



CONGREGATIO
PRO CLERICIS

Vatican City, 6 February, 2015

Prot. No. 20150367

The Reverend Frank PAVONE
National Director
Priests for Life
PO Box 141172
Staten Island, NY 10314
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dear Father Pavone,

I would like to thank you for your letter of 29 January 2015, and to acknowledge receipt of your earlier letter of 30 November 2014, together with the copy of the proposed draft statutes which were attached.

Before addressing the question of those draft statutes, please permit me to clarify some inaccuracies in the information contained in your most recent letter of 29 January 2015. To begin with, this Congregation has not asked that it be presented with draft statutes. My letter of 15 September 2014 (cf. Prot. No. 20142931) indicated that draft statutes should be presented to the competent authority, who, as you know, is the Archbishop of New York. Moreover, he is competent not by the request of this Dicastery, as the letter indicates, but by the law itself (cf. Apostolic Letter *motu proprio*, “*Intima ecclesiae natura*”, Art. 3 §2).

It is also inaccurate to state that the recent Apostolic Visitation “had very favorable results”. In truth, while it found no evidence of wrongdoing, the 2013 “Final Report” identified very significant problems. This Congregation made numerous substantive and critical suggestions, which it considered to be necessary if “Priests for Life” hopes to survive beyond a generation or two. Running throughout that report was the consistent thread that the only recognized statutes which exist, i.e., those of 1991, bore little or no resemblance to the current organization. Then, on 19 June 2014, the members of the Board of Directors of “Priests for Life, Inc.” passed a resolution whereby they would seek recognition as an international private lay association of the faithful. With this resolution, the current organization has moved even farther away from the canonically recognized statutes.

In light of these developments, this Congregation informed you, in the above-referenced letter of 15 September 2014, that the discrepancy between the ecclesiastically recognized statutes and those of the current civil corporation, “in their governance, in their membership, in the scope of the apostolate, and in their very nature as either a clerical or a lay association”, had become so great that “it is increasingly difficult to think of these two entities as being one and the same”. That same letter stated very clearly that “the association of the faithful is governed by statutes which it is not following, and the civil corporation is not an ecclesial entity at all”. Such is the situation as it currently stands.

In their resolution of 19 June 2014, the members of the Board of Directors of the civil corporation "Priests for Life, Inc." indicated their intention to pursue recognition of the corporation as an association of the faithful. The path to such recognition was indicated to you in that same letter of 15 September 2014, when this Dicastery recommended that a draft set of canonical statutes of "Priests for Life, Inc." should be presented to the competent ecclesiastical authority for review. You have responded by presenting a draft set of statutes to this Congregation, with the hope that after a suitable period of dialogue, this Dicastery would recognize the statutes, and thereby recognize "Priests for Life, Inc." as an international mixed association of the faithful. I must remind you, however, that in its letter of 8 November 2013 (cf. Prot. No. 20133327), this Congregation informed you that there is a process which must be followed to seek international recognition. This procedure will apply whether the central offices are in New York, or in Rome, or elsewhere.


It is important for me to be very clear at this point. This Dicastery does not intend to recognize an international association which is private rather than public, which lacks juridic personality, and which does not allow for a reasonable amount of episcopal oversight. Furthermore, since the majority of the apostolate of "Priests for Life" is carried out in the United States, this Congregation will not review any proposed draft statutes until it first has received at least a favorable *votum* and a *nihil obstat* from the competent authority, as well as from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and from the Apostolic Nuncio in the United States, regardless of where the central offices are located.

In the meantime, there is nothing to prevent "Priests for Life, Inc.", together with its numerous affiliated agencies, from continuing to labor on behalf of the Pro-Life movement, but it should not present itself as a recognized Catholic association. It is a civil corporation. This unfortunate situation is the consequence of twenty years of decisions which have continually moved "Priests for Life, Inc." away from the recognized statutes.

This information is not intended to downplay or criticize the many excellent works which "Priests for Life, Inc." continues to do in promoting proper respect for the sanctity of human life. Rather, it is my intention to clarify the canonical realities involved and to indicate the way forward, if the civil corporation "Priests for Life, Inc." wishes to receive ecclesiastical recognition as an association of the faithful. In the meantime, this Congregation will continue to defer to the prudent judgment of the competent authority.

Thanking you for your consideration of the observations, I take this opportunity to extend every best wish, as I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beniamino Stella". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Beniamino Card. Stella
Prefect