

October 26, 1992

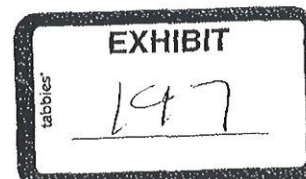
The Rev. William Perri, s.P., Ph.D.  
Clinical Program Director  
St. Michael's Community  
13270 Maple Drive  
St. Louis, MO 63127-1999

Dear Father Perri,

I am requesting that Father Vincent Fitzgerald receive a comprehensive evaluation from St. Michael's for the following reasons:

1. Father Fitzgerald was moved quickly from King's House of Retreats in Henry, Illinois to Orr, Minnesota, 1963 because of an inappropriate involvement with a young girl in that area. There is no written information in our files in regard to this incident. This piece of information about Father Fitzgerald was passed on verbally from one Provincial to the next. The information that I have from the previous Provincials is that the parents agreed at that time to take no action if Father Fitzgerald was moved immediately from that area.

2. In 1974, Father Fitzgerald participated in a clinical pastoral education program at Wilmar State Hospital. Father Frank Garvey was his supervisor. I spoke with Father Garvey about a month ago to make sure I had as much accurate information as possible about the alleged incident. While participating in the CPE program, Father Fitzgerald took two young boys who were brothers from the area on a trip with him to Northern Minnesota. It is alleged that while he was in Northern Minnesota with them, he sexually abused one of the boys and that the second boy was able to defend himself from his approaches. When the two young boys returned to the Wilmar area, the one who was abused attempted suicide. The mother discovered what had happened and reported the incident to Father Garvey. Father Garvey reported the incident to Father John McManus, an Oblate who was serving at St. Cloud Hospital. When Father McManus talked with Father Fitzgerald about the incident he indicated that he had visited with another Catholic priest who was a chaplain at a state hospital and talked over the situation with this priest. As a result of this conversation, Father Fitzgerald felt that everything was taken care of and there was no problem.



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About three years ago, the young boy who was allegedly abused in 1974, approached Father McManus and asked if anything was ever done to help Father Fitzgerald. Father McManus assured him that something had been done. Father McManus then called me and conveyed the details of what he knew about the 1974 incident. He also added, "I hope something has been done with and for Fitz."

3. In 1986, Father Fitzgerald had open heart surgery, from which he recovered successfully. He was assigned to a small parish in 1987 in Gainesville, Missouri. I visited him there during his first year as pastor and he shared with me that he was experiencing some tension with the people. He was concerned about the effect this tension would have on his heart condition. I told him that if ever got to the point where it was too much, we could certainly look at another place for him.

In the spring of 1988, I had a call one evening in Belleville, Illinois from Father Fitzgerald in southern Missouri. He was staying that evening in the rectory of another Oblate in a near by parish. He told me that he decided to leave Gainesville that very day because the people threatened "to go public about his relationship with young men," if he did not become more flexible with them and their requests.

While I sympathized with the tension he was under, I told him that his leaving town immediately could appear to be an admission of guilt. I encouraged him to return to Gainesville and said that I, or another member of our Provincial Council could go back and meet with him and the people to help identify and resolve some of the issues. He responded by saying that the tension would be too much for him that he could simply could not go back and deal with the people.

Following this incident, I asked him to get an evaluation, since given this incident and the question marks in his past it would be inappropriate for us to place him in a ministry without getting some kind of professional analysis. Father Fitzgerald went to a priest who worked at an office which the House of Affirmation had at that time in Orlando, Florida. After what appeared to be a very brief evaluation, Father Fitzgerald was given a clean bill of health.

4. July of 1992, Father Fitzgerald visited with me in my office in St. Paul. He had been ministering in an Oblate parish in Calipatria, California for about the last year. Father Fitzgerald asked if I could find a new place for him since he heard that Bishop Brom was going to begin doing background checks of priests in the San Diego Archdiocese. Because of this, he felt that he had



to move. He asked about being assigned to either the Duluth Diocese or the Yakima Diocese, both of which have Oblate bishops. I told him that certainly the Duluth Diocese would not be a good area to go since, allegedly, that is where at least one incident of misconduct took place. I also informed him, that because of the number of cases that have surfaced in the Minnesota area, this was certainly not a good location for any priest with some question marks in his background. I did promise him, however, that I would talk with Bishop George in Yakima, to see if he would be willing to accept him.

5. I visited with Bishop George in mid-August of 1992, in New Orleans. Bishop George had previously been Provincial in the Central Province and so he was somewhat aware of Father Fitzgerald's background. I gave Bishop George a factual, objective, resumé of the information that I had concerning Father Fitzgerald's background. After listening to this, Bishop George indicated that he felt there was no way he could take that kind of risk for his diocese. He also added that, when he was Provincial, he recalled the ongoing difficulties Father Fitzgerald had relating to people in pastoral situations. Currently, Father Fitzgerald's personal file is one of the largest ones we have on any of our community members. His file indicates a history of difficult relationships with parishioners, misunderstandings over financial management of parishes, and a pervasive feeling that he has never been accepted by his Oblate superiors.

6. Over the last 30 years, Father Fitzgerald has lived pretty much alone. In fact he has lived at times in a camper and has done a great deal of travelling throughout the Midwest and the country as a whole. Since much of his early work was connected with the Indian missions in Northern Minnesota, he developed a list of donors who have been very generous in supplying him with money for Indian ministry.

Besides the two specific incidents mentioned above, there has been, over the years, widespread comments about Father Fitz's relationships with young boys. On two occasions, during the past five years, I spoke to him about this general concern which seems to be held by a number of people. I urged him not to put himself in any situations which could be misconstrued. While I tried to do this very gently, his only response on both of these occasions was to remain quiet and to fight back tears.

Father Fitzgerald, OMI  
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In view of these two specific instances that have surfaced during the last thirty years, his fleeing from southern Missouri, and his recent request this last summer that he needed to be moved because of the background checks that were taking place, I feel that it is appropriate that we get a more comprehensive evaluation of Father Fitzgerald so we can assist him in the best way possible.

I see Father Fitzgerald as a man who is suffering and who is literally spent a lot of his life on the road fleeing difficult situations. Given the legal climate in our country at this time, I feel that we need to address Father Fitzgerald's situation in a caring, professional manner.

I reviewed the situation with our legal counsel and they advised us to be sure to place Father Fitzgerald in a community in the future and make sure that he has adequate supervision. They also encouraged that we be completely open with the bishop of any diocese in which he would be serving.

I shared with Father Fitzgerald the advice of our lawyers and suggested that he may want to consider moving into a new community complex which has just been completed in the Belleville area. His response to this was that the cold weather in St. Louis would be detrimental to his heart condition. However, three months previous to this he would have been more than happy to have received an Obedience to the Duluth Diocese. At this time I am convinced that we can no longer allow Father Fitzgerald to travel freely throughout the country in campers. Living in an Oblate community with supervision is not that abnormal, as our Constitutions and Rules call for community living that is characterized by accountability and mutual openness.

I will appreciate any input and recommendations which you can give to Father Fitzgerald, myself, and our community. I look forward to meeting with you at 2:00 pm, on November 12, 1992, at St. Michael's.

Sincerely yours, in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

Very Rev. James D. Deegan, OMI  
Provincial

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