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NORTH RICHMOND, VIC. 3121.

15th December, 1993.

Rev. T. M. Doyle,
Director,
Catholic Education Office,
P.O. Box 146,
EAST MELBOURNE, VIC. 3002.

Dear Sir,

RE:- FATHER BILL BAKER, PARISH PRIEST,
ST. JAMES SCHOOL, DAVISON STREET,
NORTH RICHMOND

We are writing to you on behalf of the Parents' Association of St. James School, North Richmond on a matter of grave concern.

On the evening of Tuesday, 7th December, 1993 our Parents' Association held its final meeting for the year - an informal get together to farewell Mrs. Patricia Taylor, our Principal, who is leaving the School after nine years. It was meant to be a celebration - our opportunity to thank Mrs. Taylor for looking after our children.

Father Bill Baker arrived at this meeting at 7.00 p.m. He was obviously highly intoxicated and smelled very strongly of alcohol.

There were ten women present during the initial stages of the meeting. Mrs. Taylor took the opportunity to thank the Parents' Association for all of the assistance we have given to the School. She complemented us, saying what a fine group we had been and how much the support given had meant to the School.

Father Baker then took "control" of the meeting. We were shocked and upset at the way in which he rebuked what Mrs. Taylor had said and proceeded to humiliate all who were there.

Father Baker made very strong and derogatory statements which related to the path he believed our School would take in the future and how he believed our Parents' Association should function in the future. We took great offence to the statements Father Baker made relating to the following:-

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1. The nature of our School in terms of non-Catholic enrolments and the fact the he could not see the School being able to exist for much longer in its present form. We believe that our School plays a very active role in the mission of the Catholic Church in Australia.
2. The composition of our Parents' Association. Father Baker kept insisting that the group of people who came to the meeting were not a "representative" group of School parents. He claimed this on what appeared to be two grounds:-
 - (a) There were no men present. He proceeded to ask where all the men were. His tone of voice and body language suggested very strongly that because we were women, we were insignificant. The women present felt that the remarks made were directed to them personally. We replied to Father Baker explaining where "the men" were - one woman's husband was interstate working and another woman's husband died recently. Both these men, incidentally, still are and, in the latter case, were extremely hard workers for the Parish when circumstances called for it. In fact, most men of the Parish contribute when the occasion is appropriate. Several of the other women were single parents who were offended by his remarks.
 - (b) As for Asian representation, we had two Asian ladies present, one who works as a Teacher's Aide at the School for two hours per week and who has children attending the school and one Chinese lady who had not previously attended a Parents' meeting. This lady brought her 10 year old daughter along to interpret for her. The child left the room to join the other children in the adjacent hall when the meeting became too unpleasant for her to deal with. We can only assume that the mother's impression of the Parents' Group meetings is one of unpleasantness and we do not expect that she will attend again. We fear the impressions which will circulate among our School's Asian and Chinese population.

Father Baker continued to berate us for a period of around 45 minutes, even objecting to one of us who tried to interrupt politely to make a comment. Father Baker quashed her remarks stating that she should let him finish first. For fear of saying something she might regret, this mother retreated from the meeting.

This meeting was the first of our meetings to which Father Baker has come. When he arrived in our Parish eighteen months ago, he made it very clear that he had enough of meetings and groups and did not wish to be involved with us or any other Parish group. Despite this, he complained on more than one occasion during the meeting that he had not been invited to our meetings, implying that we had excluded him. He was corrected on each occasion and reminded of his initial response to our group.

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We have decided to put this complaint in writing to you as it is the last straw. For eighteen months we have put up with Father Baker's unwillingness to participate or cooperate in the affairs of the School, his condescending manner, his bigotry, his drunkenness, his apparently vindictive nature and his general behaviour, most unbecoming his position as Parish Priest.

We are very worried about the image being portrayed to our children and to the Parish and School community. There were a large number of children present on the evening concerned and they have now spread the word about the School that "Father Baker is a drunk".

Please treat this as a matter of extreme seriousness. We feel that immediate action is required to prevent Father Baker from further harming the School community which we have worked so hard to build over the past several years. We demand the immediate replacement of Father Baker as Parish Priest and his complete removal from the Parish. Whilst he may have the pity of most and the sympathy of some, he does not have the respect of any within the Parents' Association.

As to his future within the wider Christian community, the decision is obviously yours. Father Baker clearly has a problem with alcohol. As such, he should not be placed in a position of authority or where he can influence young people. He does need and should receive help and support. Our Parish is not equipped to provide that help and support, nor should any Parish be burdened with such a responsibility.

Our new Principal for 1994 will need the support of a Parents' Association with a high morale and desire to work for the School. Such a group cannot be guaranteed whilst Father Baker remains in charge of the Parish.

Yours sincerely,

FOR AND ON BEHALF OF ST. JAMES
PARENTS' ASSOCIATION.


(Mrs.) PAM PLANT,
President.

(Mrs.) MARGARET PULLAR,
Vice-President.