

# Actress Maria Bello Says Fr. Ray Jackson Was Her Mentor

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(Excerpted from the Sunday edition of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 15, 2006, written by Carrie Rickey, Inquirer Movie Critic. The excerpts are printed with Ms. Rickey's permission.)

## **This star's social life is more principles than parties**

Maria Bello, a 1989 Villanova graduate, was on her way to law school when she took a detour into acting, during stints Off-Broadway and in ads as the Amstel Girl, blazed a career path.



**Maria Bello**

Her overnight success took 15 years. In 2004 she copped a Golden Globe nomination as the hottie in *The Cooler*.

Ms. Bello does have a 4-year-old son, Jackson, a big Eagles fan. She and her son's father, TV executive Dan McDermott, are no longer a couple, but they are committed co-parents and see each other daily.

Ms. Bello is a Philadelphia Area woman, having spent 16 years in Catholic education, is from a close knit family, and speaks of the man who changed her life.

Her parents, Kathy & Joe, "taught her that our insides matter more than our outsides." She attended Archbishop Carroll HS a year ahead of Will Smith. Her mentor was an Augustinian priest she met at Villanova University and for whom her son is named.

“Father Ray Jackson was a warrior for peace”, she says of the late priest and professor who co-founded the university’s Center for Peace and Justice. They met in class when Bello was 18 and Fr. Ray assigned an essay, “Who are your heroes?”

Most of her classmates chose Madonna and Lee Iacocca. Bello caught Fr. Ray’s attention by writing about Catholic social activist, Dorothy Day and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Every day Father Ray would ask me, “How are you going to serve?” Bello was on track to be a public-interest lawyer, but during her senior year at Villanova, was bitten by the acting bug when in drama class she improvised a Bob Dylanesque ballad.

“I thought acting was too selfish,” she recalls. “But Father Ray reassured me that “you serve best by doing the thing you love most”.

She did go to Manhattan after graduation to see if she could score acting gigs. As she knocked around theater, Bello made time to co-found Dream Yard, an East Harlem arts and education program.

By 1995, when she was signed to the short-lived TV series Mr. and Mrs. Smith, she was almost 30, an awkward age in a youth-worshipping industry. But her flint and fire got her a recurring role on ER the following year, which led to her screen work.

Her connectedness to family makes Bello grieve that Father Ray is no longer here. “I didn’t tell him enough how he formed and transformed my life.” She says, brown eyes brimming with tears.

“But he’s with me every day when I ask myself how to balance my call to acting with my call to service”

**Editor notes:**

Fr. Ray Jackson  
Born Dec 26, 1933  
U.S. Marines (Sgt.) 1952 - 1956  
Ordained Jan 30, 1965  
Died Jan 5, 1997 - Brain Tumor

Positions held in M.E.: Team priest for 15 years; Section 3 Section Coordinator; twice Philadelphia Area Coordinator

Passionate about Peace and Justice for All

Interest: Chess, Sports, Fishing, The 4 Basic Food groups - Scotch, Peanuts, Doughnuts and Coffee

For additional information about Fr. Ray, please see his autobiography under Priest’s Corner/Biographies/Journey of a Priest:

[http://www.ematrimony.org/priestscorner/20050417\\_journeyofapriest\\_jackson.htm](http://www.ematrimony.org/priestscorner/20050417_journeyofapriest_jackson.htm)