

## Father John H. Mulholland

*In August 1968, a mother brought to the pastor of Saint Joseph's Church in Hatboro two letters written by the parish's recently reassigned associate pastor, Fr. John H. Mulholland, to her son while he was at summer camp. Amid cut-out illustrations of chains, ropes, and people suffering various forms of bondage, the priest wrote to the boy:*

*Plan and prepare to break me on vacation. If you can get me to beg to be punished by you even more and beg to be your slave – I will offer a just homage payment – such as – you can be my financial bookkeeper for the school term, possessing the checkbook with signed blank checks – or an outright fee each month of maybe 10% of the balance. You really have no imagination – this is your chance – take over – become master in fact as well as word – make me know what it means to squirm, sweat and fear and to understand what slave means.*

*In the other letter, the priest discussed plans for proving submission by “kneeling next to toilet when master craps then wiping ass with paper then with tongue. Also being forced to lick master's ass and kiss it frequently.”*

*At the time the mother brought the letters to the rectory, her son was on a two-week trip with Fr. Mulholland. The letters mentioned several other parish boys and suggested that they also participated in sado-masochistic rituals with Fr. Mulholland. After the boy returned from the trip, the Archdiocese's Vicar General, Gerald V. McDevitt, recorded that he “confessed a relationship with Father.”*

*Yet Msgr. McDevitt told Fr. Mulholland that the Archdiocese's response to learning that its priest victimized parish boys with his sick behavior would “depend on the attitude the mother of the boy took and how far she would want to follow up the matter.” Archdiocese officials did nothing.*

*Two years later the Chancery received a report that a boy at Fr. Mulholland's next parish “was being strung up and Father Mulholland [was] piercing him or at least jabbing him with some instrument all over his body.” Again, Archdiocese officials left the priest in place.*

*The Archdiocesan Review Board in 2004 found that “Reverend Mulholland's letter to a young boy in his parish,” though “quite disturbing in its language regarding issues of power, descriptions of human excrement and use of restraint,” did not “fall under the definition of sexual abuse as contained in the Essential Norms.”*

*Ordained in 1965, Fr. Mulholland apparently has never undergone even the Archdiocese's concept of treatment. He remains at last report an active priest with unrestricted faculties in the Philadelphia Archdiocese.*

**Father Mulholland shares stories of sexual masochism with boys from Saint Patrick Church in Kennett Square.**

The Grand Jury was given no records of allegations against Fr. John Mulholland from his first assignment as associate pastor at Saint Patrick Church in Kennett Square (6/65-6/66). However, the priest's own letter of July 1968 to "Stan," a boy in his next parish, indicates he had inappropriate relations with boys at Saint Patrick.

In the middle of a long letter illustrated with chains, nooses, and "adults only" signs, Fr. Mulholland wrote to Stan, two years after he had left Kennett Square:

I met some kids I know from Kennett this week – three brothers 18, 17, and 15 years old . . . so they went on a four day camping trip and little brother was jumped and tied with his arms stretched out on a pole and all equipment tied on his back and the pole. He was led by one with a long rope around his neck with the other prodding behind with a short switch. POOR BOY!! He was stripped by the loving brothers, hung by his ankles with his hands tied up tight with a light rope or heavy cord going from his wrists and under his crotch and ending in a loop around his well-known privates (struggling could be painful). He was pulled up high and a low charcoal fire was shoveled under him, then wet leaves put on the fire – heat and smoke right up his body – an old Apache torture. . . Little brother now obeys.  
(Appendix D-22)

Cardinal Krol transferred Fr. Mulholland after one year in Kennett Square to Saint Joseph Church in Hatboro.

**Father Mulholland takes boys from Saint Joseph Church on a vacation described as "a two week torture treatment."**

By the time Stan's mother found Fr. Mulholland's letters to her son in the footlocker that he had taken to camp, the priest had been transferred to still a third parish. (The Archbishop in June 1968 appointed Fr. Mulholland to Saint Anastasia parish in Newtown Square.) In August 1968, though, he was vacationing with boys he knew from Saint Joseph.

In his letter to Stan at camp, Fr. Mulholland described the anticipated vacation as "a two week torture treatment" to "purge" the priest of all resistance and "break" him into "complete nothingness, thereby rendering [Fr. Mulholland] a perfect slave." He wrote of

other parish boys who would participate, referring to them as “Emperor [“Lewis’]” and “Sadistic Duke[“Smith”].” Stan, he named “Sadistic Prince [Stan], Man of Steel.” The priest called himself “Barney” and played the role of the slave. He wrote about a 15-year-old being tied “spread-eagled” on the ground and “used as a toilet.” He wrote to Stan:

If Barney is bored from lack of torture or is not chained or tied at night Prince may also become prisoner as shown [there is an illustration of two people hanging by their wrists in chains]. Barney promises never to jump or molest Prince as long as daily punishments continue EXCEPT – A PROMISE – NEVER LET BARNEY SLEEP UNFETTERED – UNTIED – OR UNCHAINED OR PRINCE will die at night as above.

The Vicar General of the Archdiocese, Gerald V. McDevitt, met with Fr. Mulholland on September 25, 1968, after he had returned from his two-week vacation with Stan and the other boys. The priest acknowledged that he wrote the letters. He said that his relationship with Stan was one of “testing strength and wrestling and things of that nature.” He denied anything sexual.

McDevitt informed Fr. Mulholland that Stan’s mother had consulted a lawyer and that Stan had “confessed a relationship with Father.” In his memo recording his conversation with Fr. Mulholland, Msgr. McDevitt wrote that the lawyer had persuaded the mother not to have police attempt to interrupt the priest’s trip with her son. In the Archdiocese file is a handwritten note with the name of the lawyer supposedly representing the mother — Stanley Gordon – and a notation that he was “sympathetic to both sides.”

According to his notes, Msgr. McDevitt instructed Fr. Mulholland to have “no further contact or communication with the boy.” The Vicar General advised Fr. Mulholland that he “did not know what he might hear further from us since much of that would depend on the attitude the mother of the boy took and how far she would want to follow up the matter.”

Monsignor McDevitt recorded no effort to contact the other boys involved. He “suggested the possibility of [Fr. Mulholland’s] seeing a psychiatrist,” but wrote that the priest said he “thought he knew himself well enough and that he did not need the help of a psychiatrist.” The record shows no effort even to find out what happened during the two-

week “vacation,” much less to protect the other known victims from Fr. Mulholland’s ongoing depravity or to inform their parents.

Two years later Assistant Chancellor Vincent M. Walsh would matter-of-factly write of Mulholland: “Part of the interview with Bishop McDevitt was a promise that he would stop going back to the parish. We had some reports later on that he was still returning to Hatboro.”

**In 1970, the Archdiocese is again warned in graphic terms of Father Mulholland’s sadomasochistic practices with boys, and again takes no action.**

Father Mulholland was transferred to Saint Anastasia in Newtown Square in June 1968. While he was there, the Archdiocese received several reports of inappropriate sexual contact involving the priest. Once again, the Archdiocese left him in place; ironically, it did so at the request of parents who continued to support the priest because the Archdiocese had not revealed to them his sadomasochistic activity. The Archdiocese abandoned plans to transfer Fr. Mulholland or send him for diagnosis and possible treatment when the perceived level of scandal lessened.

While he continued to visit victims from his previous parish, Saint Joseph Church in Hatboro, Fr. Mulholland also assembled a group of boys at his new assignment. Parents, unaware that the Archdiocese had sent them a priest known to corrupt and abuse parish youth with sadistic and depraved behavior, welcomed Fr. Mulholland’s obvious interest in their sons.

**“Lyle” reports continued deviate behavior.**

In October 1970, Lyle, a sophomore at the University of Pennsylvania and a junior adult advisor to the CYO at Saint Anastasia, alerted the Archdiocese that Fr. Mulholland’s degenerate behavior was continuing and that he had many new victims. Lyle named six boys who had traveled over summer vacations with Fr. Mulholland. “Jack,” “Steve,” and “Louis” (no last names were recorded) had gone camping with the priest in the Southwest over the summer of 1969; “Jared,” “Randy,” and “Gene” had accompanied Fr. Mulholland in 1970. Lyle described how the relationship between the boys and the priest seemed to

change after the trips. He said that Gene and Randy were “pretty tight lipped” about the trip, but that they did mention one incident. According to notes kept by Assistant Chancellor Walsh, Gene and Randy told Lyle that Jared had been “strung up” and that Fr. Mulholland was “piercing him or at least jabbing him with some instrument all over his body.”

Lyle also reported walking into a room and seeing Fr. Mulholland running his hands up and down Jared’s leg. Another time he saw a boy’s head in the priest’s lap. He described “wrestling” that took place frequently with the same boys. Lyle said it was not really wrestling, though, since there were no wrestling moves. The priest, he said, would merely lie on top of the boys. He said this happened regularly before CYO meetings. Lyle told of seeing Fr. Mulholland walking hand-in-hand with a boy in the schoolyard. He reported that the priest seemed to conduct some sort of private Masses in the church basement with only his “special boys.”

**“Barbara” confirms her brother’s report.**

Lyle’s sister, Barbara, was a member of the CYO and confirmed her brother’s account to Fr. Walsh. She provided Louis’s last name and said that Fr. Mulholland regularly drove Louis home after CYO meetings, often taking many hours to do so. She described the wrestling and told how, in a recent meeting, Fr. Mulholland and Jared had spent the entire time behind the stage.

The Grand Jury notes that the behavior reported was consistent with that described in the 1968 letters to Stan, letters Fr. Mulholland admitted to writing. Thus, the Archdiocese’s failure to respond appropriately to the 1970 report is even more inexcusable.

**Saint Anastasia’s pastor corroborates Lyle and Barbara’s observations and reports additional behavior.**

The pastor at Saint Anastasia, Fr. Joseph T. Kane, told Fr. Walsh that Lyle and Barbara were credible and responsible. In addition, Fr. Kane told the Assistant Chancellor that Fr. Mulholland had “boys in his room” at the rectory on either a daily or weekly basis

– Fr. Kane was unsure which. Father Walsh wrote that Fr. Kane verified “that certain strange activity is taking place concerning which he is not totally aware.” There is no indication that Fr. Walsh enlightened the pastor, who lived with Fr. Mulholland and could have been enlisted to monitor him, by letting him know what Archdiocese officials had known for years – that the associate pastor sent to his parish had been known to involve parish youth in sadomasochism.

**To avoid scandal, Archdiocese officials plan to reassign Father Mulholland, but the decision is reversed.**

After hearing from Barbara and another parishioner, “Walter,” that Fr. Mulholland’s reputation for “play[ing] around with boys” or “something” was widespread, Fr. Walsh informed Fr. Mulholland, on October 26, 1970, that he would have to be reassigned because of “scandal.” Father Walsh recorded that he confronted Fr. Mulholland with the whole litany of accusations against him and that the priest “merely stayed silent and accepted them as true.”

Yet Cardinal Krol did not remove Fr. Mulholland. On November 2, 1970, a group of parents from Saint Anastasia visited Fr. Walsh to say that they favored keeping the priest. Ironically, two of the parents were fathers of boys who went on trips with Fr. Mulholland and were “favored.” One, the father of Gene (age 16), praised the priest for taking his son on a summer trip for 21 days and not asking the parents for any money. Another, the father of Jack, was appreciative because “Father . . . was instrumental in getting [Jack] into Priory.” He told Fr. Walsh that Fr. Mulholland spent “a lot of time at [Jack’s family’s] home.” (Appendix D-23)

Although aware of Fr. Mulholland’s history of taking boys on these “trips” to engage in sadomasochism, Fr. Walsh listened to these parents who, obviously, trusted the priest with their children. Yet Fr. Walsh said nothing, even though it was clear from what Lyle, Barbara, and the pastor had told him that Fr. Mulholland was still abusing the boys.

Not only did Fr. Walsh not warn these parents, the Archdiocese decided to allow Fr. Mulholland to remain in the parish where he could continue to abuse their children. On October 27, 1970, after hearing that Fr. Mulholland’s reputation was widespread, Fr.

Walsh wrote: “I also made it clear to Father that there is no possibility of his remaining in the parish.” On November 5, 1970, three days after the uninformed parents’ group came to the priest’s defense, Fr. Walsh informed Fr. Mulholland “that we would have no difficulty allowing him to stay at St. Anastasia.” The explicit reason for the change of heart was because “the amount of scandal given seemed to lie only with a very small minority.” Archdiocese officials knowingly used the ignorance of the parents whose children were being victimized to justify leaving the priest in their parish. (Appendix D-24, D-25)

**The decision to order treatment for Father Mulholland is also reversed when the Archdiocese perceives the threat of scandal to have abated.**

The position of the Archdiocese regarding the necessity of psychological treatment was, likewise, determined not by the priest’s obvious depravity or the danger he posed to children, but by the perceived level of scandal. Archdiocese officials purported to leave the decision regarding inpatient treatment to Dr. Anthony L. Zanni at Saint John Vianney Hospital in Downingtown. But the decisive factor determining that Fr. Mulholland did not require treatment was Fr. Walsh’s conclusion that the threat of scandal was smaller than previously thought. In an October 27, 1970, letter to Dr. Zanni, Fr. Walsh related that he had warned Fr. Mulholland not only that the priest would have to be reassigned, but also that Dr. Zanni would likely “want him to go to Downingtown.” After determining that the “scandal” was limited to “a small minority,” however, Fr. Walsh called Dr. Zanni to inform him of this development. Father Walsh recorded in a memo dated November 5, 1970: “Dr. Zanni, with this new information, decided that he would probably not ask Father Mulholland to go to Downingtown.”

**Continuing reports obliquely refer to Father Mulholland’s depravity.**

Father Mulholland’s fellow priests at Saint Anastasia complained repeatedly about him, but Archdiocese records obscure their concerns. In April 1971, Chancellor Francis J. Statkus wrote that the pastor, Fr. Kane, reported that Fr. Mulholland “has not been effective with the CYO” and asked that he “be changed.” On March 5, 1973, Fr. Walsh, now the Vice Chancellor, recorded the complaint of a fellow priest at Saint Anastasia, Fr.

Joseph Shields: “He mentioned that the problems that were present about a year and a half ago and brought to our attention are still present. He states that Fr. Mulholland *ministers only to a certain few in the parish and that the parish has more or less accepted the strangeness of that ministry*. He felt that we should talk to Father Mulholland since there might be need for professional help.” (emphasis supplied)

There is nothing in the files turned over to the Grand Jury recording complaints made a year and a half earlier – which would have been September 1971. There was a letter from Dr. Zanni to Fr. Walsh, dated September 12, 1972, informing the Vice Chancellor that Fr. Mulholland “never contacted my office for the purpose of making an appointment as you had informed me he would.” Records do not indicate what prompted Archdiocese officials to ask Fr. Mulholland to see the therapist again. Apparently no action was taken either in response to whatever the pastor and Fr. Shield had reported or to Fr. Mulholland’s refusal to get psychiatric help.

Despite the vague and seemingly meaningless way in which Fr. Walsh and Msgr. Statkus recorded complaints about Fr. Mulholland, Archdiocese officials were aware, ever since receiving Fr. Mulholland’s letters in 1968, of the danger he posed to his “special” boys. They knew that the criticism that Fr. Mulholland had “not been effective with the CYO” could well have meant that he was lying on top of his favorite boys or spending meeting time with one behind the stage. They knew that ministering “only to a certain few” meant spending all his time with teenage boys. And they knew that the “strangeness” of his ministry to these boys might have involved, according to the priest’s own letters, binding, hanging, beating, punishing, molesting, and torturing.

Even in the face of continued complaints from the clerics at Saint Anastasia, Fr. Mulholland might have remained in the assignment were it not for Cardinal Krol’s policy of moving associate pastors every five years. On March 20, 1973, Fr. Walsh wrote to Dr. Zanni, informing him that Fr. Mulholland was being transferred. Father Walsh said he hoped Fr. Mulholland would see the doctor and expressed concern, not that boys in the new parish would be subjected to the abuses of a demented priest, but that the new parish might not tolerate Fr. Mulholland’s behavior as well as the parishioners at Saint Anastasia had. Father Walsh wrote to Dr. Zanni:



At your home on Saturday, we discussed the fact that the people in [Fr. Mulholland's] present parish have more or less accepted his way of going about the priesthood; however, the parishioners in the parish to which he might be assigned might find his ministry somewhat different, since he tends to spend his time with a small group of people, especially teenagers.

Without any record of treatment, restrictions, or even warnings to Fr. Mulholland, Cardinal Krol reassigned the priest to be associate pastor at Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Darby, beginning June 5, 1973.

**Father Mulholland remains in active ministry for 30 more years.**

Knowing that this sick and dangerous priest had never been sent for treatment, Cardinal Krol kept reassigning Fr. Mulholland, with no restrictions on his faculties, to one parish after another. Father Mulholland served as associate pastor at Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Darby (6/73-9/77); Holy Child Church in North Philadelphia (9/77-9/82); Stella Maris Church in South Philadelphia (9/82-6/87); and Saint Francis Assisi Church in Norristown (6/87-6/96). Each of these parishes had a school.

When Archbishop Bevilacqua took over the Archdiocese, Fr. Mulholland began to ask to be a pastor. He asked repeatedly, beginning in 1990. He pointed out that most of those in his ordination class had become pastors. Despite his requests, Fr. Mulholland was passed over each year. Finally, in March 1995, Cardinal Bevilacqua's Secretary for Clergy, William J. Lynn, had his assistant tell Fr. Mulholland he would not be made a pastor.

The fact that Cardinal Bevilacqua refused Fr. Mulholland's request strongly suggests that Archdiocese officials were well aware of his past predations, and that those abuses were the reason he would never advance. Presumably, Msgr. Lynn had reviewed the priest's file and consulted Cardinal Bevilacqua, who had sole authority to make decisions about pastorates. Prominent within Fr. Mulholland's file are the handwritten, multi-page letters illustrated with pictures of chains, nooses, and people hanging from chains in prison cells. The words "burning," "torturing," and "killing" are triple-sized on

the front of one letter. Yet Cardinal Bevilacqua for years continued to grant Fr. Mulholland access to parish children.

Despite all the evidence of severe and dangerous mental illness and abuse of adolescents in his file, and after Fr. Mulholland had complained to Msgr. Lynn that his pastor at Saint Francis Assisi had removed him from supervising altar boys, Cardinal Bevilacqua nevertheless in May 1996 assigned Fr. Mulholland to be associate pastor at Immaculate Conception Church in Levittown. As with all his other assignments, this one afforded Fr. Mulholland easy access to the parish school's children. And there is no indication that his new pastor was told of his problems. Without such notice, he could not know what the previous pastor apparently discovered for himself – the need to keep Fr. Mulholland away from altar boys.

Had he been informed about Fr. Mulholland, the pastor, Joseph L. Logrip, surely would not have put the priest in charge of the parish CYO – a post that Fr. Mulholland had held and abused in other parishes. Father Mulholland remained at Immaculate Conception until June 2002, when, in response to the pastor's request, he was removed. Father Logrip by then had discovered for himself that Fr. Mulholland was a problem. In addition to complaining that the associate pastor was rarely present, Fr. Logrip told Msgr. Lynn: "Father Mulholland is supposed to be in charge of the CYO. He does attend meetings, but it might be better if he did not." The pastor, according to Msgr. Lynn's notes, had also noticed what was a pattern in Fr. Mulholland's abusive behavior – he had a "small following in the parish."

On June 17, 2002, Cardinal Bevilacqua named Fr. Mulholland Chaplain at Immaculate Mary Nursing Home in Philadelphia, and assigned him to live at the rectory of Saint Dominic, a North Philadelphia parish with a grade school. Archdiocese documents do not indicate where the priest has resided since December 2, 2002, when the pastor at Saint Dominic, Fr. John D. Gabin, wrote Msgr. Lynn a one-sentence letter: "Father John H. Mulholland does not live at St. Dominic rectory."

## **The Archdiocesan Review Board investigates.**

On March 10, 2004, the Archdiocesan Review Board concluded that Fr. Mulholland's was "not in violation of the *Essential Norms* defining sexual abuse of a minor contained in *The Charter for Protection of Children and Young People* adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops." The board made that determination despite finding that "Reverend Mulholland's letter to a young boy in his parish indicates that he is a disturbed individual in need of mental health intervention."

That letter included explicit language describing sexual abuse, such as the priest's promise "never to jump or molest" the boy so long as he continued his "daily punishments" of the priest. In addition, the boy, according to a memo written by Fr. Walsh in 1970s Archdiocese-style language, "confessed a relationship with Father." The Review Board investigator reported that one suspected victim "declined to discuss the nature of his relationship with Reverend Mulholland . . . stating that the only other person who knew what happened between him and Reverend Mulholland was his wife." And finally, Msgr. Lynn reported to therapists in June 2004 that many of the victims admitted to the investigator that, "in retrospect," Fr. Mulholland's behavior with them would have to be considered "sexual."

Although it did not find sexual abuse, the Review Board did not treat the reports of Fr. Mulholland's dangerous behavior as Cardinal Bevilacqua had. Having labeled the behavior as something other than sexual abuse, the Review Board did not simply ignore it. Board members were troubled by the fact that Fr. Mulholland had never received a mental health evaluation or treatment. The board's recommendations stated: "This raises concern in that the letter gives evidence of serious mental health problems that have gone undiagnosed and untreated for many years. As a result, the vulnerable populations with whom Reverend Mulholland comes in contact may be at risk."

The Review Board called for "prompt mental health intervention." It recommended that Fr. Mulholland's ministry not include youth. Board members also recognized that one does not have to be diagnosed a pedophile to be dangerous to children and other vulnerable

populations. In Fr. Mulholland's case, they recommended that his evaluation "should address risk related factors in Reverend Mulholland's continued ministry with the elderly."

As of the Archdiocese's last report to the Grand Jury, Fr. Mulholland was still a priest with full faculties, still ministering to the elderly at Immaculate Mary Nursing Home. His residence was unrecorded.

Father Mulholland appeared before the Grand Jury and was given an opportunity to answer questions concerning the allegations against him. He chose not to do so.