

SAN DAMIANO
RETREAT

Thursday, August 8, 2002

██████████
1500 34th Avenue
Oakland, CA 94601-3092

Dear ██████████ and Provincial Definitors,

Throughout my six years as Program Administrator here at San Damiano Retreat, I have often been asked to perform duties, in the absences of our director, ██████████. Throughout these years, I have served in this capacity because, not only is it part of my job description, but it has been voiced publicly, that whenever ██████████ is not on site I assume "next in command" leadership of the retreat house.

As Guardian, Fr. Barry Brunsman, provides oversight of all of the Friars who reside here. There is a clear understanding that the Friary is distinct from the retreat house operations and leadership.

It is my understanding that Fr. Mario has been assigned here to provide care for Fr. Emmanuel, and now recently, Fr. Sebastian. I know there are others reasons for Fr. Mario's assignment here, though my understanding is limited and I have come to realize that you may wish to keep these reasons confidential and only for Friars' consideration. Staff, covenant members and volunteers are unaware of the psychological needs and limitations which affect Fr. Mario; and without clear disclosure of the acceptable behaviors and activities within which Fr. Mario is expected to function, misunderstandings, injury and harm are resulting. And because of these factors, Fr. Mario can, and has had interactions, which are inappropriate, abusive, divisive and unhealthy, especially when he involves himself in the activities of the retreat center.

In the past few years there have been incidents clearly indicating that Fr. Mario has acted without using good judgment, resulting in damage to property (cars) and the Retreat Center (the front entrance), and might possibly have been far more damaging to the individuals involved. I have discussed the consistent nature of these incidents from time to time with both ██████████ and Fr. Barry, each assuring me that these were "internal" issues and best handled by the Friars. It is clear that whenever ██████████ and Fr. Barry are away, Fr. Mario seems to take advantage of the opportunity to venture into locations and take action in behaviors he would not otherwise consider if either one of them were on site.

Another incident has recently occurred and because there will be an extended period of time in the near future when ██████████ will be in Europe (September 5th through November 10th), I feel compelled to bring the following to your attention. I should also mention that due to the extensive ministerial demands Fr. Barry provides apart from San Damiano, there are significant times when Fr. Barry is not present as well.

On Thursday, August 1, 2002, one of our newly assigned Covenant Members, John Beringer, severely injured his hand, severing fingers, while working in our shop on a table saw. ██████████ was in Oakland

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providing spiritual direction at the time of this accident, and in his absence, I became the "on-site" director, as per our protocol. Fr. Barry was away on vacation. The accident (see "anecdotal notes" outlined on accompanying page) was handled in an expedient manner with our staff calling 911 and then local Emergency Medical Technicians arriving quickly to care for John and get him safely to the nearest hospital.


During the time of this accident, another incident occurred which involved Fr. Mario, and in my estimation is yet another example of inappropriate behavior, especially in the midst of an emergency situation; another example of Fr. Mario being unable to take leadership and direction from others, especially women; and yet another example of the misunderstandings created when staff, covenant members, and Friars alike, are unclear as to the acceptable actions and functions in which Fr. Mario may and may not be engaged.

With this most recent incident in mind, as well as the extended period in which [REDACTED] will be away, (as well as Fr. Barry's outside commitments), I question whether Fr. Mario is capable of living within the guidelines and under the leadership I am asked to provide. My desire to ensure the safety of staff, covenant members, volunteers, retreatants and Friars alike, is my concern. It is with these considerations that I offer the following proposals, one of which be in place prior to September 5, 2002:

- an alternate location for Fr. Mario be found for the above dates.
- a permanent location be found for Fr. Mario which is site specific for the psychiatric conditions for which he may be diagnosed.
- a Friar or layperson with retreat director experience, be re-located to San Damiano during the above dates, who will function as the Interim Director in [REDACTED] absence.

I do realize that the recommendations I have proposed have consequent reactions for other Friars at this location, and in no way wish to create hardships for them. However, it is Fr. Mario's actions, which I question, and wonder for the safety of everyone concerned, whether San Damiano is an appropriate placement for him. Should one of these proposals not be in place prior to [REDACTED] departure, I cannot assume the duties of "on-site" or Interim Director. I trust that the gravity of this situation is clear and that appropriate actions be taken swiftly for everyone involved.

With peace and all good,


Victoria S. MacDonald, MA
Program Administrator

Cc [REDACTED]
Fr. Barry Brunzman, OFM

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Anecdotal Note of events occurring on Thursday, August 1, 2002:

John F. came into my office mid-morning and said, "Victoria, you are a nurse aren't you?"

I said, "Yes."

He stated that John B. had just had an accident in the shop with the electric saw severing his fingers.

I rushed into the kitchen to find John B. sitting at the table near the ice machine with his left hand in a large jar of ice; Judy was on the phone talking with the 911 personnel who were relaying actions to be taken to care for John.

Judy began relaying instructions to me, which I followed. I also instructed John B. in breathing slowly, calmly, and evenly. His color was ashen and he appeared to be in shock.

As I was trying to keep John calm and focused on his breathing, Mario came walking up to the kitchen table and began asking John, "What's happening?"

I quietly said, "Mario, not now."

Judy, seeing that Mario became upset at this, followed him toward the kitchen back door and explained to him that John was in shock and couldn't talk at this time.

Because I was focused on caring for John, I did not hear the conversation that followed:

Mario began to talk in a strong and loud voice that he had a right to see John as his friend, and that he shouldn't be kept from giving comfort to him. Judy said again, "I understand that, Mario, but John just can't talk right now."

Then Mario said, "Well I'm upset. And you can tell Victoria how I feel."

Judy said, "I'm sorry Mario."

Mario said, "You Women!"

The EMT's arrived and I began to assist them in observation and treatment of John B's hand. Helen, John's wife, wanted to go with John to San Ramon Regional Medical Center, and the EMT suggested Helen follow in her car. I asked Wayne to drive Helen there, which he did. I was concerned about John F. who had witnessed the accident, so I went to talk with him briefly.

It was about ten minutes later, when I arrived back in my office.

I was heading toward my chair, and was just sitting down, when I heard someone following behind me.

Turning around, I was face to face with Mario. who was shaking his finger at me and yelling loudly, "Don't you EVER do that to me again." Repeating it again and again very loudly. His voice could be heard throughout the administrative and lobby areas.

Standing up from my chair, I attempted to speak, "Mario, I am not going to talk with you when you are talking in this way. Get out of my office. We will talk when you can be more appropriate."

Continuing his yelling, Mario at first, took a step or two, and looked like he was going to leave my office, but then turned around and said, "Well, I want to discuss this now, " and began yelling even louder.

I again told him, I would not talk with him when he was yelling. He was not to raise his voice to me in this manner and he needed to get out of my office now. Whereupon Mario began yelling louder still, "You have no right to keep me from seeing my friend, John. You think you are so high and mighty around here, and that you can tell everyone what to do... You think you're God! Well, you're not!"

(He said others things but it is difficult to recall his exact words. I was absolutely silent at this point, and with that, Mario turned and walked out of my office toward the lobby.)

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