

Into the Deep

Stop Press – Orthodox Priest Asked To Leave

Bishop Coffey summoned Fr John Speekman, parish priest of Morwell, to a meeting with him on Tuesday 29th April in Sale.

Upon arrival the Bishop informed Fr Speekman in the presence of Morwell Parish Finance Committee member Andrew Panther who accompanied him, “the current circumstances are not acceptable” and that he “should leave the Sale diocese”. Also present at the meeting taking notes was the Vicar General Monsignor Dan McCartin.

The Bishop indicated that he had recently spoken to Archbishop George Pell and he was confident that a position could be made available in the Sydney Archdiocese.

This suggestion begs the question as to why Fr Speekman cannot remain in the Sale Diocese but can apparently take up an appointment in the Sydney Archdiocese!

When Fr Speekman asked why, he was told there would be no further discussion or tabling of charges/reasons that afternoon. Fr Speekman respectfully requested that he was owed the decency of being told directly from the Bishop the reasons/charges, and that he was being denied any kind of natural justice. The Bishop indicated that the “timing would be of his choosing” in making a written statement of reason.

When Fr Speekman indicated that he would not leave of his own accord and that he would appeal any such action, the Bishop indicated that he would begin a formal process to remove him. Still no reasons were given.

Morwell parishioners reacted quickly. With only a day’s notice, fifty of them drove to Sale on Thursday 1st May. They gathered at the Bishop’s Office with the intention of demonstrating their support of Fr Speekman and demanding a reason for the Bishop’s intention to remove him.

A number of parishioners from other parishes in the diocese attended to support this popular priest who speaks fearlessly on the teachings of the Church.

Along with this latest issue, Morwell parishioners are becoming exasperated at the Bishop’s decree that exists in Morwell, separating the two primary schools from the parish. No reason for the decree remaining in place has been given to Fr Speekman, the parishioners or school parents. After a number of written requests by the Parish Advisory Council, the Bishop refuses to remove the decree almost a year after its imposition.

Unfortunately the Bishop was away from Sale on the day but the demonstration was attended by WIN News, ABC radio and Gippsland Times reporters. When questioned by a WIN News reporter, the Bishop’s Office replied “No comment”.

Into the Deep predicts that this latest move by the Bishop will lead to further action far and wide. Perhaps it will bring to light the motives behind some of the decisions being made in this diocese. The June issue of Into the Deep will no doubt contain further updates.