

**PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL**  
**INDEPENDENT COMMISSION INTO SEXUAL ABUSE**

**REPORT OF COMMISSIONER  
TO HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP PELL**

**RE FATHER PETER SEARSON**

Your Grace,

I have enquired into complaints made against Father Peter Searson by Julie Stewart and [BTV]. The findings which I have made in relation to these complaints are set out in a report dated 9 February 1998, a copy of which is provided herewith.

The conclusion of that report is -

"I have found that the complaints of Julie and [BTV] have been made out. I regard the indecent assault of Julie as serious, and I will report accordingly to the Archbishop. I will also report appropriately in relation to [BTV]. Before doing so, and because I understood Mr Mulvany wanted the opportunity to make further submissions, I will delay making any recommendation for 14 days, during which time further submissions can be made if desired. I must say that prima facie, I do not consider it appropriate for a priest found to have acted as Fr Searson did, to be returned to the Ministry. Accordingly, any further submissions should in effect show cause why I should not recommend to the Archbishop that pending the resolution of whatever canonical processes might be initiated in the light of my recommendations, Fr Searson should remain on administrative leave."

In response to the invitation to make submissions Mr. Tim Mulvany, Solicitor for Fr Searson wrote two letters to me each dated 18 February 1998. Copies of those letters enclosed herewith. On 26 March 1998, I responded to the submissions made on behalf of Fr Searson. In that letter I also dealt with the letter which Fr Searson had written to you on 24 February 1998, and which Bishop Hart had forwarded to me. I enclose a copy of my letter.

Insofar as you seek any recommendation from me, I regret to advise that in my opinion Fr Searson should not be returned to the ministry. I respectfully suggest that if possible his resignation should be obtained on such terms as you consider appropriate. If that is not possible, you may wish to invoke the relevant provisions of Canon Law.

Shortly stated, I consider that notwithstanding the significant lapse of time between the assault on Julie Anne Stewart and now, the assault was of a character which constitutes misconduct such that a Priest engaging therein forfeits his right to continue in the ministry, at least until it can be demonstrated that he is remorseful and unlikely to offend again. Typically this would probably be after some expert assessment of his psychological condition.

In the case of Fr Searson, far from expressing any remorse, he maintains his denials of any misconduct, and in my view, extravagantly and unjustly seeks to blacken the character of two young women, without pointing to even a scintilla of evidence to justify his assertions.

In my view it is Fr Searson's good fortune that Julie Stewart did not wish to report the matter to the police, but instead required that her complaint be treated as confidential. My aforesaid position is underlined by my

belief that had Father Searson been charged, the prospect of his being convicted was high. Had that occurred, I would respectfully suggest that there would be no option but to relieve him of priestly duties at least for a substantial period. To do anything less would be likely to cause grave disquiet in the community at large, and the Catholic community in particular.

All the above is decided exclusively of enquiring into a number of other complaints against Fr Searson. I will further advise you with respect to these matters.

Should you require any amplification of any of the above matters, I would be happy to provide same.



.....  
Peter O'Callaghan  
Independent Commissioner

DATED 30 March 1998