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3 May 1993

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL  
Rev Fr T M Doyle  
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*File  
Confidential  
files  
Don / Searson*

Dear Father

Incidents at Holy Family Doveton

I refer to our recent telephone discussions regarding this matter.

I have been asked to advise on whether the matters disclosed in a Catholic Education Office file provided to me disclose any criminal offences on the part of Fr Searson. I have now reviewed the file and advise as follows:

1. In a file note of incidents on 2 April 1993 it is recorded that Father Searson held a knife to the chest of a young girl in church on that morning saying to her "if you move this will go through you". On the basis of this information it seems that, unless there is an innocent explanation for the conduct (which seems unlikely), Father Searson has committed an assault in relation to the young girl at least by way of a common law assault if not one of the more serious offences under the Crimes Act relating to assault with a weapon.
2. You have asked me in relation to this alleged offence to comment on a claim by the police that they are unable to charge Father Searson without the girl's parent's permission. I have reviewed the relevant legislation in this area and can find no reason why the police could not charge Father Searson without reference to the child's parents, or for that matter against the wishes of the child or her parents. It may be, however, that there is something in Police Standing Orders requiring parental consent before the police can interview a

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minor so that they are effectively precluded from obtaining the necessary evidence upon which to base a prosecution. Unfortunately I do not have ready access to the Police Standing Orders to be able to comment further.

3. A file note of 18 June 1982 states that Father Searson had obtained letterhead from St Anne's school and purchased a motor vehicle for himself so as to utilise the school's sales tax exemption. The file note goes on to record that the sales tax office has advised the school principal that it does not propose to take the matter any further. Because the sales tax office does not propose to pursue the matter I have not researched the relevant legislation but it seems to me likely that the false claiming of sales tax exemptions in the manner that has been alleged against Father Searson would be an offence under relevant legislation. If you require further information in relation to this matter please let me know.
4. In a letter to Father Doyle of 15 March 1988 from Alan Dooley it is alleged that Father Searson "clipped" a Year 6 student named REDACTED across the face requiring his mother to apply an ice pack to his cheek and requiring an absence of two days from school. If this allegation is true it almost certainly constitutes an assault by Father Searson.
5. In a file note of 13 December 1989 there is reference to an incident involving a Mrs REDACT and Father Searson at the Presbytery in which Mrs REDACT alleges that she was verbally abused by Father Searson for not paying school fees and pushed in the chest. On the basis of this very limited description of events Father Searson may have committed a common law assault by pushing Mrs REDACT in the chest.
6. In an appendix to a letter from the staff at Holy Family School Doveton to Father Doyle of 23 June 1989 there is reference to Father Searson showing children a dead body in a coffin and displaying cruelty to animals. I find it hard to see how an offence could be made out by exposing the children to the dead body unless it was in some extraordinary circumstance. The offence of cruelty to an animal, concerns, I assume, the conduct alleged in the letter to Father Doyle from Alan Dooley of 15 March 1988 in which it is alleged that Father Searson picked up an injured cat and swung it by the tail throwing it over the school fence, causing it fatal injuries. It may well be that this conduct constitutes an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, although there is a suggestion that the animal was already dead when Father Searson picked it up.
7. There is one further matter which I think is of concern which emerges largely by inference from the file and a number of references contained in it. That is the suggestion that Father Searson has been engaged in conduct of an improper sexual nature with children. I must emphasise here that there are no direct allegations in the material apart from an undated and handwritten letter from Joan Powers to Father Doyle in which it is alleged that a child complained that

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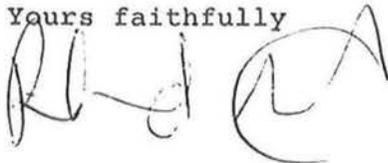
during confession Father Searson had required the child to sit on his knee. This conduct in itself does not constitute any offence although the manner in which it is related suggests that there is more to the story than that.

8. There is further reference to Father Searson making advances of a sexual nature to children in a letter from the principal Mr Sleeman to Father Doyle of 12 November 1985. There is reference to an unspecified complaint by a Grade 6 student named Julie in a letter to Father Doyle from Alan Dooley of 26 July 1987 in which the child had sought the assistance of a psychologist. There is reference in the appendix to the letter from the Staff of Holy Family School to Father Doyle of 23 June 1989 to the "unnecessary use of children's toilets" and the "harrassment of children". There is also a reference in a note from Graham Downes to Norm Lalor of 25 September 1989 to the fact that "Simon caught Father in the toilets on one occasion". In a file note of 13 March 1991 there is reference to a police investigation in relation to "sexual offences of a minor nature" which seems to have been inconclusive.
9. None of these comments in themselves disclose any evidence which would justify a charge against Father Searson in relation to sexual offences. However, the fact that over the years a number of suggestions have been made from a number of different people that there is something untoward about Father Searson's behaviour with children is, in my view, sufficient to warrant some investigation of his conduct in view of his position of responsibility to the children in his Parish. It may be that Father Searson is entirely innocent of any wrongdoing and any investigation should proceed on this assumption.

I enclose your original file as requested.

If I can be of further assistance in relation to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Richard West  
MINTER ELLISON MORRIS FLETCHER