



CONGREGATIO  
PRO CLERICIS

Vatican City, 1 October, 2015

Prot. No. 20153127

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

Dear Father Pavone,

I am sending to you, in your capacity as National Director of Priests for Life, Inc., a copy of a letter which is being sent to the President of the USCCB, His Excellency Archbishop Kurtz. The purpose of the attached letter is to update the United States Bishops regarding the final report of the Apostolic Visitation concluded in 2013, together with the continued developments which have taken place since then, regarding your organization's discernment about in its own future development.

Every effort has been made to be clear, honest, and fair in the presentation of the information to the Bishops, and to respect the autonomy of Priests for Life, Inc. As the attached letter clearly indicates, this information is not intended to downplay or to criticize the many excellent works which Priests for Life, Inc. undertakes on behalf of the sanctity of human life, but rather is intended to provide canonical clarity for the U.S. Bishops.

Grateful for your collaboration, I renew my sentiments of esteem and best wishes, and I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Beniamino Card. Stella  
*Prefect*

with Enclosure



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Vatican City, 1 October 2015

Prot. No. 20153127

The Most Reverend Joseph E. KURTZ  
President  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 Fourth Street, N. E.  
Washington, D.C. 20017-1194  
**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Your Excellency,

Four years have passed since this Congregation first became aware of concerns on the part of some Bishops concerning the clerical association of the faithful entitled "Priests for Life" [hereafter, *PFL*]. In light of its competence for clerical associations, this Dicastery initiated an Apostolic Visitation of *PFL* on 18 May 2012. It did so in order to help resolve these aforementioned concerns, to provide guidance to *PFL*, and to assist the Pro-Life Movement in the United States.

Throughout the Visitation itself, the leadership of *PFL* was cooperative and welcomed the assistance of the Holy See. The final report of that Visitation was communicated to *PFL* on 8 November 2013 (Prot. No. 20133327). While finding no evidence of wrongdoing, the report identified significant problems which, in the opinion of this Dicastery, required prompt attention. Respecting the lawful autonomy of the group as a private association of the faithful, this Congregation refrained from ordering corrective measures and instead made recommendations to the leadership of *PFL*. Until now, this matter has been treated confidentially, to allow *PFL* to work discretely toward implementing those recommendations in conjunction with the competent ecclesiastical authority in the United States. The point has now arrived, however, at which it is advisable to update the United States Bishops regarding the Apostolic Visitation and the current situation with *PFL*.

A consistent thread running throughout the final report indicated that the only ecclesiastically recognized statutes which exist for *PFL* are those approved by the former Archbishop of San Francisco in 1991. They bear little or no resemblance to the current organization, which is actually a civil corporation entitled "Priests for Life, Inc." [hereafter, *PFL Inc.*] The principal recommendations of the Apostolic Visitation's final

report reflect this discrepancy between the statutes and the current reality, and they are as follows:

- The statutes from 1991, canonically still in force, should be revised, and after having been revised, they need to be followed.
- The discrepancy between *PFL*'s governance as described in the statutes, and what is actually done in practice, should be corrected.
- Terms of office should be enforced, with a fixed maximum number of terms for key leadership positions.
- A stronger role should be provided for episcopal oversight.
- *PFL* should create an accurate and reliable system for determining membership.
- A confidential and more detailed financial report should be sent annually to all members of the Advisory Board of Bishops and to the competent ecclesiastical authority.

The Apostolic Visitation also answered a long-confusing question as to the identity of the ecclesiastical authority competent to exercise vigilance over the group. The Visitation determined that, because the headquarters of *PFL Inc.* are located in Staten Island, New York, the Archbishop of New York, by the law itself, is competent in this regard (cf. Apostolic Letter *motu proprio*, "*Intima ecclesiae natura*", Art. 3 §2).

In the final report, it became apparent that the association would need to decide if it wished to remain a clerical association or redefine itself as a lay association. Having taken this point to heart, the association's leadership began a process of internal discernment concerning the best way to move forward. Faced with the reality that the organization has grown well-beyond what was originally envisioned in the 1991 statutes, the governing board of *PFL Inc.* passed a resolution on 19 June 2014 intending to seek eventual recognition as an international private lay association of the faithful, believing that such a structure would correspond more authentically to the organization as it now exists. No such recognition has been obtained.

This decision of the governing board to seek recognition as a lay association is entirely within the competence of *PFL Inc.* The decision has served, nonetheless, to increase the divide between the ecclesiastically recognized clerical association *PFL* and the civil corporation *PFL Inc.* In effect, *PFL Inc.* has left behind both the clerical association and its ecclesiastical recognition, and has set out upon a new course. As a result, it is no longer possible to think of the clerical association and the civil corporation as being one and the same. Although they share some common elements, they differ substantially and not just accidentally. This fact is evident in their governance, in their criteria for membership, in the scope of their apostolate, and in their nature as an association of the faithful. For all practical purposes, the recognized clerical association is defunct, and what remains is a civil corporation without ecclesiastical recognition.

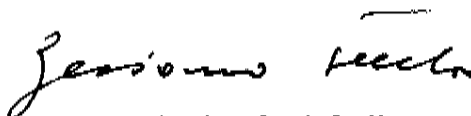
On 6 February 2015, this Congregation indicated to the leadership of *PFL Inc.* that, although *PFL Inc.* grew out of *PFL*, the two can no longer be equated (Prot. No. 20150367). *PFL Inc.* is a non-profit civil corporation of the State of New York which describes itself as an outreach of a larger separately-incorporated ecumenical umbrella group entitled "Gospel of Life Ministries". The result of more than twenty years of decisions on the part of *PFL Inc.* concerning its own growth and development is that, by its own decision, the civil corporation *PFL Inc.* has placed itself outside of any ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It is important that the Bishops of the United States know this. Since *PFL Inc.* does not possess any ecclesiastical recognition, this Congregation has indicated to the corporation that *it should no longer present itself as a recognized Catholic association of the faithful.* How *PFL Inc.* chooses to respond to the recommendations of the Apostolic Visitation is a matter for the corporation's Board of Directors to decide freely. If at some point in the future *PFL Inc.* wishes to obtain ecclesiastical recognition, it would need to follow the appropriate canonical procedures for doing so.

This information is not intended to downplay or to criticize the many excellent works which *PFL Inc.* continues to do in promoting proper respect for the sanctity of human life. Rather, it is intended to clarify the canonical realities involved and to apprise the Bishops of the United States of those same realities, in order that they might arrive at their own pastoral and prudent judgments concerning how they will choose to interact with the civil corporation *PFL Inc.*

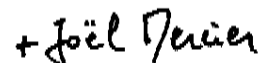
Lastly, it should be noted that the status of other "Priest for Life" organizations established outside of the United States, e.g., "Priests for Life Canada", is a separate question into which this Dicastery has not entered.

Grateful for your continued collaboration, I take this opportunity to renew my sentiments of esteem and best wishes, and I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ



Beniamino Card. Stella  
*Prefect*



✠ Joël Mercier  
*Titular Archbishop of Rota*  
*Secretary*