

I SUPPORT FATHER FRANK

In Defense of Father Frank Pavone and Priests for Life

An open letter to all U.S. Catholic Bishops from the Pro-Life/Pro-Family leadership in America

We, the undersigned, represent the leadership of the pro-life/pro-family movement in the United States—from many different organizations... from all Christian denominations and political stripes...and from all the various battlefronts in the struggle to protect women and their unborn children from the devastating atrocity known as abortion.

In the last few days, we've become aware that the integrity of Father Frank Pavone and Priests for Life is being called into question by Fr. Pavone's Ordinary, Bishop Patrick Zurek of the Diocese of Amarillo, Texas.

We have carefully examined Bishop Zurek's allegations of financial mismanagement, along with his proposed solutions.

We also have carefully studied Father Pavone's well-documented and respectful answers to Bishop Zurek's charges, and we have reached the conclusion that we must speak out in defense of Father Pavone at this time.

First of all, we have personally known and worked closely with Fr. Pavone for decades and have admired him as a brave, devout, and stalwart defender of the Christian faith as well as a formidable bulwark against the insidious and well-financed pro-death juggernaut.

Time and again, we have seen Fr. Pavone boldly lead the pro-life movement as a priest who is not afraid to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

We have benefitted immeasurably from Fr. Pavone's abounding generosity and self-sacrifice on innumerable occasions. He never asks us for anything in return. On the contrary, he gives his life for others. He does not seek the spotlight, the podium, the pulpit, or the camera. Rather, he is a man so gifted by God that he naturally is thrust into a leadership position, as you were when you were chosen to become a successor of the Apostles. And far from shirking the duties that come with God-given talents, Fr. Pavone takes up his cross daily and inspires others to do the same.

Father Pavone is also a wise man, and he has surrounded himself with top-level advisors whom he depends on to help him maximize the effectiveness of his pro-life ministry. He does not bury his talents or hide his lamp under a bushel, but fearlessly proclaims the Gospel of Life from the housetops.

This is why we recoil at the thought of seeing Fr. Pavone relegated to a convent in Amarillo, Texas. It would be a wrongful misuse of his talents, much like the servant in Matthew's Gospel who was given one talent and buried it. When the master returned, he rebuked that servant (calling him "evil") and had him cast into the darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Father Pavone has not been given one but ten talents, and he has used them wisely to produce ten more. Yes, Priests for Life is able to raise millions of dollars to fund the vast scope of their work, but there is nothing sinful about being effective when doing the Lord's work.

Bishop Zurek also says that Fr. Pavone has attributed a "supreme importance" to his pro-life ministry, and that he has an "inflated ego" because he's "famous."

We assure you that Fr. Pavone does not have an inflated ego. He is the most humble and selfless servant the Church could ask for.

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Now, does Fr. Pavone consider his ministry of saving babies from abortion to be of "supreme importance"? Absolutely. So do we. That's why we have similarly devoted ourselves full time to this mission.

After all, the Church is supposed to love and protect the poorest of the poor above all things. As Our Lord taught us, "Love one another as I have loved you." And "Whatsoever you do for the least of these, you do unto me."

These days, no one is more deserving of a full-time priestly advocate than God's holy innocent children in the womb who are targeted for a horrifying death by abortion. The Church eagerly serves the sick, the poor, the hungry, and the imprisoned. But where can Fr. Pavone or any of the good priests associated with Priests for Life exercise the same kind of full-time nationwide ministry in the Church today?

And so we feel compelled to seek justice and fairness for Fr. Pavone, with all due respect to his bishop.

Unfortunately, Bishop Zurek's actions against Fr. Pavone and Priests for Life have already given rise to an unfounded sense of "scandal" in the Church and the pro-life movement - especially after Bishop Zurek's letter to the bishops found its way to the nation's press.

We fear that serious harm has been done to Fr. Pavone and Priests for Life. And with the accusations based on what we consider are subjective feelings, suspicions, and poor information, this whole affair is puzzling to pro-lifers.

After all, it is well documented that Priests for Life has consistently complied with all the norms of financial transparency and accountability. They are audited every year by a highly respected independent CPA firm, and they have provided all their financial documents to Bishop Zurek ever since he became the Bishop of Amarillo in 2008 (and before that, to his predecessor, Bishop Yanta).

Priests for Life also sends their financials and IRS reports to any other bishop who requests them, as well as makes them public on the Priests for Life website. The 21 bishops and cardinals on their Episcopal Advisory Council always see their financial reports.

So, for Bishop Zurek to claim that Fr. Pavone and Priests for Life are somehow trying to hide something simply doesn't fit the facts.

Furthermore, for Bishop Zurek to suggest that you, his brother bishops throughout the United States, advise the faithful under your care not to donate any more money to Priests for Life seems harsh and lacks the due process afforded every priest.

In summary, we the undersigned respectfully urge you, as the leaders of the Catholic Church in America, to carefully hear Fr. Pavone's defense against the accusations against him—and then make your own well-reasoned conclusion.

We firmly believe that, with a full and proper investigation of the facts, Fr. Pavone and Priests for Life will be vindicated, and that you will echo Pilate's judgment of Jesus: "I find no guilt in this man."

Let us hope that it's not too late to stem the tide of corrosive gossip in the media that could tarnish the good reputation of a devoted priest who merely wants to end the demonic scourge of abortion in our land, which as you know, cries out to heaven for vengeance.

And be assured of our constant prayers for you as you steer the barque of Peter through this unfortunate and untimely storm.

With humble supplications and the utmost gratitude for your selfless service to the Body of Christ.

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Signatures as of 9/20/2011 9:55 p.m. Eastern – (more to follow soon)

Dr. James Dobson
Family Talk Radio

Jack Ames
Defend Life

C. Fletcher Armstrong
Southeast Director, Center
for Bio-Ethical Reform

Jim Backlin
Christian Coalition of
America

Pastor Stephen E. Broden
Board Chairman, Life
Always

Dick Bott, Sr.,
Founder and Board
Chairman, Bott Radio
Network

Rich Bott
President, Bott Radio
Network

Joseph A Brinck,
President, Sanctity of Life
Foundation

Joel Brind

Reese Butler
President and CEO, Kristin
Brooks Hope Center
National Hopeline Network

Bill Calvin
Center for Bioethical Reform

Dr. Gary Cass
Chairman / CEO,
DefendChristians.Org

Denise Cocciolone
President, National Life
Center

Cheryl Conrad
Director of Operations,
Survivors of the Abortion
Holocaust; Board of
Directors, Turn the Hearts

Gregg Cunningham
Executive Director, Center
for Bio-Ethical Reform

Mark Crutcher
President, Life Dynamics,
Inc.

Marjorie Dannenfelser
President, SBA List

Steven Ertelt
LifeNews.com

Connie Eller
Missouri Blacks for Life

Ann English

Carol Everett
Founder and CEO, The Heidi
Group

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Christopher Ferrara, Esq.
President and Chief Counsel,
American Catholic Lawyers
Association

Robert K. Fischer
President, Fischer Furniture,
Inc.

Pastor Ken Freeman
Last Harvest

Kristina Garza
Campus Outreach Director,
Survivors of the Abortion
Holocaust

Rev. Terry Gensemer
Charismatic Episcopal
Church for Life

Teresa George
Coastal Realty

Brian Gibson
Executive Director, Pro-Life
Action Ministries

Thomas Glessner
National Institute of Family
and Life Advocates (NIFLA)

Mark Harrington
Director, Created Equal

Walter B. Hoye II
President, Issues4Life
Foundation; Core Member of
the National Black Pro-life
Coalition

John J. Jakubczyk, Esq.
Arizona Delegate to National
Right to Life Committee;
Board Member Arizona
Right to Life; President, Life
Education Corporation;
Founder, Southwest Li

Phillip Jauregui
Judicial Action Group

Jason Jones
Founder, H.E.R.O.

Abby Johnson
Former Planned Parenthood
Director

Dr. Charles Kenny
The Right Brain People

Alice Marie Kinney-Grady

Reggie Garcia Littlejohn
Woman's Rights Activist

Scott Klusendorf
President, Life Training
Institute

Patrick Mahoney
Christian Defense Coalition

Karen Malec
Coalition on Abortion/Breast
Cancer

Peter D. Marengo, FDD
Grand Knight, Knights of
Columbus Council #311

Michael Martelli
Executive Director,
Maryland Coalition for Life

Dr. Patricia McEwen
Life Coalition International;
Doctors for Life
International

Marcella Melendez
President, Catholic Coalition
of New Mexico

Noelle Moll
President, Life 4 All
Ministries

Dr. Michael A. Murphy

Troy Newman
President, Operation Rescue
and ProLife Nation

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Tim and Terri Palmquist
LifeSavers Ministries 40
Days for Life

Star Parker
Founder and President
CURE

Allan J. Potts
Right to Life of San Diego
County

Penny Pullen
President, Life Advocacy
Resource Project; Former
Illinois State Representative

**James L. Scheffler BS
RDMS**
Innovative Imaging
Technology

Bud and Tara Shaver
Project Defending Life
Albuquerque, NM

Rivers Teske
Founder and President,
Hidden Choices, Inc

Chris Slattery
Founder and President,
Expectant Mother Care-EMC
FrontLine Pregnancy Centers

Andrew Smith
State Director, Pro-Life
Texas

Jill Stanek

Jo Tolck
Human Life Alliance

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of American Families

Danielle White Versluys
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Southern California

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Sandra Watson

Jeff White
Founder, Survivors of the
Abortion Holocaust Founder,
Turn the Hearts

**Tim and Colette Wilson,
Esq.**

Wendy Wright,
Former President, Concerned
Women of America