

Followup to the Visitation Report

Having received the Visitation Report from the Congregation for Clergy in November of 2013, Priests for Life began to implement its recommendations.

Because the Visitation Report cleared the good name of Priests for Life in regard to questions that had been raised publicly about its management of finances, we asked the Congregation how we might publicize the report. The response of the Prefect (attached) indicated that we should seek the counsel of Cardinal Dolan, who was competent to communicate to the Episcopal Conference on behalf of the Association to clear its good name. However, no such communication has yet been made.

When the Visitation Report was issued on November 8, 2013, the Board of Priests for Life immediately began to implement its recommendations, even though these recommendations were explicitly described by the Congregation, at the outset of the Report, as optional and non-obligatory. The progress the organization has made in the implementation of these recommendations, and of further directives of Cardinal Dolan, has been reported to the Congregation for Clergy, which has acknowledged that progress.

The Board meeting of February 27, 2014, updated the statutes of Priests for Life to incorporate the Vatican's recommendations. Most of the recommendations required adding provisions to the statutes which did not exist previously or which were expressed in other documents. All of these changes were made as the Vatican's report recommended, and these statutes were approved unanimously, signed and notarized. Meanwhile, on more fundamental matters such as the discernment as to what canonical designation the Association wanted to have, the Board passed a number of resolutions to set the necessary processes in motion to arrive at the decisions the Congregation requested.

On March 10, 2014, Fr. Frank Pavone met with Cardinal Dolan in the Cardinal's office, accompanied by his canonical, financial, and civil advisors, and gave to the Cardinal a full report of the manner in which the Board implemented the recommendations of the Visitation Report through its February 27 meeting.

Consistent with the Cardinal's additional recommendations, Priests for Life then undertook a "corporate review," conducted by its General Counsel, to insure detailed compliance with all state and federal law, and to clarify more specifically the relationship between the Corporation "Priests for Life" and the several other corporations which protect other aspects of its ministry (such as "Gospel of Life Ministries" and "Rachel's Vineyard").

Cardinal Dolan was informed that this review was being conducted and expressed his appreciation.

To incorporate further recommendations of our General Counsel, pursuant to the corporate review, a further board meeting of June 18, 2014, revised the civil bylaws of Priests for Life by unanimous consent.

Cardinal Dolan, in response to our request to restore the good reputation of the Association, had also asked at the March 10 meeting that we undergo a "forensic audit" and "reconstitute the Board."

As for the Board, we immediately added five new members and shared those names with the Cardinal, who expressed his approval. He sent an additional five names of his own, and we wrote to each of those individuals in order to initiate a process of getting to know them so that the Board could eventually make an informed decision as to whether to vote them onto the Board. We are still awaiting responses to those letters. In the meantime, the Cardinal did not respond to the Board's inquiry as to whether he was "appointing" those board members (which would be contrary to our statutes) or offering them for the considered vote of the Board.

As for an additional audit, the Board raised the question as to why the conclusions of the Vatican's Visitation Report, as well as another clean audit recently received for the year 2013, were not sufficient to clear our good name. Our General Counsel, Board, and accountants, moreover, objected to the term "forensic audit," given its implication that there is evidence of wrongdoing. Moreover, the letter of engagement that Cardinal Dolan sent, lacked any limitation on what the organization would have to spend on the audit and lacked any confidentiality requirements on those to whom the audit would be sent. Therefore our General Counsel asked for revisions to the agreement.

Despite the fact that in the March 10 meeting, the Cardinal was agreeable to a less formal process than a "forensic audit," subsequent written communications expressed no such flexibility or even willingness to discuss other options. The Board and the General Counsel of Priests for Life renewed their request for an in-person meeting to discuss the matter, and still await a response.

While waiting for a new meeting, we saw a letter to the other bishops in which Cardinal Dolan dissociated himself from the Association.

Subsequent to that, the Congregation for Clergy asked us to send to them directly a set of revised statutes. This was accomplished on November 30, 2014, and the revised statutes answered the question of the Congregation regarding what kind of Association we want to be, namely, and international, mixed (clergy and laity), private association of the faithful. The Congregation informed us that it has received the new statutes and is studying them now.