

Commission into Sexual Abuse
Peter O'Callaghan Q.C.

Optus House
Level 25 Suite 36
367 Collins Street
Melbourne 3000

Tel: 9221 6190
Fax: 9221 6191

Rev. P. Searson PP
Holy Family Presbytery
P.O. Box 34
Doveton 3177

13 March 1997

Dear Father Searson,

I have been appointed by Archbishop Pell as an Independent Commissioner to enquire into allegations of sexual abuse by priests, religious and lay persons within the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

I enclose herewith a copy of the terms and conditions of my appointment, and also a copy of the document appointing me as a delegate of the Archbishop.

You are aware that I was also asked by the Archbishop to enquire into a complaint made against you by **REDACTED** and I interviewed you in that regard on 20 November last and then wrote to you on 22 November 1996. On 21 January 1997 you advised me by telephone that the police had decided to take no further action in the matter. Because I am unsure as to whether that is the position, I do not propose to refer further to that situation at this stage.

I have to advise that there has been raised with me a number of complaints which I set out hereunder.

It is alleged that:

- (i) In early 1985 in the Church foyer at the Holy Family Church Doveton, you indecently assaulted **REDACTED** by gripping and fondling her left and right buttocks.
- (ii) In or about November 1985 you required girl or girls from the Grade 5 class to kneel between your knees during reconciliation.

- (iii) On 12 September 1985 you used a tape recorder to record the confessions of a Grade 5 girl or girls.
- (iv) On or about 7 March 1988 you threw a live cat over the cyclone wire fence surrounding the grounds of the Holy Family School onto the adjacent nature strip.
- (v) On or about 9 March 1988 you assaulted **REDACTED** by striking him on the face with a clip board.
- (vi) On or about 10 November 1989 you physically assaulted and verbally abused a parishioner, Mrs. **REDACTED**.
- (vii) In or about June 1990 you sexually abused a girl aged 16 whilst driving her home from school.

I will further enquire into these complaints and when appropriate I will conduct hearings in respect thereof, and in any event will give you a full opportunity to respond to these matters. I have recommended to Archbishop Pell that pending this being done that you be placed on administrative leave. I emphasise that this recommendation, and indeed if Archbishop Pell acts upon it, in no way signifies that there has been any decision as to whether or not the above complaints have been made out.

I must also advise you that there are a number of other complaints which have been made, and which I am enquiring into. Accordingly, it may be that I will call upon you to respond thereto. If that be the case, I will of course give you adequate notice of such complaints and the opportunity to respond thereto.

I will communicate with you further, shortly.

Yours sincerely,


Peter C. Callaghan Q.C.
Commissioner