

10/27/00

Fr. Richard McGurn
c/o Chicago Province Jesuits
2050 North Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60614

Dear Father McGurn,

We spoke on the 25th of September concerning the relationship between Fr. Donald McGuire and our son [REDACTED] who lives in Chicago. [REDACTED] is 20 years old and the second oldest of our six children. I stated that my wife and I are very concerned about the influence that Fr. McGuire has in our son's life. You requested details which we are supplying in this letter. On the same day that we talked, [REDACTED] came home from Chicago to spend a week with the family. After spending a week with [REDACTED], we are just as convinced that something is not as it should be. We met with [REDACTED] at great length and discussed our concerns about Fr. McGuire; surprisingly he defended Fr. McGuire in every case but two. [REDACTED] assured us that our concerns are but a misunderstanding. We felt it prudent and honest to tell [REDACTED] that we had contacted you and that this letter was forthcoming. We were worried that by addressing these issues with you, our relationship with our son would be damaged. After discussing the issues with [REDACTED], it is our assessment that the damage has already been done over the course of this year. [REDACTED] chose to return to Chicago to live out his commitment to Mission Fides, Fr. McGuire's retreat ministry, and to study under Father McGuire's instruction.

The purpose of this letter is to inform Fr. McGuire's superiors of his behavior towards us and our son with the hope that it will bring correction into Fr. McGuire's life as deemed necessary. When we addressed our concerns about [REDACTED] with Fr. McGuire, we were taken aback by his arrogance, condescension, deceit and his self appointed role as a guardian for our son. It is our belief that Fr. McGuire has willfully usurped our role in our son's life, has created a dependent relationship between our son and himself, and has divided our family. We hope to illustrate the validity of these accusations in the following pages.

In August 1999, [REDACTED] agreed to serve Fr. McGuire at no cost for a year at the request of Dr. [REDACTED], a family friend. The understanding was that because of Fr. McGuire's poor health, he required extensive help from an assistant in order to keep up with his demanding retreat schedule. Our son, [REDACTED] would be expected to provide whatever assistance was necessary. The agreement was that [REDACTED], then 19 years old, would stay out of college one

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year to serve. [REDACTED] and I agreed that this would be a wonderful opportunity for [REDACTED] to serve the Lord. He left Augusta with Fr. McGuire in late August, 1999.

Communication between our family and [REDACTED] throughout the year consisted mainly of emails and phone calls. The year began with some extensive emails about retreats in Alaska and Israel. [REDACTED] described the retreats in depth. After about a month his emails grew much shorter, but they still came about two or three per month except when they traveled to India in the fall and Mexico in the spring. Throughout the year his phone calls were very brief and infrequent.

We were able to visit with him three times during the year. Once when [REDACTED] came home for a week at Christmas, another during Fr. McGuire's California retreat in the spring, and a third when we met in St. Louis in the summer. We made the Ignatian retreat in California with Fr. McGuire in March and planned to spend some time with [REDACTED] the day before the retreat actually started. The only opportunity we had to speak with [REDACTED] alone was when Fr. McGuire was meeting with people at the retreat. Going out without Father was not an option, according to [REDACTED]. Not that Father was unpleasant company, but we desired to spend time alone with our son. This was a realistic expectation in light of the fact that very little time had been spent communicating since [REDACTED]'s departure from us in August, 1999.

In June we visited [REDACTED] again in St. Charles, Missouri. Our family was attending a conference in St. Louis at the same time Fr. McGuire was recuperating from knee surgery at the home of his surgeon in St. Charles. We spent one afternoon and evening with Fr. McGuire and [REDACTED]. After dinner we were able to speak with [REDACTED] alone as Fr. McGuire had his [REDACTED], there to attend to his needs. [REDACTED] seemed a bit agitated and uncomfortable throughout our talk. We asked about college plans since his year of service was about finished. He said that he had no immediate plans other than he definitely was not going to return to [REDACTED]. Additionally he said that there had been no free time during the year for him and Father to look at schools. [REDACTED] stated that there was no replacement as yet to take his place in serving Fr. McGuire; so his intention was to continue serving Father indefinitely. During the conversation he characterized his closest friends as squandering their lives at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. We were surprised at his callous appraisal of the choices his friends have made and that he was overly critical of his friends. The sense we had upon leaving was that [REDACTED] just wasn't himself - he seemed uncomfortable talking with us, was relegating the selection of college to the discernment of Fr. McGuire, and he had turned on his friends.

By August 2000 Dr. [REDACTED] had arranged for another young man to accompany Father. In early August our son called to tell us that he had made plans to stay in Chicago and serve Mission Fides for the next semester and possibly stay through summer 2001. During this year, rather than attend college, he would study texts recommended by Fr. McGuire and write critiques. [REDACTED] said that study program was to prepare him for his academic life.

We were not peaceful with this plan. It was not something he had talked to us about before this time. We would have preferred that he should leave Chicago at least for a while and pray through this decision. At this time his only counselor was Fr. McGuire. We advised him that he needed to seek other counsel in a more neutral setting. We recommended that he evaluate his discernment with Father Ted Hochstatter, a family friend, and Father Brett Brannen, Vocations Director for the Diocese of Savannah. We told him that we didn't see how Father McGuire could be totally unbiased since he would be benefiting from [REDACTED]'s decision to stay. [REDACTED] said that he was hurt that we regarded Father in such a way. [REDACTED] was not open to other counsel and said he would talk to Father McGuire about his plans.

Up to this juncture we had not spoken to Father McGuire about our concerns. Our approach to raising our children has always been to allow them, as they grew in reason, to make their own decisions after receiving input. At this point [REDACTED] did not seem to be open to our input or that of mutually respected priests. We found this new development in our relationship with him very distressing.

In mid August Father McGuire came to Augusta to give a retreat. At that time [REDACTED] was still traveling with him along with [REDACTED], Father's new assistant. We went out to the retreat center to coordinate plans for the three days he would be in town after the retreat. He agreed to come to dinner on his Dad's birthday and to try to spend a day with us. At the time he did not know if he would be able to spend the night because Father might need him. Father McGuire's accommodations for the three days were at Dr. [REDACTED]'s home which is fifteen minutes from our home. Privately Mrs. [REDACTED] had told us that they were very willing to meet any of Father McGuire's personal needs so that [REDACTED] could stay at our home. When the retreat ended [REDACTED] did not stay at our home. He said that Father needed him at the [REDACTED]'s. His arrangement there was to sleep on a mattress on the floor in Father's room. We were quite disappointed with this, but [REDACTED] was adamant about this plan.

We met with [REDACTED] one evening to discuss the details of his decision to stay in Chicago. We brought up the issues of income (at the time he was volunteering his services to Mission Fides for room and board), housing, education, lack of peer relationships, and his refusal to get third party advice. When we tried to talk to [REDACTED], he was not open to putting his arguments on the table. He appeared emotionally overwrought and said he had to go because Father needed him at the [REDACTED]. We have not experienced this behavior in our son before. We have always been able to sit down and talk through issues. We decided that it was necessary for us to meet with Father McGuire and voice our concerns about [REDACTED]'s relationship with Father and about [REDACTED]'s future plans.

[REDACTED] and I met with Father privately the night before they left town on August 17, 2000. Our expectation was that Father would understand our concerns and would cooperate with us to ensure that [REDACTED] was making his decisions freely. Even if he didn't agree with us, we felt he would honor our wishes as parents. We were shocked to find that Father was adversarial, acting

as though he had to protect [REDACTED] from us. At this point, we wish to assert that we have always had an open and honest relationship with our son, and there should have been no need for him to be defended from us. During the meeting Father McGuire said some things that we feel are essential to pass on to you. We have been extremely distressed by his response to us that evening. We wrote down his statements the next day and are including them here.

On Communication:

Father said, "You shouldn't call [REDACTED]. You should leave him alone. Support him by love and prayers. Don't ask him to call." When we voiced our concern about [REDACTED]'s lack of communication over the year, Father said [REDACTED] had communicated with long phone calls, a couple of hours per month, and that he had encouraged communication. That was not our recollection. It was our experience that whenever [REDACTED] did call, he would talk for a short time and then say that Father needed him and end the call. Father said that was not true and said, "[REDACTED] just didn't want to talk to you." When we said that [REDACTED] needed to communicate to be part of the family, Father McGuire said angrily, "Then you should never have let him come with me."

On Parenting:

He went on to say, "I know your children don't talk to you, but [REDACTED] talks to me." Here he seemed to be trying to intimidate us. We found this very offensive. He doesn't know a thing about our family. He has never even been in our home. We sometimes have to shoo kids who want to talk off of our bed late at night so we can go to sleep. How can we raise six children in a Catholic household and not talk to them?

Furthermore he said, "You have really hurt [REDACTED]. He came to me in a very hurt condition and in grave moral condition. I have heard his confession. He talks to me. ...It took him three months for him to open up to me." He said that he was still working with [REDACTED] on this. He also said that he is concerned about our other children and their grave moral condition. Their condition is no business of his; moreover, they have proven to be exemplary in many regards. Fr. McGurn, you are welcome to question all our children at length to examine their condition.

On [REDACTED]'s Freedom:

By now the conversation was getting scary, we were very concerned about what type of person we were dealing with. We were wondering what kind of hold he had over [REDACTED]. Just how much of what Father McGuire said did [REDACTED] believe?

We asked Father McGuire if [REDACTED] was free to leave Chicago. He said, "Oh yes, at any time." We then said that we wanted [REDACTED] to come on our family vacation at the end of August. Father then contradicted himself and said, "No. [REDACTED] is not ready yet."

Who is Fr. McGuire to say if our son is ready to go on vacation or not? We were sickened at his remarks. It was never our understanding that we were sending him with Fr. McGuire to

receive psychological counsel. We believe that Father took advantage of the service relationship to enter a counseling relationship with [REDACTED]. We don't believe that [REDACTED] at nineteen had the wisdom to be objective in the relationship. At this age people are very impressionable and easily swayed. Prior to his service with Fr. McGuire, [REDACTED] had been a very well adjusted young man. We do not agree with Father McGuire's assessment of [REDACTED]'s spiritual and psychological condition. He was not the deeply wounded person as portrayed by Father McGuire. He was a fun-loving brother to his three brothers and two sisters. He always led his siblings by his example of Christian character. Some of his interests and achievements are: Eagle Scout, Vice President of high school senior class, Honors Program student at ASU, altar server, co-founder of a weekly high school prayer meeting, Youth Minister assisting in youth retreats in the Savannah Diocese, an accomplished guitarist, and four years of junior varsity and varsity soccer. He was surrounded with very loyal friends (male and female). He possessed a deep love for Jesus, Scripture, the church, the Eucharist, praise and worship. Simply, he was not a deeply wounded young man.

We expressed our concern for [REDACTED]'s lack of freedom for interaction with family and friends during his time of service with Father McGuire. Father said indignantly, "I don't need [REDACTED]. I could get 10 people to serve with a single phone call." Yet [REDACTED] was not able to come home for his brother's graduation which is the only commitment we had with [REDACTED] before he left. When we asked him to come home for the graduation, [REDACTED] said he talked with Father and that there was no way Father could do without him at that time due to knee surgery. We had even lined up one of Fr. McGuire's former assistants to substitute for [REDACTED].

Father stated emphatically that he had "stood on his head" to get us together with [REDACTED] several times during the year. We don't know what he means by standing on his head. Perhaps it was fact that Mission Fides bought his plane ticket at Christmas. Surely that was not too much to ask for five months of free service. The other two times we saw [REDACTED], California and St. Louis, were paid for by us.

On Service:

Later in our conversation, Father compared what [REDACTED] was doing to his entry into the Jesuit novitiate. Father told of his own loneliness and desire to go home when he joined the Jesuits. He said he chose not to deprive his mother of the grace of the suffering mother. We believe he was trying to indirectly communicate a message to us. We said that [REDACTED] had not joined an order, and we didn't see serving Father McGuire as [REDACTED]'s vocation in life. Father slammed his hand down angrily and said, "You're wrong! This is a vocation." Our response was, "Serving you is a vocation? No it's not." Father snapped back, "That's where you're wrong. I'm standing on sound theological ground!"

[REDACTED] and I are not theologians, and we are not intimidated by those who say they are. Even if serving Father McGuire were a vocation, we do not want our son serving anyone who slams the table and indignantly tells us he is theologically sound. I am sure any parent would agree with us.

On Seeking Other Counsel:

As stated earlier, when we had asked [REDACTED] to seek other counsel about his decision, we had suggested two priests for him to speak with, Father Ted Hochstatter and Father Brett Brannen. During our conversation, Father McGuire brought these names up. He was incensed that Father Hochstatter had called his house for [REDACTED] [at our request] and had not asked to speak to Father. Father McGuire went on to make some disparaging remarks about Father Hochstatter and Father Brannen. He questioned their ability to provide guidance to [REDACTED]. Talking of these priests he extended his right hand on the table and said, "I have their spirituality in my hands." We were shocked that he judged them incompetent, but moreover, of the exalted position he felt he had in the lives of these priests. Never have we heard any cleric speak with such arrogance. He didn't say, "You may be comforted to know that I am the spiritual director of these two priests." He said, "I have their spirituality in my hands."

[I later spoke with both Father Hochstatter and Father Brannen and asked if what Father McGuire said was true. Both denied Father McGuire's claims concerning his supposed oversight of their spiritual lives. Father Brannen said that this was sounding very much like a cult. Father Brannen has offered his service in providing a place for [REDACTED] to discern his vocation at his parish in Macon, Georgia. He heartily disagreed with Father McGuire's assessment of [REDACTED]'s wholeness and of his family ties.]

In the same context, Fr. McGuire said, "I have care for [REDACTED]'s soul." This assertion is unacceptable to us, his parents.

[REDACTED] and I went home from that meeting with Fr. McGuire and stayed up most of the night praying. We were as distressed as we have ever been in our married life. The priest our son has served for a year had taken ownership of our son. He was loaded with credentials but void of respect for family.

[REDACTED]'s Sleeping Accommodations:

Lastly we wish to discuss [REDACTED]'s sleeping accommodations this past year. We were told last summer that [REDACTED] would live in an apartment in Chicago which is also the Mission Fides office. The apartment is about 15 minutes away from Father's house, a rather large house with living room, sitting room, library etc.. One of the most disturbing aspects of the past year is the revelation that my son has often spent the night in the same cramped room with Father McGuire. [REDACTED] told me that he has even shared the bed in Father McGuire's room, with Father McGuire under the sheets and [REDACTED] on top of the blankets. As a parent, I find the behavior of this priest unacceptable, even repugnant to write about. We find this more than imprudent on Father McGuire's part. Is this priest naive? Doubtful. Could the Jesuit order not provide Father McGuire 24 hour medical attention if needed? Does a 19 year old young man have to sleep in the same bed with a priest (albeit outside the covers) because the Jesuits could not provide a room in that house for a nurse or for his assistant? Could sleeping provisions not be made in the sitting room? Could they not obtain a monitoring device like parents use to monitor children? It seems

that after having diabetes all these years he is incapable of checking his own blood; a task even teenage diabetics seem to manage on their own. [REDACTED], a registered nurse, and I are suspicious of the arguments about Fr. McGuire's frail condition and therefore the need for 24 hour in-room care. There was absolutely no reason for my son to stay in the room with Fr. McGuire in Chicago or Augusta in Dr. [REDACTED]'s house.

We have been told by Dr. [REDACTED] that Fr. McGuire is too involved in the spiritual formation of the Missionaries of Charity, the Carmelites or the faithful Mission Fides retreatants to monitor his own health. The ministry would suffer without these young assistants is the other argument I hear from Dr. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] and I believe that Jesus can carry out His ministry with or without Fr. McGuire. We are opposed to young men staying with this priest around the clock as care givers. Fr. McGuire's care is not more important than the formation of my son and other young men. I truly believe that my son's conscience has been deadened to allow himself to share a bed with this priest. For what purpose I ask you?

We are gravely concerned about what we see happening in [REDACTED] because of Fr. McGuire's influence. We believe [REDACTED] has opened up too much to Father and allowed him too much control in his life. [REDACTED] thinks very highly of Father and has said that he will be loyal to him and serve Mission Fides "for the rest of my life". [REDACTED] was sent by us to serve one year only. In August 1999 we were comfortable with what little we knew about Father as an orthodox teacher. Anyone who gives retreats to Mother Theresa must be a good influence on our son, right? We were mistaken and perhaps taken in by our own pride that our son would be asked to serve Fr. McGuire.

Now we see Fr. McGuire as someone who borrows something and eventually thinks it is his. This is evidenced as he stands between us and our son. We are not sure how things will work out with our son, or how to build that trust back that has been eroded. We are fully aware that our son is an adult with free will. We can only pray that God will show him where he is in error. We felt it absolutely necessary to speak to the proper authorities in Father McGuire's life about what we are experiencing. With all sincerity and truth we submit this letter to you for your consideration.

Thank you for taking the time to attend to our letter. We are very hopeful that the truth will become evident by God's infinite grace and mercy.

Sincerely,

cc: Father Ted Hochstatter
Father Brett Brannen