

+ GLOUCESTER

Private and Confidential

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Dear Chief Constable

The Rt Revd Peter Ball

As you will be aware, I have been keeping an anxious eye on developments concerning my colleague Peter Ball, whilst being keenly conscious of the need to avoid any suggestion that I might be attempting to influence the police enquiries. However, now that a decision seems likely in the near future, I thought I should offer a few personal reflections to you about him.

I have known the Bishop for some ten years or so. He is well known for his wholehearted commitment to his Lord and the Christian Church. For him the expression of faith has taken a monastic form - which is not the taste of all Anglicans, but is an orthodox way nonetheless. It came as a terrible shock to me when I learned that an investigation was under way into allegations of indecent behaviour with an adolescent. This seemed to me at first most improbable; his whole ministry appeared to show that he is an honourable man, firmly concerned for the welfare of young people.

Indeed, the testimony from many young men whom he has helped over the years - and the list must run in hundreds - is such that if he is guilty of unprofessional behaviour it is quite unrepresentative of his style. For example, I have been told that 30 or 40 men have been ordained through his ministry. I was, myself, for seven years Principal of a Theological College in Bristol and during that time I taught several men who have passed through Peter's community. The unanimous reaction from all of them was unqualified praise for a wonderful man who had given them much to aim for in life.

I thought you should have my general reactions to Peter but, I repeat, in no way am I seeking to interfere with your investigation or influence the decision which the Crown Prosecution may have to make. I am totally committed to the principle that clergy should accept the highest possible standards of personal conduct. In particular, all clergy entrusted with youngsters should behave with priority, compassion and respect. Moreover, it is incumbent on bishops to set a lead in such matters.

'Special pleading' would be entirely inappropriate; at the same time, as Bishop Peter's Provincial and therefore his pastor, I believe I am justified in drawing to your attention the excruciating pain and spiritual torment which these allegations have inevitably brought upon a man in his exposed position and with his sensibilities. Whatever the outcome in law, he will have suffered grievously, as my own dealings with him since he was first accused have made abundantly clear to me.

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