

# THE CAPUCHINS

THE PROVINCE OF ST. MARY  
OF THE CAPUCHIN ORDER



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May 24, 1978

Rev. Paul E. Groleau  
Vocation Director  
153 Ash Street  
Manchester, N.H. 03105

Dear Paul:

I am writing this letter to supplement the recommendation form I have filled out for Gordon MacRae. I endorse Gordon's application to study for the priesthood in the Diocese of Manchester. However, there are some reservations in my mind. What these reservations are will emerge best, and in better perspective and balance, I think, in a fuller evaluation of Gordon than it was possible to make on the recommendation form.

Gordon is a good person, but a complex person to evaluate. In many ways, his worst enemy is himself. In the years I have known him, however, he seems to have come a long way in achieving a measure of personal identity and stability. He has, with the help of grace, turned many of his potential weaknesses into strengths. For example, some of the unpleasant experiences of his childhood, which could have left him bitter, have instead been converted into a marvelous compassion and ability to empathize with the sufferings of others. This in turn provides, in my opinion, a possible basis for an excellent pastoral ministry. Nevertheless, he is not, nor will he ever be, completely free from some of the debilitating personality problems which he has had for years. The question then is: can he live with them and convert them into productive, or at least neutral, factors in the priesthood? I believe he can.

The area of greatest perceived difficulty for Gordon, as far as the seminary staff here can see, is the area of community life. He seems to have no great difficulty relating to older friars or to those in authority. Likewise, he seems to relate well with fellow students at St. Anselm's and with the adults and youngsters with whom he works and who are our neighbors and friends here. Nevertheless, he has had a paradoxical and consistent difficulty relating to his peers in religious life. It is especially difficult for me to evaluate this problem this year, because I have a relatively low opinion of many of his peers. If the problem had occurred just this year, I could as easily account for it as stemming from the peer group as from Gordon himself. It has, however, occurred or re-occurred for years.

Some of the qualities necessary for successfully living community life are definitely qualities that Gordon possesses. In particular, Gordon

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is generous, willing to listen and to give of himself, and dependable in meeting general obligations. What seems to me to be lacking is an ability to form healthy friendships and close relationships with other friars who are his peers. I can identify no friar as Gordon's friend. There is, instead, a kind of emotional distance between Gordon and other friars, sometimes manifest in a physical distance as well. (I have not uncommonly found Gordon spending hours alone in the evening and late at night.) This situation has apparently taken an emotional toll in Gordon's life, which may have had a circular effect: the more depressed and lonely he felt in the community, the more "disliked" he became, which brought on more depression and loneliness, etc.

Whether as a compensation or simply as another facet of the man, his outreach and service to others is as outstanding as his community life is impoverished. He deals with unfortunate people with tact, prudence, sensitivity, and endless patience and concern. He has always had excellent evaluations from his field education assignments--teaching CCD, teaching the retarded, and working with the sick. I suppose one might wonder about motivation here: is all this a genuine expression of Christian love or is it a way of fulfilling a need for approval, acceptance, and a feeling of self-worth? My guess would be that, as for most of us, it is a mixture of both. But there can be no doubt about his effectiveness in ministering to people.

Since I have known him, Gordon has manifested a steady commitment to the faith, reads widely, and is alert to and interested in important current events in the world and Church today. He is concerned about social justice. He seems generally consistent in prayer life. His occasional missing of community prayer was not excessive, and usually he had a decent excuse. His life style has been consistently simple and unassuming. It might be good for him to expand his interests a bit more.

As Gordon's advisor and spiritual director, it is my conclusion that for his own sake and for his own peace of mind, he should leave the Capuchin Order. Gordon has reached the same conclusion. I think he deserves a shot at diocesan priesthood. I do wonder if he needs the kind of support that a religious community can offer to him for effective ministry, and if he is not, therefore, in a rather hopeless situation. However, on balance, I think the best thing would be for him to study for the diocese and see.

The solemnly professed community here agrees with my evaluation and also endorses Gordon's application unanimously. All agree that he can be a fine priest. One man points out that lay people already have the highest regard for him. Another priest on the staff suggests that perhaps Gordon could profit from some professional counselling regarding the formation of relationships necessary for ministry. (Gordon has had some therapy before.)

If I can be of further service in this matter, please let me know.

Sincerely,

*John*

(Rev.) John P. McHugh, O.F.M. Cap.  
Director of Formation

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*and (cc)*