



CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

CATHOLIC DIOCESEAN CENTRE
383 ALBERT STREET
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Telephone: 9665 0333

CORRESPONDENCE TO:

BOX 146, P.O., EAST MELBOURNE 3002
FACSIMILE: 9663 4417

IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE:

19 November, 1996

MEMO TO: Monsignor Denis Hart
FROM: Maria Kirkwood
RE: Richmond North

As requested by you, I met with Mr Michael Rocca, Principal of St James Primary School, Richmond North. The meeting took place in my office at the Catholic Education Office on 6 November, 1996.

I told Mr Rocca that the meeting was being held in order to give him an opportunity to discuss with me any particular concerns he may have with regards to his relationship with his Parish Priest, Fr Baker. Mr Rocca was informed that this was a confidential meeting and that anything he wished to say would be treated accordingly but on the understanding that a report would be made to the Vicar General as a result of the meeting, given that the Vicar General had requested the follow up. Mr Rocca stated that he understood this and was very grateful for the opportunity to talk about his concerns.

Mr Rocca proceeded to discuss, in detail, the following matters:

- (i) his concern at rumours that Fr Baker would be leaving the Parish and that it was possible that Fr Baker would be charged with some offences relating to children. Mr Rocca was unable to be specific about these issues and said that no-one had told him anything in detail, everything was just rumour.
- (ii) his particular difficulties dealing with Fr Baker on a professional and personal level. Mr Rocca elaborated on this issue stating that he had particular difficulty when Fr Baker had been drinking as he was never sure how Fr Baker was going to react to matters of a professional nature at such times. This interfered with Mr Rocca's attempts to manage the school effectively and efficiently. Mr Rocca expressed dismay at some of Fr Baker's other unpleasant "personal habits".

- 2 -

- (iii) Mr Rocca expressed grave concern about Fr Baker's dealings with some of the female members of staff. Mr Rocca described one incident which had been reported to him where Fr Baker had made comments to a female staff member regarding her clothing and what parts of her body he could see. The staff member was very distressed. The incident was witnessed by another member of staff, not Mr Rocca. Mr Rocca stated that the female staff were, in general, frightened of Fr Baker.

Each of the above concerns were discussed with Mr Rocca in detail. As advised by you, I told Mr Rocca that, to the best of our knowledge, no formal investigation of Fr Baker was being undertaken by the police nor was there any reason to suppose that charges of any kind were about to be laid. Mr Rocca was advised to forget the rumours and to deal with Fr Baker as professionally as possible. Mr Rocca was given some strategies for doing this and was further advised to contact this office if, at any time, he had serious concerns of a specific nature.

With regards to the issue of female staff, I reminded Mr Rocca of the advisability of having a Sexual Harassment Policy that was clearly understood by all members of staff. I advised Mr Rocca that, as the Principal of the school, he had the responsibility to provide a safe working environment for all staff. Neither Mr Rocca nor the staff members concerned in the incident described wished to take the matter further, however I found it necessary to inform Mr Rocca of the seriousness of the incident and that he should take steps to ensure that, as far as practicable, such a situation did not occur again. (It is worth noting that there is on record a report of Fr Baker seriously distressing a female staff member at another school with a lengthy and inappropriate conversation on the phone).

Mr Rocca is a young and inexperienced Principal who obviously requires appropriate support. I believe that, as a result of my meeting with him he will report to me any other incidents of concern and will not add to the rumour and innuendo circulating. Mr Rocca was considerably calmer and appeared to have put things into a manageable perspective by the end of the meeting. I will follow up with a phone call and visit to the school as soon as possible.

MARIA KIRKWOOD