

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.

Ecclesiastical Authority

His Eminence Cardinal Timothy Dolan
Archbishop of New York

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Founders, Rachel's Vineyard Ministries

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

March 16, 2015

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

Your Eminence,

Allow me to address a fourth aspect of your letter of 6 February 2015 (Prot. No. 20150367), for which the leadership of Priests for Life and I remain grateful. That aspect is your reference to the "reasonable amount of episcopal oversight" which, as you indicate and we agree, is an essential component for us to have as an association.

Your Eminence, it has long been our position that many of those responsible for episcopal oversight of our work have *not been reasonable* in what they have required, or in their understanding of what "oversight" requires. One of the signs of the lack of *reasonableness* is that while not failing to assert their *authority and competence* to impose various restrictions and requirements, they have often failed to provide the *reasons behind* such decisions and actions, and likewise failed to engage in the *dialogue* that should constitute a reasonable approach to initial objections.

Take the most recent requirements placed upon us by Cardinal Dolan as an example. In the unanimous judgment of our Board of Directors, our civil attorneys, our canonical advisors, and our financial advisors, the type of audit he was requiring would have been *financially crippling* and lacking in regard to adequate safeguards of confidentiality. Moreover, his actions and expectations in terms of the "reconstituting" of the Board of Directors were in violation of the nature of our organization from both a civil and canonical perspective, and this was, again, the unanimous judgment of our Board and our attorneys.

When I had the pleasure of speaking with you directly at the Congregation -- and I thank you again for taking the time to do so -- you stressed with me the indispensable place of obedience. As I said then and say again now, I fully agree. Yet the decisions of whether to proceed with the aforementioned demands of Cardinal Dolan were and are not mine to make unilaterally. In what sense do I exercise obedience when the organization's governing body, as well as their

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

advisors, point out that a request is unreasonable?

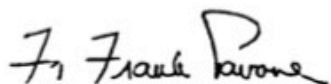
What I attempted to do, as I have already indicated, is to lead a dialogue in which the concerns of the Board and the advisors could be addressed and, at the same time, the Cardinal's goals could also be achieved. Yet he did not agree to engage in that process.

In my recent meetings at the Congregation, I shared my conviction that the current problem is not about *obedience*, but about *communication* and *good will*. We not only accept, but we seek a "reasonable amount of episcopal oversight." In the process of seeking that, we have had an Apostolic Visitation, and we found that the Visitor and his team were listening intently to us as we provided information and answers to their questions. Moreover, we experienced from them a posture of *good will* towards us and our work. We have had the same experience with the Congregation for Clergy.

By contrast, however, we have experienced a lack of both qualities -- *listening* and *good will* -- from both the Bishop of Amarillo and the Archbishop of New York. We believe that part of the "reasonableness" of episcopal oversight, whether of an association or an individual priest, is a posture of good will and the ability to listen. The fact that our experience is that these are lacking from two of the key people in this process makes the process very difficult if not impossible to carry out, and renders so many of the other considerations premature or irrelevant. Disclosure of information, for instance, does not achieve its desired effect if the recipient is not paying attention to it, and having canonical precision in the manner in which one requests something does not have its desired effect if the authority who is competent to grant the request does not have good will.

We seek your wisdom as to how to proceed under such circumstances.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Frank Pavone".

Fr. Frank Pavone
National Director