



THE
INSTITUTE
OF
LIVING

William L. Webb, Jr., M.D.
President and
Psychiatrist-in-Chief

March 25, 1987

Reverend John B. McCormick
2121 Commonwealth Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135

Re: Reverend Joseph E. Birmingham
Birth Date: 04/30/34

Dear Father McCormick:

Pursuant to our meeting to discuss Father Birmingham, this letter will summarize his treatment and progress at the Institute of Living.

Father Birmingham has been extremely cooperative with all facets of his treatment. Although it is undoubtedly a difficult and traumatic time for him, he has been open in therapy and a solid therapeutic alliance has been established. This has allowed us to focus on the necessary issues. As a result, Father Birmingham has made significant progress. In addition to individual psychotherapy three times a week, he has attended a general psychotherapy group three times a week. He meets once a week with the clergy group and once a week in a group focusing on increasing patients' self-awareness. He also participates two times a week in a group that focuses specifically on sexual concerns. Father Birmingham has interacted well with staff and other patients. It is sometimes difficult for patients to relinquish control of their activities, and they sometimes see it as having no control over their lives. However, Father Birmingham adapted well to having to ask me for "permission" for various activities.

In addition to being cooperative, Father Birmingham is highly motivated. He is not only motivated for treatment here, but is also motivated to put together a discharge plan that maximizes the likelihood of his having the support and guidance necessary to consolidate the gains he has made at the Institute of Living. When this discharge plan is in place, it will of course include outpatient treatment.

BIRMINGHAM 2.20

March 25, 1987

The question uppermost in everyone's mind, including Father Birmingham's, is "what is the risk of his acting out in this manner again". It would be unwise to say with 100% certainty that it will not happen again. However, I believe the risks of another occurrence are minimal. This statement is not only a reflection of his progress in treatment here, but also is based on several other factors.

First, of course, the effects of the trauma he has experienced by having to be hospitalized cannot be underestimated. Having to face himself and others with the awareness of his behavior has been a sobering event. Added to that, confronting the impact on the young boy and his family has left an indelible mark in his memory. He has expressed great shame and remorse. Although Father Birmingham does not voluntarily express these feelings verbally, when probed, it is obvious that they are there within him.

Secondly, Father Birmingham does not fit the usual profile of someone who is likely to frequently act out in this manner. His behavior is episodic and the last episode was 17 years ago. Identifying the particular stressors which may lead to such acting out mean those stressors, themselves, may be addressed, rather than the behaviors they precipitate.

Last, but certainly not least, reducing the risk of future acting out depends on having a solid discharge plan and aftercare program. It has been suggested, and Father Birmingham has agreed, that he continue in outpatient therapy for an indefinite period of time. Dr. John Currans is being asked to provide that treatment. A spiritual director is also being recommended. Father Birmingham has suggested Bishop Hughes and that, of course, will depend on the Bishop's availability. Your suggestion of a personal friend that Father Birmingham can talk with in an open, unguarded way is of most importance and Father Birmingham is receptive to that also.

Given that the above factors reduce the likelihood of Father Birmingham's repeating his behavior, it would seem that eventually he could return to his former work. Understandably, it will not be at his former church. The possibilities for an interim placement in a church where the vicar is in need of temporary assistance seems appropriate. The idea of

BIRMINGHAM 2.21

JB0061

March 25, 1987

Father Birmingham serving as a hospital chaplain also seems appropriate.

I have tried to go over our points of discussion briefly. If there is an issue that is unclear or if you would like further information, please let me know.

It was a pleasure meeting and talking with you. If I can be of assistance in any way, I can be reached at (203) 241-6932.

Sincerely yours,

Evelyn Necochea, M.A.
Evelyn Necochea, M.A.
Fellow in Clinical Psychology

Reviewed by Thomas J. Conklin, M.D.

EN/rrc

Thomas J. Conklin, M.D.