

11-2-07 - Reformers meet; report of abuse in R.I. released
By CHUCK COLBERT, National Catholic Reporter

The church reform organization Voice of the Faithful gathered for its national convention here Oct. 19 and 20, even as victim advocates voiced frustration with the group and the hierarchy for not doing enough to bring justice to survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

Inside the convention center, Mary Pat Fox, Voice of the Faithful's president, urged the 500 members in attendance to move from anger to love.

Keynoter Fr. Richard P. McBrien advised the organization not be confrontational with the hierarchy nor "to write off" the U.S. Catholic bishops. Fr. Donald Cozzens said

Voice of the Faithful's call for an ecclesial review of mandatory celibacy is in "perfect harmony" with the Second Vatican Council's theology.

BishopAccountability.org, an online archive of documents related to the abuse scandal, held a news conference in Providence Oct. 19 to announce the release of a document indicating that between 1971 and 2007, 125 priests in Rhode Island were accused of sexual assault or misconduct, including 95 accused of child molestation and sexual assault.

The number in the court document, filed by Bishop Thomas J. Tobin in January 2007, is higher than the 56 priests that Tobin's predecessor, Bishop Robert E. Mulvey, reported in 2004 as having been accused of sexual abuse of a minor between 1950 and 2002.

BishopAccountability.org called for a grand jury investigation by the state's attorney general. "This diocese is among the worst in the country and continues to hide secrets of crimes," said Anne Barrett Doyle, codirector of the archive. "Rhode Island children are still at risk."

About a dozen protesters were outside the Voice of the Faithful convention. Michael Sweatt, who alleges abuse as a child at a Jesuit-run school, said the organization "has lost its way."

Sweatt, who cofounded an affiliate in Maine and has since resigned, said the organization "works hard to get over the wall and sit across the table from criminal bishops, insisting on the formation of parish councils and finance councils. In so doing they will have further abused the victims.

What is it they're trying to save? Is the church as it is today worth saving?" Sweatt added, "Get back inside. Forget about changing the church and instead change [Voice of the Faithful]."

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