

# ST. ANNE'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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PRINCIPAL: MR. ANTHONY AULSEBROOK

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17-9-83CONFIDENTIAL

Bishop J.O'Connell,  
St. Monica's Presbytery,  
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**CONFIDENTIAL**

My Lord Bishop,

I am writing to you in confidence to express my growing concern and despair for the future of both St. Anne's School and for the Catholic people of Sunbury. This is only my first year as principal, but it has become obvious that the faith and the morale of the people with whom I am dealing is constantly being eroded by the actions of our pastor, Fr. Peter Searson. I do not feel that I can discuss my concerns with him at this time as his behaviour seems to demonstrate that he has some form of disorder which I can only describe as paranoia.

Where do I begin? ... Our chaplain for the school is Fr. Phil O'Donnell. He appears to be the one person that is holding the parish together. Without his openness and genuine concern for people, I have no doubt that there would be no parish, as such, at all.

I believe very strongly in the Church and in Catholic education, so it is very difficult for me to bring myself to write a letter which is so clearly a criticism of my own parish priest. However, by perhaps sharing my concerns with a person such as yourself, I would hope that my burden may be shared and perhaps I may be able to obtain some advice as to how I should proceed. The culmination of all that has worried me this year occurred last week.

All enrolments for our Sunbury schools are done by Fr. Searson so that he can check out the faith commitment of prospective new parents. He has permitted me to admit 84 new children for prep in 1984 which will mean that for the first time we will have three classes at prep and year one level and two classes at year six level for the first time. To accomodate this increase, three extra classrooms are needed. Our present staff facilities are inadequate, with only a small staff room and teachers sharing toilet facilities with the children. The female staff do not even have hot water to wash their hands with, much less any privacy. However, at this time classrooms are our main concern.

A submission was made to the Commonwealth Schools Commission last April for funding assistance for 1985 for classrooms in 1986. We were led to believe that the worst level of funding that we could hope for might be 50%, but it may be higher. Two Commissioners visited the school in early August, Professor Scott and Mr. Adrian Sexton. They told us that we should employ an architect to get proper plans drawn up and the building properly costed prior to September 9th. A lot of time and effort was expended by our building committee to appoint Mr. Jack Clarke and to then work with him on a number of occasions. His detailed report was ready for delivery to the Schools Commission on September 8th. We were also hopeful of obtaining at least one extra portable classroom from the CEO to assist us next year.

Last Monday Fr. Searson advised us that our submission had been unsuccessful and that we were advised to apply for funding in 1986, the application for this being due next Friday.

We then began to discuss the possibility of proceeding with the 1984 stage of our building so as to commit the percentage of the total cost that would need to be borne by the parish in any case. Fr. Searson told a full meeting of St. Anne's Advisory Council that there is no way that the parish can assist the school with any funding for any future development. The parents will have to bear the cost entirely! He suggested a levy of \$200 per pupil but was howled down because it would create an elitist school of people that could afford to pay, and only about \$50,000 would be raised anyway.

On Friday evening, Fr. Searson saw me and said that he had virtually told the architect to proceed with stage one in 1984, the present cost being about \$130,000. He also asked that Mr. Clarke investigate ways of reducing this cost.

While this has been going on, a very embarrassing event took place when Professor Scott visited the school. He asked Fr. Searson in the presence of us all about an entry in last year's AFS which showed a transfer of \$8003 from the General Account to the Capital Account, but the money did not appear in the Capital Account section of the statement. This has caused me growing concern, as Fr. Searson also told me last night that the AFS was signed by an accountant who did not have access to any receipts or accounts, other than cheque butts. As I am an unwitting signatory to that statement, I feel that I should now seek legal advice to protect myself from possible prosecution, as I also have a family to consider as well as my credibility as a professional in education.

There are many other legal questions that concern me as a consequence of details released for our School's Commission submission. One of these is that a loan was made from the Schools Provident Fund in 1978 for a library and resources area. The loan was for \$90,000 and the cost shown is only \$57,927. I wonder what the balance was used for and, more importantly, I am more concerned that we do not in fact have a library and resources area at all. We are using a small classroom for a library. The cheque butts for our General Account this year indicate in one instance that a cheque was written for blinds and window coverings at the OLMC school. I asked the principal about this and she advised me that the blinds and coverings were paid for by the school's Parents and Friends Association. Is it right for this sort of thing to be done between the two schools in one parish? Is it legal? If not, then I am concerned about the time when an external audit is made of every parish school next year. Fr. Searson also admits that he does not keep receipts for the required seven years.

Last night, Fr. Searson told me that the CEC wanted to audit St. Anne's books for 1981, as they have already done Mt. Carmel's books for that year. He apparently talked them out of it! He said that there had been some concern about some entries, which are usually done by the part-time school secretaries. He said that he felt we should trust them until we had some evidence to the contrary. I believe that the inference in such a statement is slanderous, and evidence of the paranoia that I mentioned earlier.

A growing number of families attend Mass at Salesian College each Sunday to avoid Masses said by Fr. Searson. These and others do not give money to the Thanksgiving Envelopes, because they do not trust the money management of Fr. Searson. For people to have this attitude towards a

parish priest is very sad. There is no spirit of unity in the parish, as Fr. Searson attempts to promote disunity at every opportunity. His efforts at this are being further fuelled by the plan for the parish to support Mt. Carmel school and not St. Anne's. When people become aware of this, there will be obvious ill-feeling again in the parish.

The actual Capital assistance given to our school is unbelievably poor. There is no outdoor shelter and parents have had to commit much in time and money for the school to survive. The parents built (and are still paying for a double classroom) in 1980 and have just completed a \$10,000 basketball court for the school - both of these would have normally been part of a parish contribution in most other schools. I have been asking all year for soap containers in the children's toilets so they can wash their hands, but these have still not been provided. The school Subsidiary Account paid for basic classrooms items for a new Year 5 class this year, we were told that this would be paid to us from the General Account in July. Again this has not been done. I am constantly being criticised for employing emergency teachers when teachers are sick, as this is such a drain on parish resources.

On a spiritual side, I believe that it is my duty to keep to the guidelines for RE that are set down for Catholic schools. The spirit in these, is that God is a loving father rather than a vengeful ogre. Fr. Searson does not give this impression to the children at all. At every opportunity he literally sneaks into the classrooms (after he has said goodbye to me and walked towards his car). He then tells the children that it is very wrong for them to go to Mass at Salesian College, even though they may be going with their parents. He has told several classes that if their mind is on play or football, it is better for them not to go to Communion when they are at Mass. What's more, if they miss out on Sunday Mass - God will remember!

He told our year six class this year that he expects <sup>them</sup> to pay attention to him as soon as he enters the room - "I talk to Rex (his dog) once only, I should have to speak to you only once". He then quizzed them about our Cleanaway disposal bin, telling them it's purpose was to dispose of naughty boys.

Although Fr. Phil is supposed to be our chaplain, Fr. Searson would not permit him to say either of the Masses for the Year 3 First Communion class, and said an extra one himself for the children in the classroom a few days beforehand. During this Mass he publically embarrassed our REC, Sr. Mary Rowan by telling her that he could not say a Mass with only one candle on the altar. At the end of last term, he came up to the school to celebrate Benediction for everyone, and we were told to celebrate Our Lady's birthday recently by saying a Rosary together. I have nothing against either of these traditions, as we can well teach the children about our past beliefs and practices - but it should be part of a plan worked out in conjunction with our REC, not something sprung upon us at a couple of days' notice. Fr. Searson also likes to hear confession in the pre-1974 tradition rather than celebrate Reconciliation as I feel we should.

I realize that this letter seems to be very long-winded and rambling, and that I may not even be expressing my concerns as clearly as I might. But I am very concerned to see a wonderful place like Sunbury being subjected to the whims of a man that will not be open about financial matters, and who cannot relate to people as a pastor should. At a Sunday evening Mass some months back, he made everyone repeat vast sections of the responses because he did not feel that they were saying them as they should. I know of people present that day who will never return to that Church while Fr. Searson is still there.

What is the future of the parish and of the school? Do I have to deny a Catholic education to large numbers of children next year,

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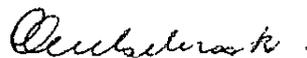
including as a matter of principle my own daughter? Should I seek legal advice immediately in order to protect my own future? Should I refuse to countersign any financial statements with the parish priest? How do I share my concerns with Fr. Searson without causing even more bad feeling or should I just sit back and wait?

I trust that you will understand my request for this letter not to be discussed with Fr. Searson at this time, as I am trying to seek advice and counsel from you in order to find ways in which to allow my school to survive as well as to find some ways in which to act as an intermediary for the many people in Sunbury who have had all that they can take.

Thanking you for your time and patience in reading this letter,

I remain,

yours respectfully,



Anthony Aulsebrook