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**YOUR OWN
AWINNER AT
WAVERLEY
GARDENS.**

WAVERLEY GARDENS
MEMBER OF THE
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RESIGNATION OF PRIEST IS SOUGHT

Short story again

IN conjunction with the City of Springvale and associated sponsors, Syme Community Newspapers, publisher of The Journal, is once again conducting its Australia Day short story awards.

SCN is contributing \$1500 to the awards, Springvale Council \$550, the Peter Stuyvesant Cultural Foundation \$750, Parker Pens \$500 and Penguin Books \$100.

Entries open today and will close on 5 December. The winners will be announced at an Australia Day function organised by the City of Springvale.

• Full details of the awards are on Page 16.

Parents' action

PARISHIONERS and parents are seeking the dismissal of the parish priest of a Doveton school.

A meeting attended by about 50 people decided to ask for the resignation of Fr Peter Searson and later obtained about 60 signatories to a petition asking for his removal from Holy Family School in Pittosporum Gt.

The meeting is understood to have given the Catholic Archdiocese in Melbourne two weeks to take "the necessary action." The deadline is believed to run out this Friday.

But Father Searson told The Journal last Thursday he had no intention of resigning.

He said: "I have not been approached by either parents or teachers concerning any allegations. There is absolutely no truth or substance to them. I'd take an oath on that to anyone. If people don't like your style, they get stuck into you. Anybody in public life is subjected to that these days."

Although he would not confirm his reasons, the school's principal of three years, Mr Graeme Sleeman, has resigned, a move which has upset not only teachers and parents but the Doveton Cluster of Schools, of which Holy Family is a member.

Approached for comment by The Journal, Mr Sleeman said: "I have no comment at this stage. Parent groups have initiated proceedings. I don't know the outcome."

"My resignation takes effect at the end of the year. I'm seeking a position in catholic education and I

don't have another position to go to. My resignation may have precipitated actions by the parents. I resigned of my own volition, as I have publicly stated."

'Timebomb'

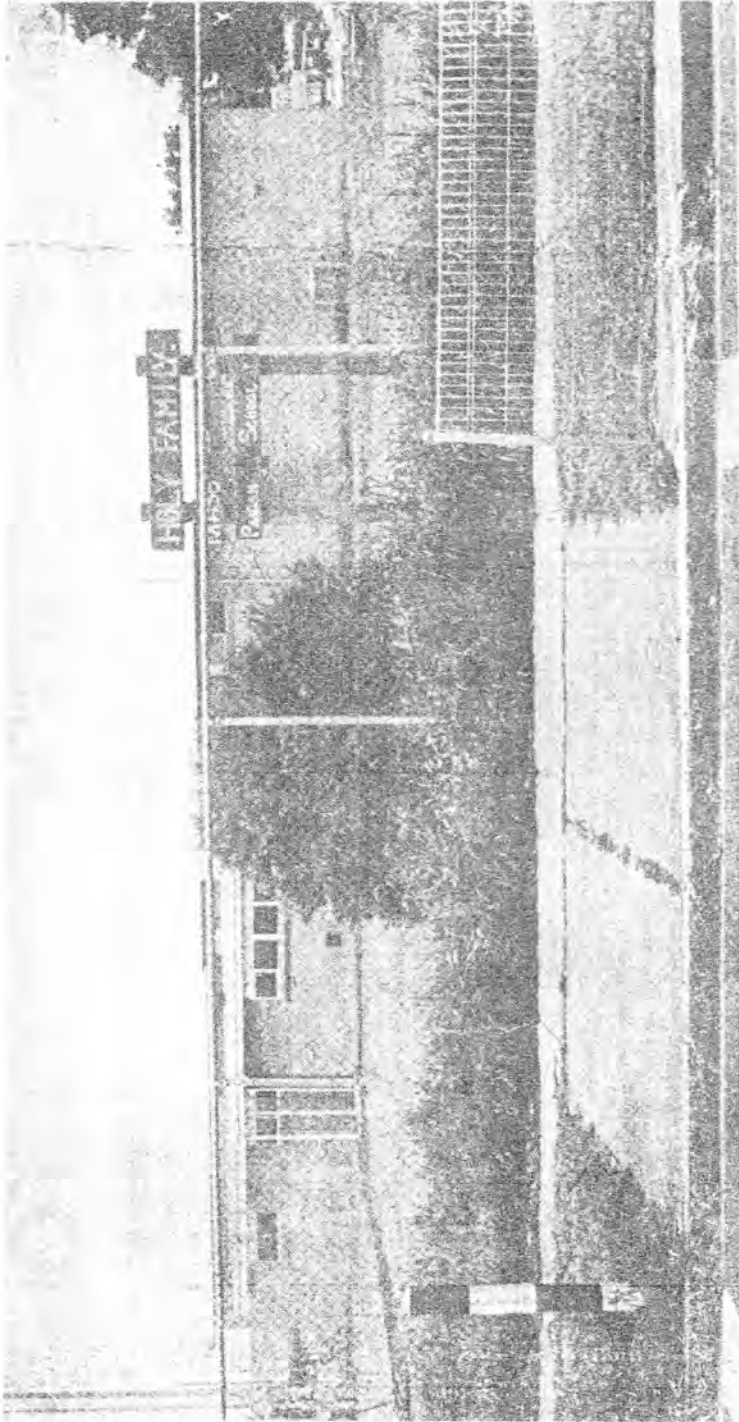
The move to seek Fr Searson's dismissal has split the parish and the situation was described by a Holy Family teacher as being "a timebomb ready to go off especially after the principal resigned without warning."

The teacher said today: "The principal has been a buffer for everyone. He is a bloody fine man and that this community can feel so strongly about a person is fantastic. We would all like him to stay."

The Doveton Cluster, which comprises all principals of member-schools, held an emergency meeting after hearing of Mr Searson's resignation and decided every school would write to parents supporting Mr Sleeman's dedication to education at Holy Family.

One of the newsletters told parents: "The reason's for Graeme's resignation are known only to Graeme and the people directly involved but I, and I know I speak for this school's community, certainly hope that he can be prevailed upon to withdraw his resignation."

The Doveton Cluster of Schools collectively said it highly respected Mr Sleeman for his work at Holy Family and decided to intending all schools in the cluster of his decision.



HOLY Family School at Doveton. . . move to have priest dismissed.

Church protest set Over brothel

HUNDREDS of protesters could be outside Springvale Council chambers tonight to voice their opposition to brothel permit application.

Representatives of 7 churches in Springvale, Dingley and Noble Park are expected to join the protest.

There has been a con-

certed campaign by the churches against the proposal to establish the brothel in Governor Rd, Braeside, and 25,000 leaflets have been circulated to homes throughout the municipality.

Springvale's manager of planning and corporate services, Mr John Moore, will recommend the application be refused and this seems certain to be accepted by the council.

The full story is on Page 3.

Time to clean out for a garage sale!

THE Journal today introduces a new classified advertising section under the heading Garage Sale.

You can make money out of unwanted items gathering dust in the spare room, garage or shed; you can get ready cash by holding a garage sale at the weekend.

In our special introductory offer, you can place your garage sale advertisement in The Journal at only \$1 per line and exchange those unwanted goods for cash.

But you'll have to hurry... the introductory offer will close at the end of November.

Our new Garage Sale listing begins in the classifieds section next week and as a special bonus we'll publish free of charge the first five advertisements phoned through to our classifieds department on 787 0211.

Full details of the offer are given on Page 14 today.

Priest faces claims of child abuse

A CATHOLIC priest suspended this week amid allegations of child-sex abuse had been removed from a previous parish after teachers and parents complained he was taking children out of school for one-on-one sex education classes.

Father Peter Searson, 74, was removed from his position at the Holy Family Parish at Doveton after Melbourne Archbishop George Pell confirmed that the church's independent commissioner into clergy sexual abuse was investigating the allegations.

Fr Searson had been the parish priest at Doveton since 1984.

Another priest once at Doveton, Fr Victor Rubeo, 63, pleaded guilty in Ringwood Magistrate's Court last October to charges of indecently assaulting two boys.

The *Sunday Herald Sun* has learned that allegations of child-sex abuse were first raised against Fr Searson at his Doveton parish in 1986.

But according to police sources, he had been interviewed by community policing squad police at Sunbury

By WAYNE JONES

in 1982 following complaints from a lay teacher and parishioners.

Fr Searson was the parish priest at Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Sunbury. He subsequently transferred to the Doveton parish.

According to police, the parents of the alleged Sunbury victim decided against taking action and charges were never laid.

At the time, Fr Searson denied the allegations, but conceded to a ban which prevented him from taking children into the confessional and his presbytery.

Parishioners and parents at Doveton sought to have Fr Searson removed in 1986 following allegations that he had interfered with several young children.

A meeting of about 50 people at Doveton's Pittosporum Gve school called for his resignation and later obtained more than 70 signatories to a petition to the Melbourne Archdiocese requesting Fr Searson's removal.

No action was taken and the school's principal resigned.

Three years later, a school teacher who had acted on complaints from students and reported Fr Searson to the church allegedly was sacked.

Police yesterday confirmed Fr Searson had been interviewed over the alleged physical assault of two boys this year.

It was alleged by one boy that Fr Searson had struck him violently using both hands.

At least three alleged victims are seeking compensation from the church.

A spokesperson for Melbourne Archbishop George Pell said yesterday Dr Pell would not comment.

The church ordered Fr Searson to take leave until the allegations had been investigated.

The Office of the Independent Commissioner was established by Dr Pell last year.

Earlier this week, its independent commissioner, Peter O'Callaghan QC, urged people not to judge Fr Searson until the allegations had been investigated.

The *Sunday Herald Sun* was unable to contact Fr Searson.

IN BRIEF

Alert on stolen drugs

POLICE have warned that drugs in a medical bag stolen from a parked car at Chadstone could be fatal if they are used.

The bag, stolen from a Nissan Patrol parked in Midlothian St, Chadstone, contained medical equipment, syringes and drugs. Anyone with information about the theft should contact Malvern police on 9822 2487 or Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000.

Shooter's body in lake

THE body of a 24-year-old man who went missing yesterday at Browns Lake at Donald, in the state's north-west, has been found. Police said the man was duck shooting with family and friends when he disappeared in the lake.

Hiker rescued in Grampians

A SEARCH for a bushwalker missing in the south-west Grampians near Castle Rock was called off after the 24-year-old St Kilda man was found safe late yesterday. Police said he had built a campfire and the smoke was spotted by an air rescue crew.

Leg severed by train

A 50-year-old woman had her left leg severed when she was hit by a train at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney yesterday.

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NEWS



Office blast - Page 5

NEWS



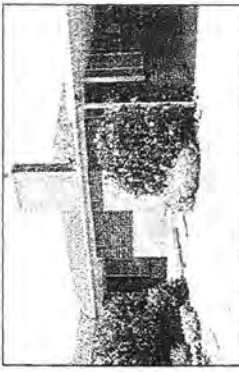
Searching for help - Page 14

FOCUS



Improve your place - Page 21-23

HOME



Discover this gem - Page 27

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PRIEST STOOD OVER

Priest, 74, suspended over sex claims

Priest, 74, suspended over sex claims

THE Catholic Church has suspended Dove-ton's Holy Family Parish priest Father Peter Searson pending investigations into allegations of sexual abuse.

Last week Melbourne Archbishop George Pell confirmed the priest has been removed from pastoral work indefinitely. The 'serious' allegations are to be investigated by the church's independent commission into clergy sexual abuse.

Father Searson, 74, has been parish priest at Doveton since 1984. In 1986 parishioners and parents asked he be removed.

In 1982 the priest had been interviewed by Sun-bury police following complaints from teachers

and parishioners. The parents of the alleged victim did not press charges and police did not proceed.

Father Searson denied the charges then, and again at Doveton in 1986.

At the time he said he would take an oath to his innocence.

Again no action was taken and Holy Family school principal, Graeme Sleeman resigned.

A letter of complaint was sent by Doveton parishioners in 1986 to then vicar-general Bishop Hilton Deakin. Again no action was taken.

Last Sunday Doveton parishioners were stunned when replacement priest Father Arthur Pinto read an archdiocesan letter from the pulpit, telling the flock their priest had been stood down pending the inquiry.

Page 8 - THE EXAMINER, Tuesday, March 25, 1997

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STOOD DOWN

By Lee Opitz

DOVETON parish priest Father Peter Searson has been relieved of his duties at the Holy Family Catholic church and school until an internal investigation into serious allegations about his behaviour is completed.

While the allegations have not been specified, Father Searson, 73, has been asked to "co-operate" with the Catholic Church's independent commissioner, Mr Peter O'Callaghan, who was appointed in October last year to investigate claims of sexual abuse by the clergy and lay people under the control of the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, the Most Rev Dr George Pell, recalled Father Searson on March 14 and placed him on "administrative leave" for an unspecified time.

Father Arthur Pinto has been appointed as his temporary replacement.

It is not the first time unconfirmed allegations have been levelled at Father Searson.

In October 1986, about 60 parents and parishioners at Holy Family signed a petition demanding his dismissal.

Father Searson, who had taken up his position at the church in 1984, refused to resign.

At that time, he told the *Journal*: "I have not been approached by either parents or teachers concerning any

allegations. There is absolutely no truth or substance to them. I'd take an oath on that to anyone. If people don't like your style, they get stuck into you. Anybody in public life is subjected to that these days."

The 1986 move to dismiss him split the parish and coincided with the resignation of the school's principal, Mr Graeme Sleeman. One staff member described the atmosphere as a "time bomb waiting to go off".

The petition to have Father Searson sacked was squashed by the then acting regional bishop, the Most Rev Hilton Deakin, who said "it was a private matter" and "any talk of resignation is in Father Searson's hands".

The *Journal* attempted to speak to Father Searson about the latest allegations on Tuesday last week following an anonymous tip-off that he was still at the church.

However, a man answering the door, said he was "unavailable" for comment.

The Archbishop said he urged people not to rush to judgement until Mr O'Callaghan had the opportunity to investigate the allegations, complete his inquiries and make appropriate recommendations.

The Archbishop said he hoped the inquiry would be resolved "without delay" and emphasised that, until then, it was essential to keep an open mind.

Deakin's criticism of Searson

Herald Sun
20 March 1997, page 14

Priest sex inquiry

A CATHOLIC priest has been suspended after an official sex abuse body received "serious" allegations against him.

Melbourne Archbishop George Pell yesterday confirmed Father Peter Searson had been removed from parish work indefinitely.

Father Searson, formerly of Doveton's Holy Family Parish, has been ordered to go on administrative leave until the allegations have been investigated.

Shocked parishioners first heard the news when replacement priest Father Arthur Pinto read them a letter from Dr Pell last weekend.

The investigation is being conducted by the church's independent commissioner into clergy sexual abuse, Peter

O'Callaghan, QC. In a written statement, Dr Pell said Father Searson would be required to assist Mr O'Callaghan in his inquiries "into certain serious allegations that have been referred to him".

He said he hoped the inquiry would be completed quickly and urged people not to judge Father Searson until the allegations had been investigated.

Dr Pell created the Office of Independent Commissioner last year to give people someone to contact with complaints against priests and other members of the church under the control of the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

The commissioner is empowered to compel priests to appear before any inquiry.

This news item is based
on a media statement
issued by ROYCE COMMUNICATIONS,
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