

# American hierarchy has unsung heroes

The good work done by some of almost 200 diocesan bishops in the United States goes unnoticed, except locally. At 73, Robert Mulvey, of Providence, Rhode Island, is by now too old to be hurt by any good things I might say about him here.

Bishop Mulvey enjoys a good reputation among many of his priests and laity for his steady, low-key, fair-minded leadership. He isn't heavy-handed in manner nor mean-spirited and vindictive in dealing with those with whom he disagrees. He generally makes a point behind the scenes, without calling attention to himself or to the person he wishes to praise or reprove.

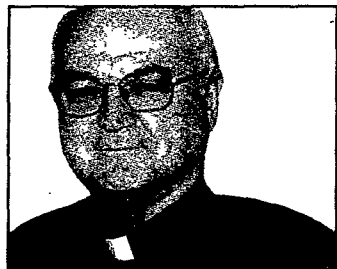
Except in dealing with the victims and survivors of sexual abuse.

Last September the diocese agreed to pay \$13.5 million in legal settlements with 36 (later 37) men and women who had been abused by 11 priests and one nun of the Providence diocese. (The final figure was over \$14 million.)

Bishop Mulvey publicly apologized to the victims and their families "with deepest sadness." Some of them wept as he spoke.

One of the survivors told *The Boston Globe*, "It means more than anything to have the bishop admit that he is sorry. You can't put a price on that."

Even plaintiffs' lawyers had words of praise for the bishop and his associates. "They treated our clients with respect," one attorney



**Father Richard McBrien**

Essays in Theology

observed. "They gave them the courtesy of listening to very painful sagas and showed real empathy for the pain they had been put through." He also disclosed that the diocese had offered to pay for all past and future therapy, over and above the settlement amount.

In accordance with that settlement, the bishop agreed to meet privately with each of the victim-survivors — a pastoral task that he would have unhesitatingly fulfilled even without legal enforcement.

When he established a special diocesan board to deal with sexual-abuse issues, he did so, he said, because "the Church must be a safe place to all."

In May, the diocese announced that, as the bishop had promised, no churches, schools or social-service agencies would be closed in order to meet the financial terms of the agreement. Instead, the bishop sold the 16-room, ocean-front summer home bequeathed to the diocese in the early 1940s for \$7 million.

Bishop Mulvey acknowl-

edged the sacrifice in giving up a residence that had served priests and bishops alike as a summer retreat, "but its value to us pales in comparison to its value in bringing a healing response to victims of sexual abuse."

David Clohessy, executive director of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, expressed admiration for the bishop's willingness to sell valued property to compensate the victims and survivors. Dozens of dioceses, Clohessy noted, have talked about doing so, "but I would say that you can count on one or two hands the number of dioceses that actually have."

The bishop showed similar sensitivity to families of victims of the Rhode Island night-club fire a few months ago, giving \$25,000 in diocesan funds to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.

When the local press sought his reaction to Cardinal Law's resignation as Archbishop of Boston in early December, he didn't fall back on evasive, boilerplate answers. He said the cardinal was right to resign, and called his actions a "betrayal of trust" that had shaken people's faith in the church.

But whether an individual bishop is "a hero or a bum," he said, our faith is in something infinitely higher.

In this column's opinion, Robert Mulvey is one of the hierarchy's unsung heroes.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## Columnist urged to be 'up front'

To the editor:

Sister Schoelles' July 3, 2003 editorial on gay sex is typical of the way she presents and discusses sensitive moral issues. It is in the third party mode and has the surface appearance of being objective and thought provoking when in reality it is anything but this. If you analyze the article it is apparent that Sister Schoelles is lobbying for the Catholic Church to adopt a set of moral standards which would allow gay partners to engage in sexual relationships but she won't come out and directly say so.

Sister Schoelles should "get real" with her readers and state clearly what her position is on these sensitive moral issues. After all, as President of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry she is able to heavily influence what is taught there and its impact on the students. We should insist that she be up front with us.

Robert Sturgeon  
 Shagbark Way  
 Fairport

## Thinks writer is turning sin into sickness

To the editor:

Re: Debate on sexual behavior needs thoughtful approach; Patricia Schoelles, SSJ; *Catholic Courier*, 7-3-03. Methinks that Sr.

Schoelles employs the referenced column as an exercise in the psychologization of sin. Dr. D.Q. McNerny, a professor of Philosophy at Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary, defines the psychologization of sin as an attempt to transform sin into sickness. Apparently Sr. Schoelles is not aware of St. Peter's warning that "the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to eat."

Sr. Schoelles could also "get real" by reminding all those afflicted with the need to exercise their gay and lesbian tendencies of St. Peter's words, "stand up to him (the devil), strong in the faith and knowledge that your brothers all over the world are suffering the same things. You will have to suffer only for a little while: the God of all grace ... will confirm, strengthen and support you."

Henry M. Korytkowski  
 Solmar Drive  
 Rochester

## Says column only adds to confusion

To the editor:

The *Catholic Courier* has a sacred obligation toward its readers to teach what our church teaches on all matters of faith and morals, and to help people understand why those teachings are important.

Patricia Schoelles seems only to add to people's confusion in her July 3 column. Her advice to "get real" regarding homosexual relationships reminds me of those people who promote the distribution of condoms in high schools and colleges — they also say "get real."

Father John F. Harvey, OSFS, the founder of COURAGE gives excellent help to persons with same sex attractions and their families. Anyone who is concerned what this issue is doing to family life should write or contact their central office:

COURAGE, Church of St. John the Baptist, 210 West 31st St., New York, NY

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