking about you guys. They have been asking whether you are OK.' It seemed like the whole church was concerned about us and I had no idea what they were talking about.

At all services a few people on staff came up with sad faces, but said nothing.

I was sitting in one of the services and one of the office staff said to me: 'It is really good you are in church this morning'. I was confused by this because I was always in church each week.

Shunning by parishioners in the church and the church lounge.

I noticed at that time that as I walked through the church building, some people looked at me and then turned their back on me. I felt that there must be something wrong, I felt pain because there was a blatant rejection of me by so many parishioners, by looking at me and then turning their backs. It was as if there was this whisper campaign that I was completely unaware of. I could make nothing of their hostile looks and refusal to have fellowship with me.

Notwithstanding all of this, that same Sunday evening Emma Nicholls was at church. She walked in with Camille de Roy. Previously I had introduced Emma to Camille to try to help Emma get more friends. Emma came up to me. She was clearly excited and said she was moving out of home away from her family, and needed furniture. The parish had got her a flat, she said. I drove her to her home (having told her that she was not coming back to our place because it was a school day the next day and I needed to get the children into their routine for school). With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that she had no knowledge of the complaint made in her name against my husband and her attitude to me was relaxed and happy.

The next day, Monday, I was in turmoil. I was dreadfully distressed because all these strange things were happening at church which I didn't understand and yet were very real. I tried to ring my husband on his mobile phone but I could not get through to him. I went to a friend, A-P- to ask for prayer. She told me that she had been asked to pray for one of the then assistant ministers the Rev. Leigh Roberts concerning an important meeting he was having the previous Tuesday. This is when I found out about Scott going to that meeting, which was the first inkling he was given that there had been a complaint, but without being given any details. He had been told not to tell me.

On the next day, Tuesday 13 February 2007 I was able to get through on Scott's mobile phone and talked to him, and told him that people were behaving weirdly at church. The phone call kept dropping out. I was crying 'Scott, what's going on?' Scott said to me: 'I heard that there has been an accusation. They won't tell me any details and they did not want me to tell you at this stage' He said: 'I've blown them up in ministry calling them filthy minded, cowardly hypocrites.'

Bullying and harassing behaviour by Yvonne Gunning, the children's minister and the Rev. Bruce Clarke.

After the conversation with my husband that Tuesday I was very angry with the church leadership. I drove to the church and met Yvonne Gunning, the staff member in charge of children's ministry. I asked her what was going on. I told her how the girls had been treated on Saturday evening and she said: 'Camille was only being overly zealous'. Yvonne's attitude was one of smugness.

I said: *'The girls were crying. Why were they ordered out when you had been calling for more youth leaders?'*

Yvonne replied: *'Machelle I can tell you nothing'*.

I said: *'Well, then I need to talk to Bruce'* (meaning Bruce Clarke the assistant minister).

Yvonne said: *'Well, I'll go with you.'*

In fact, Yvonne was lying in implying that she did not know anything to tell me. She knew everything about the matter because she had already had two conferences with Mrs. Lee Nicholls.

I had great difficulty in getting Bruce Clarke to speak to me. I said to him several times, following him around as he tried to avoid me: *'Bruce, I need five minutes. What's going on?'* He kept saying: *'Machelle I can tell you nothing'*.

It was so obvious from their behaviour to me and the children from that Saturday onwards that lots of people knew what indeed neither I nor my husband had been told. I can say that it seemed to have been handled with the clear design to do the utmost damage to my husband and myself and our children. In fact we had ALL been judged; tried and convicted without being told anything that we could defend ourselves about and although nothing had been investigated. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that the senior leadership, staff, everyone and their partners, their prayer partners, indeed every man and his dog knew about it, before my husband was given any details, and before I was told at all.

My children were treated as lepers and hounded out of the church for no reason. The stress and pain for all of us was then and has continued to be unbelievable and well-nigh unendurable.

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Part 3

The abuse continued and the pain was multiplied

In the following weeks I continued to go to church, having told Yvonne Gunning that I was going to continue doing so. Yvonne was smug, and continued to say: *'I can tell you nothing'*. I kept waiting and waiting for someone to tell us something. I continued going to church and being treated really badly by the staff, leadership and parishioners, being 'shunned' and avoided, and I didn't know what was happening and nobody would tell me.

At one stage Bruce Clarke said that Scott and I should telephone Phillip Gerber of the Professional Standards Unit to talk about it. We still had been told nothing and given nothing.

In the phone call with Phillip Gerber he said to me: *'It is a complaint by a 20-year-old with history, and she's in competition with you'*.

I said: *'The only 20-year-old person we have been having trouble with is Emma Nicholls.'*

He said: *'Oh, so you know who it is. She's in competition with you'*.

I said: *'What are you talking about?'*

He said: *'It is a case of "grooming"'*.

He would not give us any more details.

Child abuse and bullying behaviour towards Tiara by Cathy Clarke, the wife of the Rev. Bruce Clarke.

Almost three weeks later, on the Sunday evening after the church service my daughter Tiara was playing in the lounge area of the church with her two closest friends, Rachel Jones (daughter of Peter Jones, who is a parish councillor) and Sophie Clarke, daughter of the assistant minister Bruce Clarke and his wife Cath. These three children had been friends for many years, and had 'sworn' to be 'friends forever,' as children do. Cath Clarke came over to them and said to Tiara: 'You stay away from my daughter.' She took her daughter Sophie by the arm and pulled her away. Sophie started to cry as she was put into Cath's car. I came over to the girls from where I had witnessed this, and tried to comfort Rachel and Tiara, who were dreadfully distressed, bewildered and crying. I cannot help wondering what on earth was said by Bruce to his wife that would make her think that this was an appropriate way to behave towards my daughter, one of her daughter's best friends.

Delay in giving us details that we could respond to and the triviality of the complaints when we finally read them.

It was not until early March that Bruce Clarke and Rob Grimmet (a warden) came to our house and handed over a copy of the statutory declaration signed by Emma Nicholls on 23 February 2007. I now know that the delay was because Emma Nicholls did not want to make a complaint and she had to be forced to do so in a three-hour interview with Yvonne Gunning after Bruce Clarke was told by Jenni

Woodhouse, PSU Chaplain, the case could not go ahead without her being involved. My husband prepared a lengthy response denying Emma's allegations and delivered it to the PSU.

Most of Emma's 'accusations' were ludicrous, such as that when she was aged 19, my husband saw her wearing a skirt belonging to one of our daughters (they often lent her clothes when she stayed overnight) and said: *'You look good in that.'* When she was 20 she complained that he blew a kiss at her, when in fact he had blown a kiss to one of our daughters. The bulk of her accusations were of this order, and even the diocesan investigator had to recommend that they be abandoned.

It still took the diocese almost 12 months to give us the investigator's report in which the bulk of these trivial complaints, including the one of a hug at age 14 were abandoned, and it took another 6 months before the report of the Professional Standards Committee was issued, abandoning the only other 'child abuse' complaint – the 'sideways hug' at age 16 and downgrading the so-called 'charges' to low level harassment by unwelcome touching even unintentional of an adult woman by a married man.

But the stress of reading this farcical document, detailing things that even if they had happened would not constitute sexual abuse of a child or adult, was devastating. Our whole family was distraught at both Emma's betrayal of the trust and Christian love and friendship that we had all given her for 6 years despite her many behavioural problems; and secondly the sheer triviality of the complaints. We kept looking at each other saying: 'For this, we are being hounded out of the church and shunned in the streets?'

Bullying and harassing behaviour by the Rev. Bruce Clarke, making false accusations against me and my daughters.

It was around this time February to April 2007 that for a period of time almost every afternoon, usually after the older children were home from school, that Bruce Clarke kept telephoning me, to ask which services we were going to or otherwise complain in one way or another about me and my children. This, in the known absence of my husband on business trips, was dreadfully bullying and harassing. The children and I were extremely distressed by his behaviour towards us.

One instance of many ways in which Bruce Clarke bullied and harassed me occurred some days after he had given us a copy of Emma's statutory declaration. Bruce telephoned me in the middle of a weekday to say that there had been a mobile phone message sent to Emma that day saying, *'don't muck with me or I will muck with you'* in a muffled female voice. He was accusing one of my daughters of doing this.

I said to him: *'Bruce why would you even think that it is one of my girls? Bruce, it's the middle of the day and they (her older daughters) are at school. Ellesha doesn't have a credit on her phone. She hasn't had for a long time. Charis doesn't have a phone. Tiara cannot find her phone. I don't have a phone because Christopher has taken it. Bruce, we don't even have Emma's mobile phone number.'*

Bruce gave me the number that Emma had called, and I called it and heard the recorded message.

I told Bruce to investigate it.

I said: *'Call the number, and there is a recorded message. Call the Police, Bruce. They can track it down because they did that with the Cronulla riots by finding out whose SIM card it is.'*

I even called a private detective the next day to find out how you could find out whose SIM card it was from a number, but he said I needed a court order.

I was distraught at this example of further false accusations that I felt I had to try to meet. But just when I had answered one, then they came up with another one.

Also around this time Bruce telephoned me:

He said, *'Oh, Emma's complaining because your girls were in the cry room.'* (meaning the soundproof room at the church for mothers with babies).

I said, *'What are you talking about? We have been praying with Bernie and Phyllis, and we have been saying that we were going to be staying away from Emma.'*

He said *'Well, um, Tiara, and Emma's in the cry room, Tiara, she said Tiara was in the cry room.'*

I said, *'Tiara? She wasn't even at church on Sunday night.'*

He said *'Oh, it must have been Cheyenne.'*

I said: *'Bruce, my girls are not in the cry room.'*

Throughout the conversation he was saying continually *'um...'*

I said: *'Bruce, you need to repent. It's getting out of hand. Bruce, you need to repent.'*

Bullying and harassing behaviour by the Rev. Bruce Clarke and shunning by Wendy Richardson, a Parish councillor in obedience to the Figtree leadership directive.

One afternoon during this time Bruce Clarke rang me and said: *'You're pranking parish councillors and you have to stop.'*

I had no idea of what he meant and I said: *'What do you mean pranking?'* and he explained that this meant calling them up and then hanging up when they answered.

I was at a loss to understand what this was all about and he kept ringing me and complaining about it for several days. I was distraught with yet another accusation by Bruce Clarke against me and my family. I even telephoned Phillip Gerber to say that we were now being accused of this and I didn't know what it meant, and he also said *'pranking'* meant calling someone and then hanging up.

The only person I knew on the parish council was Wendy Richardson, who was long-time family friend. I had been the one who organised for her to get a mobile phone, so that she could call me in an emergency, such as if her car broke down, as she lived in a lonely area.

At this time, Christopher had my mobile phone. I talked to Christopher and he told me that he had accidentally called her number (by sitting on my mobile). He said that she called back but when he answered, *'Hello Wendy, how are you?'* she hung up on him. So then I called her back to explain what had happened, and hoping to have a talk in view of our friendship, and she hung up on me. I rang her several times because I couldn't believe that she would hang up on me, but she kept hanging up. Christopher then rang her, and when she answered, he then handed the phone to me. I asked her why she kept hanging up on me.

She said to me. *'I'm not allowed to talk to you, that's all I can say'.*

As a result of this conversation I found out that all the parish councillors and the wardens had been told, I believe by Bruce Clarke, or someone in the Figtree leadership, at the last council meeting on 17 March 2007 not to speak to me or anyone in the family.

Shunning behaviour by School teachers in obedience to the Figtree leadership directive.

At about this time one day I was at our local beach with some of the family and we saw one of Tiara's teachers from The Illawarra Grammar School there with his family. He and his family were members of Figtree Anglican Church as well as known through the school. As we went to go over to talk to them, he made a negative sign to stop us coming over. He called out: *'I can't talk to you.'*

When I attended the school for the parent/teacher interview, the assigned teacher said to me: *'What are you doing here? I can't speak to you.'* I said: *'I am here for the parent/teacher interview arranged by the school.'* The teacher said: *'Oh, all right. I suppose so. But we can only talk about the school work. I can't talk to you about anything else.'*

Bullying behaviour towards me by John Reid (who offered to provide pastoral support to us) in obedience to the Figtree leadership.

Bruce Clark sent Scott a letter saying Scott couldn't go to church, and that our long-time friend, John Reid, had offered to be pastoral carer to the family. However, after his offer to be pastoral carer was agreed to by the parish leadership, John did not get in contact with Scott. I thought he would be really caring and helpful, but I had talks with him and I felt that he was aligned against us.

One thing I asked him about was if he could set up an appointment for me with Mrs. Goodhew so I could ask her to make a statement. In October and November 2006 I had told her about my concerns about Emma's inappropriate behaviour and my wish to get others to bear the load of looking after her, which had led to me introducing Emma to Mrs. Goodhew. John said he would have to get back to me. In the interim he went to Rod Irvine.

He came back to me and said: *'I asked Rod Irvine about you contacting Pam Goodhew and he says "no, you aren't allowed to talk to Mrs. Goodhew".'*

I could not believe that he would think this was an appropriate thing to do let alone that this was an appropriate response from Rod Irvine. It was bullying me. After this I felt that we couldn't trust John as a pastoral carer. I said to him that while we had been really good friends in the past, I didn't feel he could be pastorally looking after us during this time if that was how he did it, but hopefully afterwards we could be friends again.

The bullying and harassment that I and my family experienced at the hands of all these people was especially vicious when it was well known that Scott was away most of the time on business trips and I was trying to keep the family together physically and spiritually and to try to heal the deep hurt and distress done to my children by these hard-hearted people. I was deliberately cut off from support and comfort from the very people who had been friends and even my prayer partners.

Bullying and harassment by spread of gossip and denial of presumption of innocence:

(a) by Yvonne Gunning:

Simone Boswell, a good friend from home schooling circles, called me around this time to say she had been rung up by Yvonne Gunning who said to her: *'I have you seen talking to Machele. You are not to talk to her.'*

I have also found out from reading a copy of her email to the Director PSU Sydney diocese dated 25 February 2007 (included in the investigator's report) that at that time Yvonne Gunning had passed information about the accusations to her brother *'who is a criminal lawyer'* and that he had said *'this is criminal and he (Scott) could get 2 years jail. He believes Emma should report it to the Police.'* The Director replied that he was *'surprised you would be talking about the matter with your brother. ... as you know what is disclosed in this case is relatively minor ... '*

Yvonne was described by the Investigator in his report as: *'a passionate witness in Emma Nicholls' cause and demonstrated a deep suspicion and dislike of Scott Dobbs.'*

I am also informed and believe that she spoke to the local Church of Christ minister and possibly other local clergy, giving them (goodness knows what exaggerated version of) the allegations and issuing warnings not to offer any of us any Christian fellowship.

(b) by the Rev. Bruce Clarke

From the time of Mrs. Lee Nicholls' complaint at the beginning of February 2007 (well before the time that Emma Nicholls actually gave a statement on 20 February 2007) and when at last we were given a copy of her statutory declaration dated 23 February 2007 in early March 2007 Bruce Clarke had publicised to people in the congregation that Scott was 'stepped down' from his so-called 'coffee ministry' because of sexual misconduct. Bruce was telling people that he has 'received accusations' against Scott.

Bruce also told members of the congregation including Scott's employer, later professional partner, David MacNeice, that Scott was a sexual predator. Fortunately David had heard all the telephone conversations between Scott and Bruce and had decided that Scott was entitled to be given the opportunity to defend himself through the proper application of the church processes. Scott and I were told by other parishioners known to be friends and supporters of us that Bruce also approached them and likewise tried to influence them against us. This included visiting them and using flash cards with the words 'sexual,' 'predator' and 'victim' on them to persuade them that we should be shunned, and in the case of David MacNeice, that Scott should be sacked.

The diocesan investigator says in his report that Bruce Clarke presents as an emotional witness *'who has clearly been scarred by his dealings with Scott Dobbs in relation to the management of the complaints in this matter'* Apparently, Bruce Clarke has complained that Scott was abusive, when the true story is that Scott and I were trying to get Bruce to deal with the matter professionally and in accordance with proper and Christian procedures. However, Bruce, along with Yvonne, were both doing their best to circulate gossip and make the allegations known far and wide, even before we knew about them. When we tried to defend ourselves, this was called being abusive. As the investigator noted about

Bruce Clarke: *'he presents as a witness with some animosity towards Scott Dobbs and has demonstrated a keen interest in the allegations being sustained.'*

Bruce Clarke also told the investigator that my husband had told him that he been the subject of a complaint at a previous church before coming to Figtree, then 12 years before. The investigator then went to speak to the minister of the parish in another Christian denomination from that time, now retired, and told him about the allegations, named us and asked for information. The minister said he had no recollection of us at all, let alone of any allegations of any nature while he was minister of that parish.

This is not surprising as, firstly, there never have been any other allegations against my husband and secondly, we had never attended that church before coming to Figtree Anglican Church.

Abusive and harassing behaviour by Rod Storey, Figtree parish councillor & head of Christian organisation:

At the evening service on 15th April 2007 the whole parish council was there including Rod Storey who sought me out in the church lounge area to have this conversation:

He said to me, speaking quite forcefully: *'Do you know that Scott is guilty and that your reaction is simply a natural defence for someone trying to defend your husband? You need to be prepared that he is found guilty. I'm going to pray for you.'*

I said: *'Then bring all the cards to the table. Do you know something that I don't? How have you come to that conclusion?'*

He said: *No!*

I said: *'Then how have you come to that conclusion?'*

He said: *'Scott is guilty of a heinous crime. A heinous crime has been committed here. It is unforgivable'*

I said: *'Well are you saying that what was preached from the pulpit tonight is a lie? Well, are you saying that Scott is guilty? There is no forgiveness? You only know lies and slander.'*

He said: *'Oh, if Scott confessed with deep, deep repentance..... Machel, (here he named two members of his family) were sexually assaulted under my very nose by (he named another family member). With constant diligence.'* (He said it angrily). *I want to pray for you.'*

I said: *'You need to pray for yourself. A girl can say what she likes and makes mischief, and there is no natural justice.'*

Further in the conversation Rod said: *'If it was anyone else I would be stringing him up myself.'*

I said: *'This girl (meaning Emma Nicholls) has a serious psychiatric disease. If you read the accusations you would see they are froth and bubble. This is not a criminal offence. This is not a civil offence. This is not even a parish matter because you have shown you don't care for us or have a desire for the truth. You need to pray for yourself because the stark light of truth ...'*

Rod kept interrupting me to assert that Scott was guilty. Then my son Christopher came over and told me to come away and calm down.

Eventually my son Christopher said: '*We need to go to parish council and talk to them.*'

I said (to and about them): '*You guys need prayer.*'

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Part 4

New and spurious allegations are brought by the Rector's wife Helen Irvine and she breaks up a parish 'reconciliation meeting'.

As I have said earlier, the allegations from Emma were so trivial we could not believe the amount of bullying, harassment and malice directed to us by persons in Figtree Anglican Church on the basis of them. As Scott was away most of the time on business trips to see clients, I and the children had to bear the brunt of the spleen and hostility directed at us by the Figtree leadership and parishioners.

However, as early as 20 March 2007, the leadership were told in an email from the Director PSU that there was little in it – what he termed *a lack of understanding of boundaries* (see Part 5). It is interesting that this 'social work' language was also used by Emma in her letter to Scott on 26 January 2007 when she talked about having crossed boundaries in her behaviour towards him. But now, of course, the Director was saying that it was Scott, not Emma, who had crossed the boundaries, in the teeth of the evidence of Emma's emailed account of her infatuation with Scott and her inappropriate and provocative behaviour in November/December 2006.

It took a while for things to develop from there. (See my comments in Part 5 concerning the attempts to force us to break a commitment in order to attend a meeting on 24th March 2007 which Bruce Clarke had already arranged with Phillip Gerber). Nevertheless, a 'reconciliation meeting' was set up between the leadership and my husband and myself, with the Director PSU Philip Gerber in attendance. We were encouraged to invite those (few) who had remained friends and supporters from among the Figtree parishioners.

Bruce Clarke had prepared an agenda (and a copy is amongst the diocesan investigator's materials):

- 1. Discussion of Scott's behaviour as presented in his response:** what we want to talk about is the significant number of points in his response that admits to a certain style of behaviour (IE hugging, kissing and other overt expressions of affection) that appears to cross physical and emotional boundaries. *Specific question regarding this:* What is Scott's own understanding of his behaviour and it's (sic) impact on others and in particular women?
- 2. Discussion of Scott's response to the complaint:** Discussion about the issue that Scott has appeared to have an inability to have any pastoral empathy for the situation of the claimant (Emma Nicholls). *Specific question regarding this:* Does Scott understand how

he has come across in the way he has responded to this issue? Does Scott have any empathy for Emma's sense that her boundaries have been crossed – whether this is real or imagined?

3. Discussion of how Scott feels that he has been treated by the church leadership and the churches (sic) pastoral responsibility to him and his family. *Specific Questions:* In what ways does Scott feel that he has been mistreated in the process? In what ways do you feel that we could have handled this better?

4. Discussion of Scott's future at the church. *Specific Questions:* Given that the matter is being dealt with at the local level under the authority of the senior minister, what are we to do about your specific roles in ministry? In what way can Scott continue to attend the church? What does Scott see as the future of the coffee ministry and the coffee machine at the church?

On the afternoon of this meeting Scott and I received a telephone call from the Rector's wife Helen Irvine. Helen was employed as an academic at University of Wollongong in the same department as Scott when he was a PhD student and academic there up to the end of 2005. Helen said that at the meeting that evening she would be bringing accusations against Scott of sexual abuse of students at the University. She said she had three or four women who had made accusations. We were just staggered. There had been no accusations made as far as Scott was aware when he was there.

We told our friends that this would no longer be a 'reconciliation meeting' and why, and we suggested that they not bother coming.

When we got to the meeting Helen said what she had said to us on the phone, but no more. She would give no details, either of the identities of the women or of the accusations. When we appealed to the Director PSU, he simply shrugged and pulled a face and said: '*They seem to have made up their minds.*'

In that meeting it was made very clear that the leadership wanted to throw us all out of the church. We could not understand the depth of the hatred and malice. We left the meeting and went into Wollongong to have a late meal – a bowl of noodles. We just looked at each other and called this our 'excommunication noodle'.

That was on 1 May 2007. It was another seven months until, in the investigator's report, we read a signed statement by Corinne Cortese, some notes of a telephone conversation between Helen and an anonymous complainant termed Girl Y, and some notes about someone called Anna Maria. I am aware of the identity of Girl Y as Scott and I had discussed her provocative behaviour towards Scott, and he had asked Helen Irvine to speak to the girl and ask her to stop behaving in that fashion. Anna Maria never complained about sexual harassment. She complained for a few days (until she withdrew the complaint) about sexual discrimination, in that Scott had indicated a preference to share his office with a couple of male PhD students (like himself) and the wife of one of them who was also a PhD student rather than with her. These things were well known to Helen and her final signed statement made it so clear that there was no case of an allegation of sexual abuse.

Nor were there allegations of sexual contact between Scott and Corinne Cortese. The main burden of her complaint was that Scott, as tutor, looked at her, one of about 16 students in the weekly

tutorial in one semester. There was one other time two or so years later when she thought he was looking at her at a university function, when they were among many people. After this she says she answered an anonymous email (Hotmail address) and exchanged emails with someone she believes was Scott. She stopped answering the emails after a while and they stopped. Scott denies sending her emails, and none of us can understand a grown woman complaining about being looked at by her tutor in a tutorial. For a full examination of this please see the article *'The First Stone Revisited'* and *'The Evolution of a Lie'* – details on the last page.

What made it all the more extraordinary was that none of these women were members of Figtree Anglican Church, nor as far as we are aware of any Christian church. They had not made any complaint to the PSU. So I could not understand why all this irrelevant and anonymous material was being collected by the investigator and why then it was placed before the members of the Professional Standards Committee. But what I had explained to me was that as Emma's allegations were falling apart, the diocese and the Figtree leadership were looking to justify themselves by dragging in this material.

What made the whole issue of what Helen Irvine did so extremely hurtful to me and my children was her complete betrayal of our Christian friendship and trust. We gave this to her because of her position as the Rector's wife. We, particularly the women and girls of the parish, looked to her to provide an example of good Christian womanhood. Instead we found a common gossip and a slanderer. I read in her signed statement attacks on me and my children. She accused my children of dying their hair blond (they were actually born blond) and the girls of wearing sexy clothing (they look smart and well-dressed, and no-one would call their clothes sexy unless of course that person simply preferred all women and girls to wear 18th century neck-to-ankle puritan outfits). She made an unfounded accusation against my daughter Ellesha, saying she used to climb into men's laps. Her comments about me, calling me insecure about my relationship with Scott, were as hurtful as they were untrue.

I read this material and I wondered: Helen, what have we done to you that you would do this to us? For how long, behind your smiles and invitations to join a Bible-study group, were you fermenting this hatred of me and my children?

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Part 5

We are all banned from coming to church

It was in the afternoon of Thursday 3 May 2007, two days after the collapse of the 'reconciliation meeting'. Bruce Clark, in a telephone conversation with me and my eldest daughter Ellesha (on speaker phone at Bruce's request) told me and my children not to come to church. He read out the following statement (of which I have a copy which was furnished by him to the diocesan investigator and included with the report):

'You had asked the other night about the future of yourself and the kids the other night (sic). On reflection we believe it is the appropriate thing for you, your family and the other family

concerned that you, Machel, and your children do not attend Figtree Anglican Church and its ministries (including youth and childrens (sic)).

We want to make it clear that this action is completely separate to the situation with Scott in regards to his being asked to leave the church, last Tuesday night 1st May. This action has been taken because you have had repeated interactions with other parishioners where you have sought to bring the name and character of Emma into disrepute. This action is also to provide a place at Figtree Anglican where Emma feels safe and her family can worship.

In saying this we are deeply concerned for you and the children and would want you to know that if you have a change of heart and desire reconciliation, we would be willing to talk to you about coming back to the church community.

Given that we understand an investigation will most likely be undertaken regarding the allegations of Emma and Scott (sic), we would not envisage this taking place in the near future.'

I have found among the Investigator's materials a memo prepared by Bruce Clarke in which he sets out what he calls '**Machelle Dobbs: Record of Incidents**'. This would appear to be the foundation for Bruce's ruthless decision to abuse my daughters and sons and myself. The memo says as follows:

Sunday 25 March 8.30 – 9.30pm: Machel questioned C- in the foyer after fuse (?FUSE, the title of the evening service) asking her if the staff knew she was mad? C- has written out a record of what was said.

Saturday 31 March 11 – 11.30am: Emmas (sic) sought legal advice from Mark re the slandering of her character from the Dobbs family. *No other detail given*

Sunday 1 April 10.30 – 11.00am: Scott spoke to Rob while I was present about having a private meeting with Rob re the lack of unity on the team. He told us he was meeting with Philip Gerber on Monday. Claiming he got on well with Phil as they were both lawyers.

Sunday 1 April 8 – 8.30pm: Machel spoke to Dennis Woodward after the service saying a young girl who was mad had made up lies about Scott and that she was speaking to all the parish council about it. Emma was quite distressed as the Woodwards are personal family friends. Emma rang and spoke with Dennis. Dennis rang me for clarification Monday.

Tuesday 17 April 11 – 11.30 am: Spoke with Simone Boswell today re her long conversation with Machel. Simone said Machel had a folder with Emma's and Scott's statements and some emails from Emma to Elisha (sic). She told Machel that there were false allegations made against Scott by Emma. (Simone knows the Nicholls family). She told her that Emma was lying and was troubled and that she had spoken with a few people who can confirm this. She asked Simone to write a letter to the church, stating that the family is strange.

Thus, I and my children were banned from the church because I said three things on three occasions that actually proved to be true.

The first was that Emma suffered from a diagnosed psychiatric disorder (I never said she was ‘mad’ – that is a word that Bruce and his informants have used in placing their interpretation on what I actually said). The Investigator had an interview with a Dr. Richard Schloeffel who specialises in anxiety disorders, who was at the Emma’s treating doctor since 2 March 2006. He said in his signed statement:

‘6. I am treating Emma Nicholls for two things, basically obsessive compulsive disorder and a physical disorder of severe gastrointestinal dysfunction, which is undefined. ...’

The second true statement was that Emma had made up things. As her later signed statements demonstrate, she has embroidered even her original statement to the point of farce. After more embroidery, what was an allegation of a hug at the age of 16 turned out to be a ‘sideways hug’ from Scott sitting in an adjacent chair, or possibly standing up (Emma cannot remember) and Emma sitting on a sofa one of my daughters sitting beside her. At one point in her interview with the investigator she accepts that he could have been sitting on one of the arms of the sofa. Not only was the sideways hug a rather perilous physical challenge for the spinal column, but the presence of others in the room and in the house, would make it all the more unlikely that if anything happened at all, no-one could possibly construe it as containing any sexual element. As the signed statements by her mother Lee Nicholls and Yvonne Gunning prove, what they say she said to them has also been embroidered to the point where Emma in a later signed statement flatly denies what her mother and Yvonne Gunning say that she said. When one examines these signed statements the complete dysfunction of Emma and her closest advisers becomes appallingly obvious.

The third, that Simone could write a letter stating that the Nicholls’ family was strange, although not expressed by me in that fashion, was certainly within Simone’s power. In fact Simone Boswell also knew the Nicholls’ family from the home-schooling movement. I had stopped my daughter Tiara from visiting the Nicholls’ house because she would consistently come home in tears. Simone Boswell did the same with her daughter for the same reason. Mrs. Lee Nicholls used to send to Simone and to me strange poems, notes and letters. We had discussed how odd it was to be receiving these from Lee Nicholls.

After reading these documents in the Investigator’s file I have become even more convinced that the reason I and all my children were banned was that Bruce Clarke could not stand to have the allegations challenged, even when the challenge was based on well-known, even widely-known facts, and this was because his handling of the matter right from the start could only be termed (at the kindest) disastrously incompetent as far as an appropriate Christian response should be.

And the children were hounded out of church and I was shunned and humiliated well before the first of the ‘incidents’ recorded by Bruce in his memorandum. Therefore these incidents (two of which have nothing to do with me personally and none of which have anything to do with my children) can only have been cobbled together to provide some shaky foundation for the abusive behaviour that had already been instituted by Bruce Clarke.

Bullying by Rod Irvine and Bruce Clarke in relation to their response to the accusations.

Further confirmation for this viewpoint rests on the fact that in a letter dated 11 April 2007 the Director of the PSU wrote to Scott the following words which are a re-statement of what he said in his email to Bruce Clarke on 20 March 2007:

*'It seems to me that what the church wardens, Parish Council, Bruce Clarke and Rod Irvine had was evidence, admitted evidence that you have a particular understanding of boundaries of physical touch and relating to people which, at best, is capable of being misunderstood by vulnerable people and at worst involves a level of risk of harm to vulnerable people. They did **not** (his emphasis) have evidence that you are a deliberate, intentional or serial predator on young women and children.'*

Yet, despite the fact that the Director had given this as his opinion on 20 March 2007, and Scott had denied Emma's allegations in his reply to her Statutory declaration, Rod Irvine by letter dated 28 March 2007 imposed all sorts of inappropriate restrictions on Scott's attendance at church. Scott had already been the subject of a public announcement that he was no longer allowed to bring his coffee machine to the church *'because the leadership had lost confidence in the way he related to people'* whatever that might mean, considering that there had only ever been, and only ever was, one complaint by the mother of a 20-year-old woman, neither of whom were regular members of the church.

No-one else in the congregation over a period of 12 years had brought any complaint against Scott at any time, as both Bruce Clarke and Yvonne Gunning were forced to admit to the investigator.

The restrictions included these:

- 'You are not to talk one-on-one with women or girls in the congregation, other than your wife or daughters.
 - You are not to meet with female congregational members one-on-one.
 - You are not to have FAC members or children of FAC members (*no sex is specified, so presumably of either sex*) sleep over at your home.
 - You **will** meet with one man, mutually agreed with FAC, on a monthly basis for the next twelve months for personal mentoring on the issue of relating to women.
 - You **will** be part of an all-male bible study group or a bible study group with your wife.
 - You **will** attend mutually agreed counselling for yourself **and your wife** for six to ten sessions in order to talk about issues raised following the complaint against you.'
- (My emphasis added)*

Now, this was merely because of the complaint of one woman's mother. In early December 2006 Emma had written an ecstatic email to a friend in which she talks about her growing infatuation for Scott. So there were two problems: the first was that Emma was convinced that any kindly affectionate actions shown to her, along with and in the same way as to Scott's own daughters (which is acknowledged by Emma), meant that she was loved in a sexual manner by Scott, which was not true; the second was that the likelihood of Emma to misinterpret such kindness to her notwithstanding that it was bestowed in the same way on the rest of the family was not something to which any amount of

mentoring of Scott or counselling of Scott and me could make any difference. Emma was and is unsound in her understanding of human relationships, whether because of her illness or her sexual inexperience, as confirmed by her doctor, or her immature naivety.

What Dr. Richard Schloeffel, her doctor, said about her to the investigator is this:

'(Her) obsessive compulsive disorder causes her to be isolated from people. It gives her a great deal of anxiety and distress. I think she has periods of quite marked depression. She's not able to carry on normal relationships with other people and she's not able to study and she's not able to work. Because of her disorder, she basically has poor coping skills with dealing with normal everyday activities.'

And this:

Ken Taylor: *Whether you feel that there's any likelihood that, that she has made these complaints, and that, that she recalls this behaviour in a way that's not reliable, because of her medical condition.*

Dr. Schloeffel: *Oh, look, from what I'm observing of her, that's always a possibility, but it's not obvious. ... I can't tell you a hundred percent either way.*

And this:

Dr. Schloeffel: *Her perception towards this gentleman (Scott) is of infatuation. I'm sure she had a ... some sexual feelings towards him ...'*

A clear example of this immature naivety is in an email where she talks about having her hand held and stroked in a way that 'only should be done between a man and his wife'! Also one of the symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is sexual delusions and ruminations. There was at least one clear example of this in Emma's email to Sandra Hardwig, her internet mentor SanDee.

The letter from Rod Irvine was an extremely bullying letter, not only in its attempt to bind me to its restrictions, even though I was not accused of anything and I was not under the jurisdiction of the church legislation, but also, especially, considering that the complaint had so little to it even taken at its highest. After the collapse of the case but for 'low-level sexual harassment by unwelcome touching', even if unintentional on four days between the end of November 2006 and the end of January 2007, it can be clearly seen as even more bullying, high-handed, controlling and inappropriate to the actual circumstances of the case.

Not surprisingly Scott had already refused to have anything more to do with Figtree Anglican Church well before this letter was written. It was simply the nail in the coffin for all and any of us having any relationship with the Figtree so-called Christian community.

Bullying by the false suggestion that we refused to meet leadership and Mr. Gerber.

The hard line taken by this letter owes a lot also to an accusation that drove both of us to distraction. Both Rod Irvine in this letter and Phillip Gerber in another state that Scott and I had refused three appointments to meet them to discuss where to go from there. This is another example of bullying behaviour.

Bruce Clarke tried to force us to make an appointment to meet on Saturday 24 March 2007. But this was an election day and Scott and I had undertaken to man a table at a polling booth to hand out how-to-vote leaflets for Fred Nile's Christian party. When told this, Bruce Clarke came back twice with suggestions of other times on the same day. He suggested that we should just leave the table unattended in order to come to this meeting and tried to force us to do so. As we had given the commitment to the party officials to man the table all day we declined the three appointments.

From looking at documents included with the Investigator's report, it would appear that Bruce had already invited the Director PSU to come and stay in Wollongong that day, booking him and his wife into a good hotel and suggesting he might like to try the surf, before consulting us as to our availability. This was then used against us to somehow indicate that we were unwilling, born of Scott's assumed guilt, to meet and discuss the matter.

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Part 6

Overt bullying of my children

The rudeness with which the leadership and others of the church treated my children was extraordinary. It is hard to believe that such treatment would be appropriate even for someone who had been found guilty of sex abuse. It seems that, in a rather Old Testament way, the Figtree leadership took the view that whole family was to be made to suffer for the father's alleged sins. Apart from people crossing the road to avoid us, and refusing to speak to us, the following are just a few of the worst examples of what we had to endure at the hands of these Christian people.

Bullying of my daughter Ellesha by members of the youth ministry in obedience to the Figtree leadership directive:

Ellesha was devastated by the directive that she was prohibited from attending any of the church youth activities and cut off from her friends. She waited until the youth group was meeting at the home of a friend they all called 'Cec' ('who I knew would defend me', she said). She spoke to him beforehand and he said she could come.

Everyone was at Cec's home that evening but Cec himself was late getting back from Sydney. Everything was fine until a young woman youth leader C-P- arrived. Ellesha reports that this friend treated her very badly. She did not even say 'hello' to her. She came out of the kitchen and handed Ellesha a mobile phone. She did not say who was on the phone. Ellesha says 'Until this point I thought: no-one will try anything. I'm at Cec's home by invitation and no-one believes that stuff (*about her father and Emma*) anyway'. It was Ron Irving the youth pastor on the phone. She felt quite sorry for him. She says: 'He had nothing to do with the decision and I felt that he did not feel comfortable with what he would have to do.'

The following is Ellesha's account of what happened then:

Ron said: '*What are you doing at youth group?*

I said: *'I'm not at youth group. Cec has invited me and I came over.'* I was crying.

He said: *'But you knew that a youth group function was going to be held there?'*

I said: *'So what Ron, I can be here. Cec invited me.'*

Ron said: *'You are being very naïve or very silly!'*

I said: *'I'll call my parents.'*

He said: *'OK.'*

(I thought he needed a way out and I felt sorry for him. He was just trying to do what his boss was telling him to do.)

I handed the phone back to C-P- and burst into tears. I didn't understand how or why Ron knew I was there. I said to C-P-: *'Did you call him?'*

F-, another youth group friend, grabbed Ellesha and took her into the kitchen. Another friend, B- came over and said something in defence of C-P-. Ellesha was crying and shaking. She thought Ron was ringing me to come and get her. She walked out furious and upset. She says: *'I couldn't believe that she (C-P-) wouldn't even talk to me first. I sent Cec a text message the next day 'They tried to kick me out.'* Bega, Cecil's flatmate (also a leader) said *'Ellesha is always welcome here.'*

Nathan came and collected Ellesha at the end of the evening. She says: *'But as I was driving home I thought "I will never go back to youth group again."'*

Bullying of my daughter Charis by Bruce Clarke and the efforts of her friends to protect her.

My daughter Charis resumed going to the evening service on the urging of some of her friends. Each time she did, they would form a human barrier around her so that members of the youth ministry leadership could not harass her.

So Bruce Clarke took to telephoning me each time and purporting to order me to remove her from the church premises. *'Charis is here. Come and get her, Machele,'* he would say every time. I refused. I would tell him she had as much right to be there as anyone else, and to stop harassing me. Very touchingly, a number of her friends circulated a Petition addressed to the Figtree leadership asking that Charis be allowed to attend a church youth function without being psychologically molested and harassed by the leadership. The request was denied by the Figtree leadership.

The rest of us were targeted and treated as if we were lepers.

My other daughters and my sons equally were targeted at different times. The above are only a few instances. Another example of the Christian indifference and ruthlessness demonstrated by the leadership is when my son Christopher had lunch with Bruce Clarke in June 2007 and asked him why we could not go to church, Bruce said he 'would get back to' Chris after discussing it with the staff and clergy. He did not get back. My son had demonstrated to Bruce a clear concern for us to be able to attend church and to give the church the opportunity to do the proper thing by my family, even if Scott stayed away until the charges were dealt with.

Yet clearly this was of no importance to Bruce Clarke. It was as if his ordination vows meant nothing.

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Part 7

Warnings to the Figtree leadership, diocesan leadership and Director PSU

Each of the leading members of the Figtree leadership, ordained and lay, and the Director PSU have been written to by different people at different times expressing their dismay and abhorrence of this behaviour, warning that what they were doing to us constituted abuse, bullying and harassment and would bring scandal upon the church. None of them have appropriately responded if at all.

An influential parishioner D-M- wrote on 23rd June 2007 to Rob Grimmet, Church Warden Figtree Anglican Church. He wrote –

'My Dear Church Wardens

I write this letter out of deep Christian concern for the way I think Dr. Scott Dobbs and his family have been treated by some of the leaders and various people in positions of authority in Figtree Anglican Church, over the alleged allegations supposedly to have been committed by Dr. Dobbs.

It seems strange to me that this family in their time of need appears to have been ostracised and excommunicated by the church that should be giving them as much support as they can and not trying to distance themselves or taking sides in what, at the present time, are unsubstantiated statements.'

He then expresses concern that the diocesan procedures and protocols have not been followed. He goes on to say -

*'I am concerned that at a time when our Church is asking us to imagine a church that cares, that is filled with compassion, that loves the lost and is in love with Jesus (and his teachings); that we have turned our back on the Dobbs family and we have not followed the proper processes and procedures of the Sydney Diocese Anglican Church in Australia. It is my understanding that only a **Bishop** (his emphasis) can excommunicate a member from the Anglican Church and in that instance there are only two grounds on which a bishop can rely, neither of which I am aware of Dr. Scott Dobbs or any member of his family being accused of.*

I am also concerned that a number of people in positions of authority in our Church are alleged to have made public statements on this case that could be seen as defamatory'.

The letter continues in similar manner.

Bernard and Phyllis Tibbs, long-standing parishioners and deeply committed Christians wrote on Thursday 28th June 2007 to The Rector, Figtree Anglican Church Rev. Dr. Rod Irvine, as follows in part –

'PASTORAL CONCERN FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE DOBBS FAMILY &
THEIR FRIENDS AT FIGTREE ANGLICAN CHURCH

Dear Rod,

May we bring to your attention our ongoing grave pastoral concern for the six children of the family of Scott and Machel Dobbs: Christopher, Nathan, Ellesha, Charisa (sic), Tiara and Cheyenne, and in particular their relationships with their friends at Figtree Anglican Church?

This arises out of our understanding Rod, that letters over your signature have been tendered to the Dobbs family, one of the effects being that the six above-named children are excluded at this point of time from attending any church services, youth groups or any other related activities at Figtree Anglican Church. And we understand that these exclusions have been instituted because of no personal or group actions of the Dobbs children.

Later in the letter they go to say-

'Rod, please hear us when we say that we grieve deeply in Christ Jesus, fully aware of the infirmities of us all in this situation. We perceive that the effects that are following your letters and your other actions of exclusion of the Dobbs Children from fellowship, we as a Church are substantially failing in our demonstration of agape loving unity with these children. And further we perceive that this is leaving the children of the Dobbs Family, the children of their associated Figtree Anglican Church Families and the watching world beyond, with palpable misapprehensions about ...

- The members of Figtree Anglican Church being Christ's true disciples.*
- Them having no way of knowing truthfully that the Father has sent the Son into the World.*

If our observations are valid then these matters are very serious indeed and in need of urgent measures to put them right in the Lord.'

On 2 July 2007 Christine Metusela wrote as an open letter –

'I have known Scott and Machel Dobbs for the past 14 years and I truly believe Scott to be innocent of what Emma Nicholls and the FAC (Figtree Anglican church) have accused him of. I have taught Emma Nicholls in the past and have had something to do with the Nicholls family (having taught Emma and Beth) (The Nicholls' other daughter). I believe that Emma is a mentally disturbed character and that she is quite capable of concocting stories about Scott because of her frame of mind.

(After expressing other concerns she goes on to say -)

'I am really concerned about the way the whole matter has been handled. The pastoral care was just not there for the Dobbs family, which should have been there regardless of Scott being innocent or not. The whole family has been affected adversely by this so much so that they are

still suffering today. The younger children have been really affected – something they should have been spared. The whole matter has dragged on too long, procrastinating any healing taking place and for the family to get on with their lives.'

In March 2008 the Rev. David Greentree wrote to the Rev. Bruce Clarke a personal letter from one Anglican priest to another. Although I have not seen the letter, I know that it referred to Jesus' command to let the children come to Him 'for of such are the Kingdom of God'.

In January 2008 I know that Louise Greentree wrote a personal letter to Philip Gerber Director of PSU, as one Christian lawyer to another. I have not read that letter but I know that it expressed strong concerns at the manner in which the 'case' had been conducted, the dragging in of the slight 'complaints' from UOW (which had nothing to do with Figtree Anglican Church or the Anglican Church at all) and the objectionable nature of anonymous 'evidence'.

How the diocesan hierarchy has condoned and permitted the continuing child abuse, bullying & harassment of myself and my sons and daughters

On 19 June 2007 I telephoned the Sydney Archbishop, the Most Rev. Dr. Peter Jensen. When I insisted on speaking to the Archbishop himself my call was diverted to Dr. Philip Selden, the Diocesan Registrar and Archbishop's Executive Officer. I told him that I and my six children have been excommunicated from Figtree Anglican Church and how all of us were being abused and harassed by the Figtree leadership and parishioners.

I asked him to make sure that the Archbishop was told. He undertook to do so.

I know that Louise Greentree wrote a detailed letter to the Archbishop concerning the abuse and harassment of myself and my children by the clergy and parishioners of Figtree Anglican Church on 12 July 2007. Earlier in that letter she set out the instances of the banning of the whole family, including children aged 11 – 21 from church, the shunning, threats and abusive comments and behaviour of clergy and parishioners of the parish. She went on to say:

'On behalf of Mrs. Dobbs and her family I am calling on you as Chief Pastor, and the person responsible before God for the actions of your church during your term as Archbishop to intervene strongly in this matter on behalf of Mrs. Machele Dobbs and her children.

I am asking you to call to account and discipline those of the clergy and parish employees who have behaved in a manner of unexampled callousness and caused grave distress to sincere Christian people. I am also calling upon you to call to account those parishioners, wardens and parish councillors whose conduct towards Mrs. Dobbs and her children has been a disgrace to the church.

If you are prepared to act, I will furnish you with a detailed account of the many specific instances of conduct of grave concern. '

She also only received a reply from Dr. Philip Selden reiterating what I believe to be incorrect advice that a Rector has a wide discretion in effect to ban people from his church.

The letter from Dr. Philip Selden to Louise Greentree also said that the Regional Bishop, Al Stewart was being kept advised about all these circumstances. It almost goes without saying that the Regional bishop has not contacted us to try to alleviate the harm done to us and make other arrangements for our pastoral care during this ordeal.

In my telephone conversation with Dr. Philip Selden he also said to me also that he undertook to advise Phillip Gerber the Director PSU Sydney Diocese. It also almost goes without saying that the Director PSU, who has clear and unequivocal jurisdiction in this case of child abuse, bullying and harassment by ordained clergy and church workers has not been in touch to take a formal complaint and to pursue the matter in accordance with his mandate as Director.

I and my husband on speaker phone informed Archdeacon Deryck Howell, the Chair of the Professional Standards Committee in a telephone conversation in June 2008 telling him my complaint and the particulars of the child abuse of my daughters and the harassment and bullying of myself and my sons by leadership and parishioners of Figtree Anglican Church. He replied words to the effect: 'The rector has a wide discretion as to who he allows to attend his church.' He has not contacted me nor taken any action of which I have seen any result to put a halt to the continuing child abuse and harassment and bullying of myself and my family.

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Part 8

Last Words

The much-publicised church response to child abuse scandals of the last century and the early years of this says a number of relevant things that were ignored and flouted by the Figtree and diocesan leadership.

In addition to having had to endure the abusive behaviour, the bullying and harassment of these people I have been unable to get anyone in the Anglican Church Sydney diocese to act to put a stop to the continuing abuse of myself and by children. Nor have they taken steps to ameliorate the grave psychological consequences nor, even for the sake of the reputation of the church done anything to prevent this becoming a public scandal. It seems that the church has learned nothing from the past scandals. They are still protecting the real abusers and wasting time and diocesan money on claims that are manifestly false.

My very real concern is that by looking the other way, and being content to be acting in relation to false claims, they are allowing the real abusers free rein to continue their horrible and dishonourable activities in the name of God.

Thank you for reading this article. Please pray for us.

What Tiara wrote after being 'excommunicated' by Figtree Anglican Church at age 13

Dear reader,

When you say the word church, what do you think? Some might think it's the building you worship in, but I think of the people who actually do the worshipping, meaning 'the people are the church.' When you excommunicate a person you are taking away from the church, especially when the person has been attending and volunteering at the church for a long period of time. But even if the person has only been there for two weeks, it shouldn't make a difference.

(She writes about an argument between a priest and a scientist over creation. If they throw insults at each other, instead of debating the facts properly and looking at the Bible, the priest is not being Godly at all. But that does not justify the scientist either.) She then goes on:

Figtree has taken the matter into their own hands and has not taken in the facts but are doing what the two debaters did. As a victim/bystander of the situation I have seen no insults or false allegations being passed towards the church of Figtree and as a result the church has taken advantage of this. The FAC has taken the matter into their own hands when really the situation was between the Dobbs' and Emma Nicholls.

The church is not legally allowed to get involved with this situation unless Dad is a church worker which he isn't so legally we can sue the church for defamation but to stop us the church is pushing to make Dad's work seem like church work but which it isn't on volunteer work. When the FAC actions were questioned by an investigator the church could not handle it in a Christian manner and if you want to hear the whole story behind that, ask it from my Dad. If this situation between Emma and the Dobbs family as the letter clearly states on the allegations, why wasn't the situation addressed two years ago when Emma started to feel this way toward my Dad? Sometimes Emma was not at all appropriate towards Dad at all and again if you don't know what I mean, just ask. I have written this letter not to convince anyone of what happened between Figtree and the Dobbs family, but first of all let me explain. We have known Emma for many years now and to the time that the allegations were released we have been good friends as well. Emma has sent allegations saying Dad has been interfering in certain people's personal space. If you meet my Dad you will immediately get a warm strong handshake and a good hug. He acts this way to everyone he meets and is very friendly to everyone. As a member of the Dobbs family I have never encountered a single moment in the history of my life when Dad has acted inappropriately. And from my observations he has never done differently to any other person.

Emma has had a history of delusions in her childhood and her psychologist has also declared the same in many notes and references. She as a result has sent allegations that my Dad has interfered with her personal space and that this 'interference' has made her insecure and supposedly suicidal. As well on top of this when we pushed a defence the church immediately excommunicated us.

When you hear a rumour of any sort you immediately think of that person guilty of whatever the rumour is. People judge as soon as they hear even a rumour about someone and we all do it, but we have to say, 'it's not our place.' God made us all equal and because people are the church you can't send anyone away from the church (reference the Bible) so all that Figtree is doing is sending us away from a building! But the church has seemed to follow us (meaning the people haven't pushed us away so God must be doing something). Don't worry, after this we will be a lot stronger in the Lord than Figtree ever was. In the Bible it says, 'judge and you will be judged'. No more needs to be said there. There are many cases of when wrongful charges have turned bad (*The letter then discusses the case of Dana Holland 'exonerated' after serving 10 years of a 118-year sentence for two wrongful convictions.*)

Also in the Bible Jesus was wrongfully charged as well. Think about that.

Tiara Dobbs daughter of Scott Dobbs

I give thanks to the people who have supported us in this situation.

Lament

Weep, weep for those
Who do work for the Lord
With a high look
And a proud heart.
Their voice is lifted up
In the streets, their cry is heard
The bruised reed they break
By their great strength and the smoking flax
They trample.

Weep not for the quenched
(For their God will hear their cry
And the Lord will come to save them)
But weep, weep for the quenchers.

For when the Day of the Lord
Is come, and the vales sing
And the hills clap their hands
And the light shines
Then their eyes will be opened
On a waste place,
Smouldering,
The smoke of the flax bitter
In their nostrils,
Their feet pierced
By broken reed-stems ...
Wood, hay and stubble,
And no grass springing,
And all the birds flown.

Weep, weep for those
Who have made a desert
In the name of the Lord.

Evangeline Paterson from *Deep is the Rock*

(Elms Court: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1966)

©1966 by Christianity Today.

Other articles about the Figtree case

These are available on the website www.churchdispute.com

A Cautionary Tale Unmasked. This is the revised version of an anonymised account of the history of the making of the allegations and an analysis of the diocesan materials after the investigator's report was received in January 2008 with disclosure of the names of all parties.

There is also the **Executive Summary of A Cautionary Tale**, which was handed out and emailed around parishioners, staff and clergy of Figtree Anglican Church.

A Cautionary Tale – the cover-up begins. This is also a revised version of an anonymised account of the further developments after the Professional Standards Committee had made their report with the anonymity lifted and disclosure of the names of all parties.

There is also the **Executive Summary of A Cautionary Tale – the cover-up begins**, which was handed out and emailed around parishioners, staff and clergy of Figtree Anglican Church.

'The First Stone' Revisited: This is an examination of the allegations made by Corinne Cortese, and by Helen Irvine apparently on behalf of the anonymous girl Y, and the strange case of 'Anna Maria', who did not make any complaint. It reviews them alongside and in the light of the examination of the Ormond College, University of Melbourne case of alleged sexual harassment which was so tellingly examined by Helen Garner in her book 'The First Stone.' It concludes that the ideology of 'victim feminism' that Helen Garner (among others) deplores is alive and well in Corinne Cortese and Helen Irvine, with the apparent support of the Sydney diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia, to the great detriment of the serious purposes of the feminist movement.

'Sex, Lies and Videotape': This was prepared and handed out, mailed and emailed to parishioners and leadership of Figtree Anglican Church after the regional Bishop made a video of himself reading from the letter and report of the Professional Standards Committee and the Rev. Barnett showed it at each of the services on Sunday 29th June 2008. The article was required in order to make clear what the Bishop failed to make clear: that the so-called recommendations had no foundation or authority, and they had been arrived at without a proper hearing from both sides. Also, as at that time it was known by the Bishop that Scott Dobbs had NOT written to accept the recommendations and the time to do so had expired, the Bishop's actions was yet another abusive process: he knew that the report and recommendations were rendered irrelevant because the matter would now have to be referred to a Disciplinary Tribunal for a hearing.

Leadership, Ministry and a Coffee Machine. This is an examination of the failures of Figtree Anglican Church personnel, the director PSU Mr. Philip Gerber, the then Chancellor of the Diocese Acting Judge Peter Grogan QC, members of the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) and the Disciplinary Tribunal to deal appropriately with Dr. Dobbs' submissions that all these lacked jurisdiction under the Discipline Ordinance 2006 to accept, investigate, refer to the PSC, for the

PSC to make any recommendations other than dismissal and finally to refer to the Disciplinary Tribunal. The lack of jurisdiction was finally acknowledged on the first hearing day resulting in a recommendation that the charges be and were withdrawn and dismissed after Mr. Gerber and his barrister were unable to proceed to offer any evidence of Dr. Dobbs' appointment to a position of leadership in the parish.

The Evolution of a Lie. Figtree Anglican Church v the Dobbs family: *An introduction and overview and chronology of significant events.*

This is a summary version of the first six chapters of the book 'The Evolution of a Lie', which was produced to be given to the Archbishop of Sydney Dr. Glenn Davies by Scott and Machel Dobbs to assist him to understand the depth of the injustice that Figtree Anglican Church leadership, staff and parishioners, former bishop Al Stewart and the then director of the PSU Phillip Gerber and other persons of the diocese have meted out to the whole family, and the complexity of the case. It points out just some of the things that Figtree Anglican Church and diocesan people did wrong from the beginning and that the path to reconciliation is a long and rocky one given the refusal of these people to accept responsibility for the consequences of their incompetence.

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