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ATTESTATION

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To whom it may concern,

As a Board Certified Clinical Psychotherapist and a Nationally Certified Psychologist, I write in reference to Fr. Frank Pavone and the long-standing difficulties he has faced with regard to his Bishop, the Rev. Patrick Zurek, of the Diocese of Amarillo, Texas.

Fr. Pavone, whom I have known for many years and find to be of sound mental and emotional health, has been subjected to a clear and consistent pattern of abusive behavior by his bishop for more than a decade.

This abuse is thoroughly documented. In this regard, for example, I believe that the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome has confirmed some of these abuses by the very fact of said Congregation's declaration of the invalidity of repeated penalties which Bishop Zurek imposed upon Fr. Pavone. Furthermore, in 2013, the Congregation's Apostolic Visitation's Report declared that Priests for Life's and Fr. Pavone's financial administration of the association was sound. This declaration was formally and decisively against the written allegations of Bishop Zurek to all the Catholic Bishops of the United States, wherein he falsely accused Fr. Pavone of financial impropriety.

Accordingly, in view of such well-documented abuses against Fr. Pavone, it is only natural that Fr. Pavone deeply mistrusts Bishop Zurek, and that Fr. Pavone should be both advised that any further meeting or communication with Bishop Zurek will only serve as yet another platform to be exploited by Bishop Zurek to harm Fr. Pavone's reputation and person.

For such reasons and as happens in all civil, judicial, social or administrative arenas where the individual rights of victims are protected, it is only just that Fr. Pavone be owed the rights and measures of healing that any victim of abuse deserves. Failure to otherwise provide a safe environment for Fr. Pavone's person would only perpetrate harm against him as the victim.

In a November 21, 2019 Meeting of the Rectors of the Colleges in Rome, Msgr. Andrea Ripa, Under Secretary of the Congregation for the Clergy, gave a talk titled "**Considerations About Spiritual Abuse, or Abuse of Conscience.**"

Though the talk was written with seminarians and religious communities in mind, the quotations of Pope Francis which were cited, as well as the some of the signs and symptoms of **spiritual abuse** which were explained, apply to Fr. Frank Pavone, *mutatis mutandis*, in terms of the serious and harmful nature of the abuse of authority and abuse of conscience he has suffered at the hands of Bishop Zurek,

Ripa states:

"In his 'Letter to the People of God' in the summer of last year (August 20, 2018) on the subject of abuse, the Holy Father repeatedly referred to the different types of abuse, identifying for them a common origin, that is 'an anomalous way of understanding authority in the Church – a common cause in numerous communities where sexual abuse, abuse of power and of conscience have occurred – which is clericalism."

Ripa adds,

*"Deepening this reflection on the occasion of his trip to Ireland, Pope Francis returned to this theme in his meeting with the members of the Society of Jesus (25 August 2018), specifying that, among the different types, "sexual abuse is not the first. **The first is the abuse of power and conscience.**"*

Ripa further notes,

"As the Holy Father has indicated, at the origin of this type of abuse there is a misuse, a 'corrupt' use, of authority, seeking to subdue others rather than working for their good..."

One trait of spiritual abuse which Ripa states "*deserves attention,*" and which Fr. Pavone has suffered under Bishop Zurek's authority, is the "*explicit or de facto **prohibition of contacts with people or groups that are 'not pleasing' to the spiritual leader***" [bold emphasis in original], particularly in terms of Fr. Pavone's Pro-Life ministry which is fully in accord with the teachings of the Church.

Ripa adds,

*"In a situation where spiritual abuse occurs, **the needs and interests of the individual do not matter**, therefore they are not taken into consideration or, at times, are even judged negatively and dismissed" [bold emphasis in original].*

Regarding this last point, Fr. Pavone's legitimate needs, interests, and pastoral work in the name of the Church have not only been judged negatively by Bishop Zurek in a very public and slanderous manner, but Fr. Pavone's natural law and canonical rights have repeatedly been violated by Bishop Zurek (e.g., see *CIC* can. 220 regarding the right to a good reputation).

I fully support Father Frank Pavone's request for "no contact." It is actually a very healthy response to an unhealthy situation of spiritual abuse.

Authority figures in religious life who demand systems of dominance and submission have perpetrated immense harm by abusing the vow of obedience.

A recent document, "New Wine in New Wineskins" from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, clarifies this point:

"It must be kept in mind that true obedience always puts obedience to God first, before authority and the person who obeys. ... true obedience ... requires that each individual demonstrates his or her own conviction obtained through discernment, even when this conviction does not coincide with what is being asked by a superior. Then, if a brother or sister obeys at his or her own will in the name of communion, charitable obedience is put into practice."

It goes on, quoting *Perfectae Caritas*:

"Superiors are to exercise their power in the spirit of service [...] govern their subjects as sons and daughters of God, and promoting the voluntary obedience with reverence for the human person. ...' "

There has been ***no reverence for Father Frank Pavone's dignity or vocation at any level on the part of Bishop Zurek.***

After years of emotional, psychological and spiritual abuse, it is a perfectly reasonable strategy to avoid another encounter or any contact where Father Frank will be demeaned, intimidated, or the victim of additional gaslighting or spending incredible amounts of time and energy to anticipate and respond to more whims and wants of a person who puts him into a double bind – a no win situation - a situation in which he is continually confronted with two irreconcilable demands or a choice between two undesirable courses of action.

Healing from abuse begins by establishing personal boundaries that protect one's mental and physical well-being.

I would ask you to consider the words of Pope Francis, in his 20 August 2018 Letter to the People of God. He states:

Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that “not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people.” Clericalism... leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say “no” to abuse is to say an emphatic “no” to all forms of clericalism.

He then summons the People of God to be "committed in truth and charity with all men and women of good will, and with society in general, to combatting all forms of the abuse of power, sexual abuse and the abuse of conscience."

I pray you may commit yourselves to the same goals.

Sincerely In Christ,

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