

SSS.000682

April 13, 1976

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The Most Reverend Robert F. Sanchez, D.D.
 Archbishop of Santa Fe
 Archdiocesan Offices
 202 Morningside Drive
 Albuquerque, NM

Your Excellency,

We have been asked to comment to you on the matter of La Hacienda de Los Muchachos in Farley, New Mexico. The request comes from Tony Garcia, who, with his family, is responsible for much of the work done at the Hacienda. Mr. Garcia felt that a written statement might shed some light on the predicament now facing the Hacienda. We have already had conversations with two representatives of the Health and Social Services office, and feel that we should have a definitive written statement on record. Our primary concern in doing this is for the boys who have been, and hopefully will be, at the Hacienda. The boys who go there have enough troubles in their lives without the conflict and confusion that can arise from "anonymous investigations". We would like to write about four main areas of thought. First, a history of our association with the Hacienda. Secondly, our association with Father Ed. Thirdly, our participation in the present situation involving the Hacienda and H.S.S.D. And finally, what we feel can and should be done. Everything we say will, of course, be quite subjective since we do not want to try to objectivize our comment by using superfluous second-hand information. Where such information seems relevant, and substantiable, we will to give the source and circumstances.

When we first visited the Hacienda in early 1974, we were amazed that such an ambitious project could be sustained in such a desolate place as Farley. We were uncertain of Farley's location, and when we did find it we were all the more uncertain. We noticed some activity around the only large building in the "town" asked for the Hacienda, and were told we had found it. At that point in time, the inside of the school house were just beginning to evolve into living quarters. An electrician was preparing to wire the building properly. Father Ed was enthusiastic, the boys were enthusiastic, and by the time we left, we were enthusiastic. It was an idea so impossible that it was bound to succeed, and we wanted to be a part of it.

We did continue contact, visiting now and then, attending the Fiestas sponsored by the Hacienda, talking with the boys when we met them in town, or at school. Crucita, my wife, went with two friends to assist the boys who were not allowed to go to school in Springer. These were boys with special education problems of several kinds, and these ladies went to help them study math, reading, and art. The boys thoroughly enjoyed it. Everyone enjoyed it, but finally needs and interests changed, and the program was discontinued.

We also enjoyed attending the Agape suppers and the staff and boys always made us feel welcome. Indeed, their eagerness was quite overwhelming. The ceremony is long and impressive, yet elegant in its simplicity. This brings us to our second topic, our association with Father Ed. This especially includes the Agape Suppers which are re-enactments of the First Eucharist, even to the Passover meal of cabrito, bitter herbs, etc.

First impressions are indeed lasting ones — especially when you meet Father Ed. We first met him at a special Lenten Mass on Wednesday evening. The Mass was of, for, and by the children of the parish and led by a group of Highschoolers who had just come back from a Search Weekend. Our Pastor, Fr. Irving Klister, had to be out of town, and Father Ed said Mass. We thought he was a missionary from the remote corners of New Mexico. This giant man in dusty engineer's boots prayed the Mass with extraordinary gentleness and dedication. He blessed babes-in-arm when they came to the Eucharist with their mothers. He was deeply moved by the spirituality our young people unashamedly displayed. He was a man we wanted to know.

He invited us to visit the Hacienda, then invited us to our first Agape Supper. We were delighted in his interest in ceremony, in proper action, in total personal involvement with the Mass. He made the whole experience wonderful, unforgettable. We continued to enjoy his company, and visited as often as we could. Regretably, that was not often, and equally regrettable, things began to change. Since we were not in the mainstream of this change, it is difficult to describe what happened. In some ways, the Hacienda seemed to be flourishing and constantly improving. On the other hand, there were more and more reports of small rebellions, boys running away, and a more rapid turn-over in boys sent there. The staff, too, underwent some changes, and as with many volunteer enterprises, some of the changes were very short-lived. In this period, Father Ed also seemed to change. One particular event comes to mind. The impressions of this one particular episode were, and to some extent, still are, somewhat distressing. We feel compelled to stress that the following account is a personal observation, and quite subjective.

It was Holy Thursday, 1975. We were attending our second Agape Dinner at the Hacienda. The ceremony has already been described. After the re-enactment of the First Eucharist, Father conducts the Mass. During that Mass, he gave an unforgettable homily. The gist of it was that the people of the church were ignoring the church and her priests; that we should feel sorry for priests, and do more to help them; that priest carried a terrible burden and responsibility in that they, from and above all other men, have been chosen by God as His priests; that during the consecration, the priest had the authority, and the terrible responsibility, to command God to be present at the altar; that God, because He had allowed this man to be a priest after the order of Melchisedek, must obey the priest and transubstantiate the bread and wine; and that we, the miscreant parishioners, must do everything we can to support our priests as they face this experience daily. Some of that sounds like good Catholic doctrine. Some of it sounds dangerous. In the many months since, we have often wondered if Father Ed really said those things. We thought perhaps we had misunderstood the thrust of his message. However, subsequent conversations with other persons that were there that night have yielded similar impressions. Father's mood that evening was intense, as usual, but not really in a positive way. He seemed distressed. Perhaps because of that experience, or perhaps because it is truly so, he has seemed distressed to us ever since. Recent events have intensified that feeling. We were reluctant to report any of this, indeed we didn't want to talk to anyone else about it. We just wanted to excuse it as a demonstration of a human foible, and leave it in the past like good friends should. However, as I mentioned, other persons shared almost identical feelings, and misgivings, as well as an uncomfortable wariness. Father Ed was noticeably different.

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During the spring of 1975, Crucita and her friends helped with the special education students at the Hacienda, as previously described. After that, we gradually lost touch with the Hacienda and the boys. One of the fellows that had been there since we had come to know the Hacienda made it a point to seek us out whenever they were going to have a Fiesta, but the rest of the boys just stopped being as friendly. Some of the boys that seemed to be in positions of responsibility suddenly were no longer there. When we asked about them, all anybody would say is, "They left." They boys didn't seem to want to be involved with "outsiders" any more, nor did they complain about petty things the way everybody does when "institutionalized". It's just natural to complain about this guy's personal hygiene, or that one's intelligence, or the food, or heat, or activities. We heard nothing from the boys, but did hear about them. They were running away, taking risks that made no sense at all on the surface. It seemed that discipline had taken a new turn. Boys we had considered friends were politely evasive. Some of the boys who seemed to have at least a little sense and maturity got pegged as insubordinates and were seemingly ostracized. One boy confided that he could hardly wait until he was eighteen so he could get out of the Hacienda. The anxiety underlying that statement was clearly not the kind that produces good, healthy gritching about barracks life. Most recently, there was the tragic death of Vaughn Bishop. I tried to talk to his partner in that experience. All the boy would tell me was that they were escaping, that he was going home to his mother. Again, allowing for the fact that the kid wasn't very bright, and that he had a great many emotional problems, there seemed to be something very hard and ugly that gave him such a strong motivation to take off across the mountains in the dead of winter. Shortly after Vaughn's funeral, a social-worker from the U.S.S.D. office in Raton called on the hospital to gather information on the boy that had survived, and on anything he might have said about his reasons for taking off. The director of nurses referred her to us, knowing that we had a continuing relationship with the Hacienda, and we discussed many of the things already recounted in this letter. She asked us to meet with her supervisor to discuss the matter further. They did not really ask leading questions, and seemed to be interested in hearing our views, experiences, etc. Again, our main reason for cooperating was that we were deeply concerned for the boys, some of whom we felt quite close to.

This same concern is the reason we decided to write this letter, and to go into some detail. A letter that merely says, "The Hacienda is O.K." doesn't seem fair to all the parties involved. Mr. Garcia, and perhaps other members of the staff, seem to think that the Welfare People are harrassing the Hacienda, and that they "have it in for" Father Ed, which seems to be a natural reaction for someone who has worked so hard at a dream like the Hacienda. The Garcias have given so much of their lives to the Hacienda, and I am sure they are very perplexed by all this controversy, especially since it comes mainly from people who are not there all the time. We feel that someone else should be there, at least on a regular visiting basis, if not as a resident.

We have already said that there is a great need for a facility like the Hacienda. We also believe that there is a great need for more outside input and supervision. There should be more careful screening of boys who go there. In the past there have been personality combinations that could be very volatile. That, coupled with the somewhat depressing environment of makeshift everything just doesn't seem conducive to good mental health and social adjustment. Add to that a strict, repressive discipline, and the natural turmoil of adolescence,

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and you've got dynamite by the potful. We do not feel that the staff of the Hacienda, however dedicated, are prepared to properly handle that sort of situation. In the past, some volunteers who did have the ability to communicate with the boys on a non-authoritarian basis and tried to do so, found that they did not fit into the program, that they were too unsure of themselves to be useful, or that their commitments had been fulfilled prematurely. Those boys are not all dummies, and they could see what was happening when people came, got involved, and suddenly left under a cloud.

We are concerned, too, for the boys who got caught in the middle of this thing. W.S.S.D. is on one side telling Father Ed what's good for them, and he seems to be on another side telling them what isn't good for them, and no one seems to be in there with the boys helping them adjust to another upheaval in their already confusing lives. We have offered to take at least one of the boys into our home so that he doesn't have to start all over again in a new school to close to the end of the year, and also so he doesn't have to be under the pressure that has been brought to bear on the Hacienda. We have heard that the boys have left, that the Hacienda is closing, that it isn't really closing, that they are going to start all over with a whole new set of boys, that Father Ed has taken the boys that were there and placed them in foster homes of his own choosing, and all of that seems incredible, so we don't know what to believe.

One important factor not mentioned is community reaction. The entire community, both here and at Farley is about evenly split into three view-points: For, against, and indifferent. This differentiation is especially strong in Farley, and the recent events have given the Against side some potent arguments.

We feel it is also important to consider Father Ed's position. He has worked so long and hard on this project, and economic events of the last year have brought serious set-backs. There was a time last year when he took a plane trip to Florida; after his return, things just seemed to go from bad to worse. He seemed to us like a man fighting for hope, fighting for a dream that was slipping away through no fault of his own. He acted as if he would almost rather put an end to the dream than see it continue as something vastly inferior to what he had planned. He put so much of himself into the Hacienda that it's imminent failure must have been a terrible personal agony to him.

Well, this has turned out to be more of an epistle than a letter, but we hope the information here will be useful to you in deciding your position on the future of the Hacienda. We feel that what is most needed at this point is a firm decision based on prayerful deliberation and objective evaluation. We are certain that you, and the other parties involved, can arrive at such a decision if there is sufficient information available. For that reason, we have gone into detail on several points. We will continue to be interested in the future of the Hacienda, and willing to cooperate in any future discussions concerning Father Ed's work there. We do believe it would be best if he would be the Spiritual leader for the boys, but not the sole source of authority, love, faith, and comfort.

Your servants in Christ,



Charles O. Todd, III



Crucita A. Todd