



DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

February 19, 1999

Most Reverend Archbishop Csaba Ternyak
The Congregation of the Clergy
Piazza Pio XII
00193 Rome, Italy

PROT. NO. 98002758

Dear Archbishop Ternyak:

I write in response to your letter of January 8, 1999, in reference to Reverend Gordon MacRae.

Father MacRae is a priest of the Diocese of Manchester who was ordained on June 5, 1982. He served as an associate pastor in two different parishes of the Diocese until July 1st of 1987 when he took a voluntary leave of absence from priestly ministry. Father MacRae is currently serving a prison sentence at the State Penitentiary in Concord, New Hampshire. He was convicted by civil courts of several counts of sexual molestation of a minor in 1994. While I have been Bishop of this Diocese only for the past six months, I have discussed this unfortunate case with diocesan officials who were involved in it at the time, and I would offer you the following information in regard to it.

Beginning in the Fall of 1983, and up to and including the time of his conviction of the abovementioned felony, several different accusations were made against Father MacRae by different young men. They involved different levels of sexual activity, some more serious than others, but always they involved inappropriate sexual conduct. From the first of these accusations the Diocese required Father MacRae to undergo psychological counseling. The level of this counseling gradually increased and ended with long-term inpatient care with the Servants of the Paraclete in Jemez Springs, New Mexico, from March of 1989 to April of 1990. In 1988, during his leave of absence, he was formally suspended from priestly ministry as a result of the public nature of one of these charges.

Subsequent to the termination of treatment with the Servants of the Paraclete he had decided to stay in New Mexico, and was working for the Servants in a non-priestly role on various administrative duties at that treatment facility. It was at this time that formal civil legal charges were placed against him which ultimately resulted with his conviction.

The extent of the guilt or innocence of Gordon MacRae is difficult to establish, even though the civil court found him guilty. He did admit to diocesan officials inappropriate caressing and kissing of a young man in at least one situation. In his civil trial he denied the more serious events. The psychological treatment which he was required to undergo appeared to arrive at differing conclusions. The Servants of the Paraclete, where he spent the longest period of time, testified that, "We did not consider Gordon to be a sexual offender". The professionals at Jemez Springs indicated that he had had "limited sexual activity with adults before ordination, some sexual activity with adult prostitutes after ordination, as well as having a young man sit on his lap, hugging him and attempting to kiss him, and imprudent conversations with another young man who said he would do anything for money. We were aware of no other sexual offenses." As a result of this assessment, these experts concluded that Gordon was not someone who repeatedly abused others in an illegal fashion.

On the other hand, an evaluation that had been done in December of 1988 by the House of Affirmation in Whitinsville, Massachusetts, after a five-day testing period, arrived at a different conclusion. They believed that Father MacRae was a child offender with little conscience. In large part they based their conclusions on interviews with Father MacRae. One quote from that report is sufficient to indicate the basis of their conclusion: "Father MacRae reported several inappropriate sexual encounters with adolescents. Although he experienced intense shame and guilt for the behavior, he indicated that he does not feel in control of such behavior." It is important to note that this report indicates that Father MacRae admitted to these inappropriate encounters. The report also indicated that Father MacRae acknowledged that he was addicted to alcohol, sex, smoking, eating, and spending money. The professionals at Jemez Springs were critical of the conclusions of this report in their later treatment of Gordon MacRae. They apparently felt that the five-day assessment period was too short a time to arrive at the truth. They further indicated that Father MacRae denied, with them, the very things that he apparently admitted to in the previous assessment. The difficulty, then, of ascertaining the true clinical status of Gordon MacRae is apparent from the discrepancies noted above.

Whatever the truth is about his guilt or innocence, the Diocese of Manchester was in a difficult situation during his public trial. The Diocese supported him privately with funds while at the same time not defending or supporting him in a public way. For example, the Diocese helped to fund his defense. Gordon MacRae feels that some of the statements made by the Diocese at the time were condemnatory and not helpful to him. He feels that the diocese was not sufficiently supportive either publicly or privately. In my judgment the Diocese did its best within a highly inflamed environment.

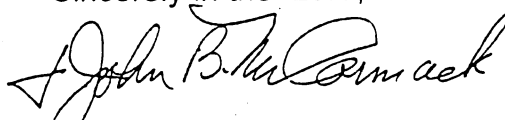
Once he was convicted and sentenced to prison, he made it clear to the Diocese that he did not want to receive visitors from the Church. We respected his wishes, only to be later criticized for not caring about him. Since he has been

in prison the Diocese has provided him a small monthly stipend to allow him to not be wanting in his personal needs. I visited Father MacRae in prison and he continues to be critical of the Diocese for not being more publicly supportive of him in his situation.

Some believe his prison sentence is unduly harsh and lengthy. This is due in part due to the way the law of New Hampshire is written, and also to the public sentiment about such crimes. There are people in prison who are serving much shorter sentences for very serious crimes. Furthermore, it is probable that at the time of his arrest and later conviction that he had his impulses under greater control and was no longer a serious threat to society. His lengthy jail sentence is even more inappropriate, given his rehabilitation. I am sympathetic with Gordon MacRae's concerns in this regard, but do not feel that the Diocese can publicly advocate on his behalf without risking grave public misunderstanding about the seriousness of its understanding with regard to sexual misconduct by clergymen. Furthermore, I believe that the Diocese supported Father MacRae and continues to support him in the most appropriate way possible. His receptivity to this form of care and support is minimal. Hopefully my visits to him will break through his resistance. While I understand his disappointment with his perception of what the Diocese did or could have done, I believe that his criticisms do not hold merit.

If I can provide you further information in this regard, please do not hesitate to call upon me.

Sincerely in the Lord,



John B. McCormack

Bishop of Manchester