

Priests for Life is a recognized Catholic association and a 501(c)(3) corporation whose mission is to end abortion and euthanasia. With a full-time staff of over 60 people, it is a family of ministries, encompassing Deacons for Life, Seminarians for Life, Rachel's Vineyard, the Silent No More Awareness Campaign, Gospel of Life Ministries, and more.

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Archbishop of New York

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Assisting God's People to Proclaim, Celebrate, and Serve the Gospel of Life.

March 14, 2015

His Eminence Beniamino Cardinal Stella
Prefect, Sacred Congregation for the Clergy
Vatican City State

Your Eminence,

Permit me to renew my gratitude for your letter of 6 February 2015 (Prot. No. 20150367) and to address a third aspect of its contents, namely, the submission of the new set of statutes.

I understand and accept the process you describe for how such statutes are to be presented, first on the local level to the competent authority. (I have also always understood, and explained to others many times, that the Archbishop of New York is the competent authority *by virtue of the law itself*. I am sorry if my letter conveyed otherwise.)

May I first point out that the leadership of Priests for Life presented the statutes to the Congregation at the end of November *because we had been advised that this is what the Congregation wanted us to do at that point*. We were not trying to circumvent the guidance of the Congregation, but rather following what we thought was new information from our advisors.

We apologize if that was not the proper procedure. But aside from the fact that we were asked to do so, there was also another reason that this made sense to us. The competent authority, to whom the statutes need to be presented first, had publicly indicated that he did not want to engage in this process any further.

Your letter of 6 February means that we should approach the Archbishop of New York for this purpose. But we would respectfully request that the Congregation assist us by encouraging him to respond to us rather than to take the posture that he does not want to have anything to do with us. If, after all, it is by virtue of the law itself that he is the competent authority, then it is neither his decision nor ours nor the Congregation's to say that he has nothing to do with us. That is why his unwillingness to communicate with us does not make sense to us.

The other motive in sending the statutes to the Congregation is rooted in the series

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"The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit." (2 Tim. 1:7)

of meetings we have had with officials of the Congregation since the completion of the Visitation. Through those meetings we have been trying to discern whether the type of association and apostolate the statutes describe falls under the competence of the Congregation for Clergy or, alternatively, the Council for the Laity. As you know, we were given that choice by the Congregation after the Visitation. While we are very familiar with the types of activities our mission entails, we are not experts regarding under whose competence that particular configuration of activities, in a mixed association, would fall. That has precisely been the topic of several meetings with the Congregation, and in those meetings it was understood that we would explore with the Congregation the specifics of how we wanted to revise our statutes, so as to see if, in the end, the reality of our association would in fact fit under the competence of the Congregation. We therefore presented the specific wording of the new statutes to the Congregation so that it could serve as a basis for that conversation and discernment to move forward.

We understand, as your letter points out, the "twenty years of decisions which have continually moved Priests for Life, Inc. away from the recognized statutes." We do not, however, see the result as "unfortunate." Each of those decisions, as our ministry has grown and diversified, was made in a very public manner, with wide consultation (including with bishops), and with one primary goal in mind: *advancing more effectively the pro-life mission* to which we have committed ourselves. That continues to be our primary goal. We are responding to the needs of the faithful, the signs of the times, and the dynamics of the pro-life movement, in which we play a central role of leadership.

If the resulting nature of the apostolate can be given official recognition by the Catholic Church, that is obviously a benefit. But the success of our apostolate has not been the result of such *recognitio*, but rather a result of the work itself and the fact that it is changing minds, saving lives, and meeting the needs of the faithful who are part of the pro-life movement. And we thank Your Eminence for affirming in your letter the value of the work we continue to do.

Recognizing the benefits of eventual *recognitio*, we are happy to continue to adjust the statutes of the Association to more precisely reflect the actual work we do. The latest version which we sent you at the end of November represent the latest attempt to do so. And insofar as the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities here in the United States have a role to play, we will continue to ask for their assistance.

Yours in Christ,



Fr. Frank Pavone
National Director