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*Sunbury Catholic Parish Centre**St Michael, Bulla**Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Sunbury**St Anne, West Sunbury*TELEPHONE:
744 1060PARISH CENTRE
51 Macedon Street
Sunbury 3429
P.O. Box 300
18/5/'82.

Your Grace,

This letter is a formal request asking that I be allowed remain in the Parish of Sunbury for another two years, if at all possible.

I am well aware that Diocesan needs at times necessitate changes that just cannot be helped. I was well aware of this when asked to leave Scoresby, even though I was heavily committed to the homeless youth project that we had nursed to the stage of birth. As I am now in my second year, my request therefore means a four year term as an Assistant Priest, and that I not be considered for re-appointment until January 1985.

Contrary to what many people think, I am particularly happy here in Sunbury. I have developed a definite liking for the town itself, and I have found a very open and supportive parish community. Whilst acknowledging that Peter Searson and I are poles apart in so many ways, and whilst acknowledging that there have been times of severe tension and high feelings, time has shown that we can at least mutually co-exist graciously. Generally, we both go our own way ministering to the needs of the community as we see them. Obviously what I see as needs and ways of answering them, and what he sees and the way he goes about it is different, and at times necessarily conflicting. But, as I understand things today, that is simply the general situation in our rather polarised Church today, and unfortunately because of the polarisations some poor parishes are exposed to quite a confusing situation, as is the case here in Sunbury.

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I will touch on the parish situation later, but I wish now to return to my original reason for writing. There are so many reasons why I believe I should stay in Sunbury longer than the general short life of an Assistant Priest. The general situation of the parish demands some constancy. I have asked people to continue, despite difficulties, to remain active within the parish community. I spend quite a considerable amount of my time counselling angry and disallusioned parishioners who see opting out as the only way to cope with the tension. I always encourage them to remain within the parish and try to keep the parish worthwhile. If in fact I, who have asked them to hold on in the hope of something better eventually, accept another position, I am simply doing what I am asking them not to do. Those who currently trust me would then be highly unlikely to go through it all with someone new. After all, he too would up and leave them in a couple of years as well. I believe in fairness to the many people who I have pleaded with to keep being involved, that I should remain to be some source of strength and leadership.

Whereas a change in Parish Priests would take away this particular need for me to remain, there are also other factors involved despite the fact that Peter Searson or anyone else is the Pastor of Sunbury.

I have committed myself, or am in the process of committing myself (and hence this letter) to a number of projects that by their very nature need a substantial period of time to get set up, established, and running before I can leave with any confidence that they will be continued by the community.

The first reason is that we are commencing the Catechumenate in a few weeks time. I do not need to spell out to you how much time and effort is required to doing this properly. Fortunately, at this stage of parish life we have the potential to implement it properly. This is largely due to the fact that I have conducted two weekly Adult Education sessions a week since I have been in Sunbury, despite the aggressive opposition of Peter. This year's topic has been the Rites

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of Christian Initiation. We have studied the theology, history, and possibility of these rites in considerable detail. We have quite a large core group of excellent parishioners who have been involved in the Adult Education, and they will provide a substantial part of the soon to be formed Catechumenate Team. Much to my surprise and delight, Peter has given permission to go ahead. Needless to say, I don't wish to lose such a marvellous opportunity to do something so potentially good for the parish, something that he will actually support and also be actively involved in. As you are aware, this program or process is geared to a 12 months calendar, and one could hardly expect it to be on its feet and self-sufficient after only one year of operating. So, if I was shifted in January, not only would the intial Catechumenate program be left up in the air, but there would be no hope of it gaining a regular and normal acceptance within the parish on the long term basis.

My other main reason is that I have begun to be involved in a very committed way with both our Church and our community Youth. I was fortunate, that last year we had a Josephite Sister, Shirley Condon, who was active in running our Youth activities in the parish, while also being in charge of the Sunbury Youth Council. Shirley this year is doing the Pastoral Institute course, so I have had to take over from her excellent work. As well, our other key youth leaders were lost to the group either because of commitments or moving from the area. So I have had to start with a completely new team of adult leaders (fortunately about a dozen), but it means that they have to have some leadership and experience before they could look after our Youth with any confidence.

As well as parish youth, I am chairman of the local C.Y.S.S. program and quite actively invloved there. Also I have been asked by the now defunct Sunbury Youth Council to get a community youth group going. There is a Youth Centre lying totally disused because the last attempt at a regular community youth group failed about two years ago. Without going into the statistical data on the need for something of this nature in an isolated town like Sunbury, I will simply leave it to you to appreciate the urgency of something to happen.

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Public meetings were held to try and do something. I deliberately did not attend as I hoped that someone experienced from within the community might come forward to answer the need. I would much rather that I not do this job. But, as so often happens, while there was some general interest there was no-one willing to take it on. As some people were aware that I have some experience in this area, I was then approached and asked to try and get it going. I wish to go ahead for two reasons. Firstly, because the need is great, and secondly, I have always believed it is in the Spirit of Vatican II to be involved in the broader community, and that such activities give good witness to the fact that we, as Church, are genuinely interested in meeting the needs of the entire, not just the Catholic, community.

I am not willing to start something that is so public and that involves a lot of people working hard, and considerable outlay of community money, if in fact I cannot with confidence commit myself to the project for the time necessary to ensure that it succeeds and continues despite my presence. Obviously, the whole thing might fail in the short term. Running community youth groups these days is particularly hazardous, and sometimes they can do more harm than good, if they are simply focusing all the trouble into the one spot. Gang fights, today, are the main reason for disbanding community youth groups. But, although I see that as a genuine worry and possibility, I do not think that it should stop us from at least trying to do something positive for local youth. If not, we are simply failing them without giving them a chance.

I need to approach the Bulla Council for support (which should be forthcoming). The Council has not been happy that the Youth Centre has been lying idle for two years. I am sure that they will only be too happy to see one of their resources being put to use again. However, there is a need for me to commit my services to Council for a substantial period of time. The very nature of youth groups is transitory and fickle. I am sure that I can only expect substantial support if I can offer substantial commitment. As such, I need some confirmation of the probability of my security of tenure here in Sunbury.

As this letter is already getting to the epistle stage, I will stop putting my position. If, however, you need further information of these or other projects that I am trying to get going locally, I would be very happy to drop in one day and chat about it personally. If I have failed to convey my deep hope for remaining as part of this community by what I have already written, I would gladly try to do it in words.

Well, now to the unfortunate and rather depressing saga that seems to have a long-running script that would put many of our television "soapies" to shame - the problem of quite a large section of the parish in the continual conflict with Peter Searson.

I will put it on record that I have not communicated formally with any of the Church authorities this year, despite the fact of at times even writing the letters before deciding not to burden you with more of the saga. I also include this as a secondary aspect of the reason to communicate. If I did not have the other intention, I would still not be writing. But having begun to write, it would be very remiss of me to fail to communicate to you some of the problem here in Sunbury, as I see it.

Firstly, I have not the slightest doubt that Peter is psychologically unsuitable to be the Pastor of this parish, or any other. His behaviour is so strange that it is hard to know where to begin. I could literally write a book on him, and I have been here only a bit over a year ! I must again repeat that I find the man to be gracious to me personally, except on some rather rare occasions where he has let his guard drop. Having said that the external relationship is gracious, I must go on to say that what he says to people over the phone and publicly at meetings is very maligning and definitely character assassination. People who know and trust me dismiss his comments, but it does worry me that some parishioners would naturally accept the word of the Parish Priest, and so be very wary, if not even hostile, to me. I have often been so upset that I have been determined to challenge him, but then I tend to weaken because I know it would do no good whatever, and would harm the external gracious relationship that we have been able to maintain. My other

reason for not confronting him is that I am aware of his sickness and am aware that he utterly denies any allegations that are ever made against him. He simply is never wrong !

I will not bore you with countless individual stories, but I wish to make a very definite and very considered statement of concern.

I have been staggered at the amount and the degree of deep personal hurt that Peter has been able to inflict in the parish. I am constantly hearing in my parish visitation specific individual accounts that are just quite horrifying. It is not that people just generally don't particularly like the man. There is a deep and bitter resentment to him, caused by something he has specifically done to the person concerned. It is not that he makes a public mistake and that everyone hops on the bandwagon and repeats the same story. The accounts are personal, the hurt is invariably deep and there are bitter scars to be seen as a result.

His utter humiliation of women has to be seen to be believed. He revels in reducing people to tears. And the reality is that this happens frequently. Our school principle at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Sr. Mary Gavaghan was in tears on Sunday evening (and she had just returned from a Retreat), and she is so depressed that she has cancelled anything to do with the parish until school resumes next week. Mary is a tough lady who is not a tearful prima donna. It is certainly not the first time she has been so flattened. Twice last year I complained to Joe O'Connell, not on an issue as such, but because Sr. Mary and some staff members, had been humiliated to such a degree that they completely broke down in tears. There are many things that I can ignore, but this situation is not one of them. I can even feel myself getting angry as I punch on the type-writer as I even tell the position. Very bluntly, how many good and faithful people are going to be sacrificed before we get some relief ! What right has one sick man got to inflict so much hurt on to so many people. The person I worry about most is Sr. Mary. I genuinely believe she is heading for a nervous breakdown. Many parishioners share this view, and are very upset at the moment. Mary, coming from stubborn Irish stock and also because she sees this as her personal cross as a religious sister, refuses to give in and move from the parish. However,

I cannot see her lasting another two school terms in her present condition, and I fear that she will end up a broken person.

It is not just Sr. Mary who is severely depressed. The other school principal, Mrs. Carmel Edments, was similiarly reduced to open crying at a meeting held this year in the presence of our regional consultant, Mr. Peter McDonald, and the C.E.O, finance advisor, Mr. Kevin Pitman. Carmel, in very obvious distress, had to leave the meeting, and he did not even flicker any acknowledgement of her distress. It is sad, but I think true, to say that the poor man derives some sick pleasure in these situations. I believe it is all part of his desire to be completely dominant and to wield total and unquestioned power over peoples' lives .

Many staff members, of both schools, have had similiar experiences. There is a very sad bitter and resenful reaction of both school staffs against the man. Many of them cannot even worship in the parish Church because of the bitterness within them. Many seek out my Mass times, but even more don't even take that risk and worship at Salesian College. Fortunately, Fr. Frank Klepp, the Salesian Rector, is well aware of the tensions and has made our alienated parishioners welcome at Rupertswood. However it is sad that they feel they can no longer be part of our worshipping community. What is even sadder, and again the numbers are amazingly high, is the fact that many people are totally alienated and simply have opted out of Church life. It is worth noting that Sacrificial Giving is steadily declining, and Peter said that Easter Dues were "down a third on that of two years ago" ! Unfortunately, people are so disallusioned that they are starting to vote by their pockets, and are registering their protest by withholding or diverting what they would otherwise give to the parish.

I am presently working with one excellent (and gentle) family who are so deflated that they are seriously contemplating selling their house and getting completely out of the parish. Yet another couple (the former President of the Mt. Carmel P & F 's) have just withdrawn their children from the school, because of their dissatisfaction with Peter. The whole Mt. Carmel P & F's have resigned over his financial and

attitudihal running of the school.

I am aware that you are probably receiving quite an amount of mail on this point. May I point out, in Peter's defence, that some (certainly not all) of that is the work of a small and quite vindictive group of parents who are so negatively obsessed with Peter that they have seized on a valid complaint and pursued relentlessly and quite viciously their determination to get rid of him, whatever the cost. Unfortunately the ones suffering are Sr. Mary, our staff, and our children ! These parents unfortunately are simply using the school as the battleground for their personal vendetta with Peter. We hope this will be rectified soon into second term by a re-electing of a totally new and supportive P & F 's committee.

I'm terribly sorry that this is going on and on, but I have touched only the tip of the ice-berg. His communication is non-existent. He has closed himself off in his own world, and his only company sadly appears to be his dog ! All parish organisations are run down. The Pastoral Council has not met since last year, he cancelled our Team Meetings (himself, myself, two Principals & the R.E. Co-Ordinator) after two of our supposedly weekly meetings, the Liturgy Team is a farce, etc, etc..

Another problem is that unfortunately he was caught shop-lifting again. This time it was in a local hardware store earlier this year, but no charges were laid. I only found out about it after I heard it via a conversation in a local hotel. I then confirmed the story with the store manager. I had typed out a short report to you at the time, but decided that in isolation it might appear too petty. As I see it, it is simply yet another manifestation of the mental illness of the man.

One thing I try and do is give you support when people complain about nothing happening from the Cathedral. I try and point out that it is very difficult for you to be able to do anything about it. I point out his position in Canon Law, but I also try and get them to appreciate that simply moving him is only going to perpetuate the

problem in another unfortunate parish. However, they keep asking that surely there must be something that can be done, somewhere where he can go that does less damage. I suggested to Joe O'Connell last year that perhaps an appointment to the Armed Forces could be a solution. I am well aware that his army fantasy is part of his problem, and that doing that to the Armed Forces could be irresponsible. But then, on the other hand it just might work. I only offer it as a suggestion, and in the hope that a pleasant solution may be found.

I can only repeat the urgency of our plea. How many people are going to be broken, how much faith is going to be lost, before something is done? I am sorry that you have to cop the complaints, but I can assure you that the vast majority are certainly warranted.

Thanks for all your great work as our Archbishop. I'm sure that although some get cantakerous in the heat of the moment, that you really do have our prayerful and active support and loyalty.

As a member of the O'Donnell clan, I would also like to thank you for your thoughtfulness and hospitality on Dad's retirement from the Education Commission. I know that both he and Mum were delighted. Unfortunately Dad is not overwell at the moment. He is spending a few days in the Mercy following an angina attack at work a few days ago. But his physician, Bill Heath, has cleared him from any long-term damage. So he will soon be rested and back into the fray.

You must be exhausted, having read this manuscript. It is now well after 2 a.m. and I am exhausted by thinking about it and typing it!

Again, hoping that you can see fit to leave me here in Sunbury until January '85. Contrary to what it may seem, I am really very happy, and love it here in Sunbury.

Yours sincerely,

Phil O'Donnell