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Who is Fr. Frank Pavone?

by Dennis Coday

NCR Today

The news that Fr. Frank Pavone, founder of Priests for Life, is being recalled to his Amarillo, Texas, home diocese, to answer questions about the financial operations of the pro-life group, may have shocked his followers.

One hopes that this is a misunderstanding and can be cleared up quickly. Goodness knows we've had enough scandal.

For those not familiar with Fr. Pavone, I dipped into the archives of Catholic News Service to find two stories from the recent past about Fr. Pavone and Priests for Life.

From April 29, 2010

Pro-life 'freedom rides' set to begin this summer in Birmingham

By Catholic News Service

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (CNS) -- Calling for an end to the nation's "enslavement to legal abortion," Father Frank Pavone of Priests for Life announced April 27 that a series of "freedom rides" for the unborn would begin this summer.

The rides will be nonpartisan, interdenominational and nonviolent and will involve a diverse cross-

section of people, Father Pavone said at a news conference in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park.

"Like the freedom rides of five decades ago, these freedom rides symbolize the principle ... that justice and equal protection of human rights belong to each and every human being, regardless of size or age or any other condition," he said.

Among those joining Father Pavone in the announcement was Alveda King, director of African-American outreach at Priests for Life and niece of the late civil rights leader, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Her father, the Rev. A.D. King, is depicted in a statue of praying ministers at Kelly Ingram Park.

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"When I lived in Birmingham, when our home was bombed in this very city, when my classmate was part of the group of four little girls killed in the bombing of historic Sixteenth Street Baptist Church across the way, I dreamed of a world when life would be better, when freedom would prevail for all," King said. "Now, today, almost 50 years later, we pay tribute to the freedom riders of 1961."

The pro-life freedom rides are to begin with a July 23 send-off concert and rally at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center, followed by a ride to Atlanta through July 25. Father Pavone said dozens of rides in all parts of the country could be scheduled over the next year.

The rides commemorate the civil rights rides protesting forced segregation in public transportation in the South, despite Supreme Court rulings that such segregation was illegal. The first ride left Washington on May 4, 1961, headed for New Orleans; hundreds of riders were beaten and/or arrested during the rides.

"We join our lives and hearts together with those who have gone before us," King said at the Birmingham news conference. "We take to the bus, to the streets of America, riding for justice and freedom for all, from conception till natural death."

Although "a woman has a right to choose what she does with her body," King added, "the baby is not her body."

"Where is the lawyer for the babies whose civil rights are violated by the act of abortion?" she asked. "How can the dream survive if we murder our children."

Father Pavone said the rides would be preceded by a period of intense prayer to end abortion, beginning on Pentecost Sunday, May 23, and continuing until July 4.

Others participating in the Birmingham news conference were the Rev. Clenard Childress, a Baptist minister from New Jersey who is director of the Life Education and Resource Network; the Rev. Stephen Broden, senior pastor of Fair Park Bible Fellowship in Dallas and a candidate for Congress; Father Michael Deering, vicar general for the Diocese of Birmingham; members of Catholics United for Life of Huntsville, Ala.; and Bishop Demetrios Roscoe, founder of Living Church Ministries in Birmingham.

Members of the Priests for Life pastoral team at the news conference included Janet Morana,

executive director and co-founder of the Silent No More awareness campaign; associate directors Father Peter West and Augustinian Father Denis Wilde; and Dominican Father William Scott Daniels and Theresa and Kevin Burke, founders of Rachel's Vineyard, a healing ministry for women and men after an abortion.

From Aug. 3, 2010

First pro-life freedom ride curtailed at Atlanta's King Center

By Stephen O'Kane Catholic News Service

ATLANTA (CNS) -- A bus full of pro-life advocates, including Father Frank Pavone of Priests for Life and Alveda King, niece of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., prayed for an end to abortion near the historic King landmarks on Atlanta's Auburn Avenue July 24.

However, the peaceful demonstration did not occur exactly as anticipated, when National Parks Service officials escorted the group from the site, saying the pro-lifers did not have a needed permit. Meanwhile, a vocal group opposing the pro-life prayer service shouted at them throughout it.

The group of pro-life advocates had traveled from Birmingham, where the "freedom ride," sponsored by Priests for Life, began with a rally the night before.

More than 100 additional people, waiting patiently in the scorching sun, joined the group in Atlanta as the bus unloaded. Together they marched past the grave sites of Rev. King and his wife, Coretta Scott King, and crossed the street to a shaded area near the King Center.

Father Pavone, national director of Priests for Life, said the pro-life journey was planned to build on the spirit of the 1961 freedom rides of the civil rights movement.

In its 1960 decision *Boynton v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation in bus terminals and restaurants serving interstate travelers. The following year, more than a dozen people, both black and white, attempted to travel by bus from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans to test the enforcement of that momentous decision.

According to the Priests for Life website, the pro-life movement shares the civil rights vision of equal justice for all people based on the inherent dignity of every human life. The group asserts that both movements are movements of freedom.

"My Uncle Martin had a dream that Protestants and Catholics and gentiles and Jews would join together and sing the age-old spiritual 'Free at Last,'" Alveda King states on the website. King is director of African-American outreach for Priests for Life.

As the silent group marched slowly to the King Center's grounds, a vocal group of abortion

advocates holding their own rally chanted at the pro-lifers, "Shame on you," "Trust black women" and "You are not King's legacy."

As the pro-lifers gathered in front of the new Ebenezer Baptist Church, they began to sing "We Shall Overcome."

Then, in a moment of confusion for almost everyone involved, the National Parks Service escorted them off the King Center site, saying they were not able to hold their service on the grounds. Meanwhile those in the group favoring abortion were left alone and continued their chants.

Now huddled on a public sidewalk across the street from the King Center, the pro-lifers continued the service, alternating readings from Rev. King with Scripture passages.

A civil rights litany for justice and life, written by Father Pavone, included eight petitions that were read aloud by various people.

"Lord God, author of peace, you created all human beings that they might live as one, and you entrusted the life of each to the care of all," prayed one member. "We pray for peace in our times, a peace which is not simply the absence of bombs and tanks, but rather the full protection of everyone's rights, and the harmonious relationships of human beings with each other and with you."

Asked why the group was escorted off the King Center grounds, some Parks Service officers said the group did not have a permit to gather there, while others said it was to keep the two groups from getting too close to one another and to avoid a confrontation.

According to the National Parks Service, the permit that was issued to Alveda King did not allow the group to gather on the property near the church.

Judy Forte, superintendent of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, said "the only permit that was issued to my knowledge that day was the permit I had given to Alveda King" for a group of 30 adults to gather for a reception in one of the National Parks Service buildings before a tour of the King Center.

The Birmingham-to-Atlanta freedom ride was a new initiative of Priests for Life. A concert and rally at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex July 23 and a demonstration outside Birmingham's Planned Parenthood clinic, where abortions are performed, preceded the three-hour bus ride to Atlanta.

Father Pavone said the next pro-life freedom ride would begin in Knoxville, Tenn., in October and possibly include a stop in Chattanooga, one of the largest cities in the nation without a Planned Parenthood facility.

From Sept. 10, 2008

Priests for Life returns to roots, drops plan to have own seminarians

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON -- In what the founder of Priests for Life called a return to its roots, the organization has decided not to seek church recognition as a society of apostolic life that would accept and ordain its own seminarians.

Instead Priests for Life and the related Missionaries of the Gospel of Life will continue to help priests, seminarians and lay Catholics around the country become "more effectively pro-life" within their own parishes and communities, said Father Frank Pavone in a telephone interview Sept. 9.

"We got it right the first time," he told Catholic News Service, noting that he founded Priests for Life in 1991 as a way to "infuse the existing structures" of the church and society with the pro-life message.

Priests for Life and the Missionaries of the Gospel of Life will be one entity, "without the founding of a canonically distinct community," said a joint statement from Priests for Life and the Diocese of Amarillo, Texas.

Father Pavone, who was originally ordained as a priest of the New York Archdiocese, was incardinated in the Diocese of Amarillo in March 2005 and became the first member of the new Missionaries of the Gospel of Life the following year. He will remain a priest of the Amarillo Diocese, he said.

"It seems best that the association remain focused specifically and exclusively on the pro-life work itself, and leave to dioceses and religious communities the specific task of forming men for the priesthood," said a Sept. 8 news release from the organization. "Priests for Life is always working, however, to supplement that training, both before and after ordination, with specialized training in the many facets of the pro-life movement."

In a Sept. 8 letter to supporters, Father Pavone said the pro-life movement was "entering yet another phase of this battle."

"We are closer to victory than ever before, and now is the time to redouble every effort and to push over the finish line," he said. "Now is the time to cut off any 'dead wood,' any projects that aren't bearing fruit, any expenditures and efforts that are not actually moving us toward the goal of ending abortion, and any bureaucracy in our structures that is hindering rather than advancing the mission."

Father Pavone said the organization would "vastly scale down the building projects that we have in the works." The Missionaries of the Gospel of Life broke ground in August 2006 for a new house of formation and international headquarters in Amarillo.

"A big central headquarters isn't necessary. A small one suffices," the priest said. "I don't want to divert all kinds of attention and resources to building anything that may prove superfluous. We're closer to victory than ever before. The focus now needs to be getting the job done, not setting up more structures for plans to get it done in the next generation."

Father Pavone said he also planned to dedicate himself to finding ways to collaborate with other pro-life leaders and organizations.

"Gathering leaders for retreats and strategy sessions, and building bridges of communication and collaboration that didn't exist before, continues to be one of the most important things in which I am involved," he said. "These efforts for unity are bearing fruit and many leaders have approached me about how we can harvest that fruit and begin more joint efforts, rather than just pursuing, on parallel paths, the work of our individual organizations."

Father Pavone also announced a series of new online training programs for clergy and laypeople, which he said would provide "simple 'how-to' resources for getting the pro-life job done."

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