

STATEMENT REGARDING ST PAUL'S SOUTH COOGEE

A matter concerning the parish of South Coogee was made public in the Sydney Morning Herald on March 25, 2006. It was not possible to make any public comment at the time because of a legal action for defamation which was made by Dr Belinda Goodenough against the church and diocese.

In November 2005, the Bishop, Archdeacon and Rector prepared an apology in the following terms:

"PUBLIC STATEMENT Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

Bishop Robert Forsyth, Bishop of South Sydney, Archdeacon Deryck Howell, Archdeacon of South Sydney and the Rev Stephen Bainbridge, Rector of St Paul's South Coogee join to make the following statement and apology.

On 13 February 2005 the Rector with the concurrence of the Bishop and Archdeacon made the following statement to the parish at the conclusion of the normal Sunday morning service:

'As Rector of St Paul's I must inform you that Belinda Goodenough has been stood down from all positions of ministry leadership within the parish due to inappropriate action on her behalf. I am unable to give any detail but the matter has been discussed with the Regional Bishop and Archdeacon. Please do not speculate or repeat unfounded talk. I ask that you continue to love and pray for Belinda, Mitchell and Emma.'

The inappropriate action for which Dr Goodenough was stood down consisted solely in the sending of an email (text only without attachment) by Dr Goodenough to the Rector which he, the Bishop and the Archdeacon considered offensive and demonstrated unsuitability for leadership within the church. It did not include any behaviour which involved any other members of St Paul's congregation or any other person.

We regret and apologise for any damage done to Dr Goodenough's reputation through any misinterpretation that may have arisen from the announcement. The intention in making such an announcement was to avoid such an outcome."

This was not accepted by Dr Goodenough.

However, following a satisfactory settlement of the matter earlier this year, Bishop Robert Forsyth prepared this statement:

"Defamation action against clergy settled

Defamation action in the NSW Supreme Court involving three clergy has been settled. The action had been taken by a former parishioner of St Paul's Anglican Church South Coogee, Dr Belinda Goodenough against Bishop Robert Forsyth, Archdeacon Deryck Howell and the Rev Stephen Bainbridge over an announcement made over a year ago. The terms of the settlement are confidential.

Commenting on the settlement of the action Bishop Robert Forsyth said that he regretted that this church matter had been taken to the secular courts of this land for solution and also the way it had been handled by the press.

“I would like to express my continued full confidence and support of the minister of the church and its senior leadership, and of the right and responsibility of the minister to stand down from voluntary public ministry in the church those whom he comes to believe may not be suited for it.” the Bishop said

Bishop Forsyth added “I deeply regret the pain and hurt to all the parties involved, including the minister’s family, and pray that the parish will now continue to flourish as it is doing and that these matters may be put behind us.”

The Sydney Morning Herald today (17/6/06), carried another news story which necessitates further comment.

The letter which follows has been sent by the Archbishop’s Executive Officer to the SMH for publication on Monday next.

“Had SMH contacted the office of the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney about the continued allegations from Dr Belinda Goodenough (reported 17/6/06), other information would have been available to ensure a more balanced account.

For example, apology was offered in November 2005 (not for standing Dr Goodenough down from ministry positions, but for any unintended assumptions which people may have made from the words which were used.) This was not accepted by her. Dr Goodenough, her husband and other members of her family were in very frequent contact with the Archbishop’s office.

The matter has nothing whatsoever to do with whether women may preach, as implied in the SMH story. In fact, enquiries would have revealed that two theologically trained women, licensed by the Archbishop, preach regularly in the church at South Coogee, and have done so for many years.

If any clergyman had sent an email in similar terms to that sent by Dr Goodenough, he would have been disciplined and probably lost his position. We believe that is consistent with the high standards demanded by the community, particularly of church workers.

Incidentally, Archbishop Jensen did write a thesis on the persecution of witches in the 16th century. He did this 30 years ago. Those who have read the thesis will know that he regards that persecution as malign.

Dr Philip Selden
Archbishop’s Executive Officer,
Diocese of Sydney”