



Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS Bishop of Motherwell

11th August 2017

Letter to the Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Motherwell

Dear Fathers, Deacons, and Lay Faithful of the Diocese,

UPDATE ON THE CASE OF FR MATTHEW DESPARD.

I have been asked in recent times by various people, clergy and lay, to say something about the situation regarding Fr Matthew Despard. I write this letter, therefore, to record what has happened and what the present situation is.

The canonical trial of Fr Despard for crimes associated with the publication of his book *Priesthood in Crisis* concluded with a Decision given by the Apostolic Court of the Roman Rota, to which Fr Despard had appealed after the Decision reached by the Inter-Diocesan Court of the Catholic Church in Scotland. The Decision of the Roman Rota partly affirmed and partly reversed or “reformed” the Decision made by the Scottish Tribunal. The decision on appeal confirmed that Fr Despard had committed the crime of defamation and he was required to remove the defamatory book from the Internet and from all other selling or distribution sites whether real or virtual, or at least, in the judgement of his Bishop do all that he reasonably could to this end. I accept that Fr Despard has fulfilled this requirement.

For the duration of the canonical trial Fr Despard retained the office of PP of St John Ogilvie’s, High Blantyre, but was placed on administrative leave in accordance with the law.

Once the trial concluded, and in the light of all that had happened, I then determined it necessary to initiate an investigation to establish whether Fr Despard should be removed as Parish Priest of the Parish of St John Ogilvie, High Blantyre, in accord with the Code of Canon Law. From the serious evidence gathered I concluded that Fr Despard be requested to resign as Parish Priest of St John Ogilvie’s. He agreed to do so and I accepted his resignation.

Fr Despard has requested that he now be allowed to return to public priestly ministry by being given a new pastoral assignment in the Diocese of Motherwell. Conscious of my canonical obligation to ensure that a person nominated to an ecclesiastical office possesses the required suitability for that office, and having consulted the Motherwell Diocesan Consultors, I have asked Fr Despard to fulfil certain requirements. I await his response indicating his willingness to accept and carry out to my satisfaction these requirements.

I ask your continued prayer for Fr Despard, myself, and the Diocese of Motherwell.

+ Joseph Toal

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