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Pavone continues to raise money for Priests for Life

Tom Gallagher | Oct. 25, 2011

Fr. Frank Pavone. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

Fr. Frank Pavone, the high-profile, pro-life priest whose bishop has restricted his ministry because of questions about the finances of the group he runs, continues to raise money for the group while reaching out to supporters with Web videos, press releases and endorsements.

Pavone, head of Priests For Life, sent a fundraising letter to supporters Oct. 14 to tell them that "in obedience to my bishop, I am carrying on with our shared pro-life mission." He expresses worry that supporters might be misled by "all the misinformation and outright attacks on me and Priests for Life."

"All I can tell you is that just about everything you're reading or hearing is false. All of it," he wrote.

This is at least Pavone's second fundraising letter since his bishop, Patrick Zurek of Amarillo, Texas, recalled him to the diocese in the Texas panhandle last month because of "persistent questions and concerns" about how Pavone was handling millions of dollars in donations to his organization.

Pavone did not respond to Zurek's public invitation for a private meeting Oct 13. A spokesman for Pavone said the next day that Pavone did not meet with Zurek because he had begun a formal process of mediation [1] with an appeal to the Vatican.

Meanwhile, Pavone has taken up temporary residence with a women's religious group, the Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, a Franciscan charismatic community, about an hour outside Amarillo, in what is reportedly Spartan quarters [2].

Although one of his supporters compared the living arrangement to "solitary confinement," the sisters told local media that Pavone has an air-conditioned apartment with a kitchen and access to the Internet. It is from here that he is running Priests for Life.

In his Oct. 14 letter, Pavone includes two endorsements with an enclosed letter to supporters of Priests for Life written by retired Cleveland auxiliary Bishop Robert Gries as well as a statement from former U.S. ambassador

to the Vatican, Ray Flynn. Pavone has already posted the Gries letter on Priests for Life website [3].

Gries' letter says his relationship with Pavone is based on having "crossed paths many times" over 10 years. He then writes, "During all this time I have found him dedicated to the preservation of life for the unborn."

Pavone's fundraising letter highlights the third paragraph of Gries' letter, which states:

"Please keep Father Pavone in your prayers. He is currently facing some difficult days as he negotiates with his bishop. The work he had done since founding the Priests for Life must continue as we face the future. Please continue to support Priests for Life."

Gries twice says that the work of Priests for Life and the organization itself "must continue." Gries never says that Priests for Life must continue with Pavone leading it.

In his final paragraph, Gries uses the past tense and says, "I was proud to stand with Father Pavone when he asked me to serve on the Advisory Board of Bishops."

The letter does not discuss Pavone's governance, financial or management acumen, the issues with which Zurek is primarily concerned. Gries does not assume any fiduciary responsibility for the organization in the letter.

Pavone also includes in his letter an endorsement from former U.S. ambassador Flynn. Pavone says Flynn wrote a letter of support, which included this statement:

> "I want you to know that in my opinion, nobody speaks more effectively and as passionately for the unborn as you do. We are very fortunate to have such a strong and committed pro-life voice as you. Please God, continue to give Fr. Frank Pavone the courage to lead us in this critical life issue. We will pray for you and support you in the years ahead."

The rest of Pavone's letter follows a familiar outline: He lashes out at unnamed Catholics who want to destroy Priests for Life and calls them "smoke of Satan," "heralds of the culture of death" and liars.

Priest for Life spokesman Jerry Horn declined to be interviewed for this story. Priests for Life does not plan on sharing any more internal information until after the Vatican has ruled on Fr. Pavone's appeal, Horn said.

Pavone said donors should follow Gries' call to continue to donate to Priests for Life.

Pavone continues to operate a national anti-abortion campaign through technology by issuing videos, press releases, endorsements and fundraising letters.

Priests for Life's updated website also states that Pavone is in Amarillo and is temporarily not taping EWTN television segments. Priests for Life now includes dozens of quotes of support of Pavone and the organization delivered over the years.

Pavone's stationery and signature block now include the title "National Director of Gospel of Life Ministries."

Last month, Zurek had ordered Pavone to come back to Amarillo diocese for prayer and reflection and to limit in his priestly ministry to the diocese.

To read Pavone's most recent fundraising letter, click here [4].

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[1] http://amarillo.com/news/local-news/2011-10-14/priests-life-release-statement-explaining-no-show#.TpiKJOtZ8yE
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