



Bishop Patrick Zurek

## PRESS RELEASE

The Center For Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR)

September 14, 2011

For Immediate Release: CBR Will Soon Lead Informational Pickets Outside Catholic Facilities & Activities In The Diocese of Amarillo, TX.

The Center For Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR) announces the imminent start of informational pickets in the vicinities of Catholic facilities and activities in the Diocese of Amarillo, TX. The purpose of these demonstrations will be to urge parishioners to respectfully ask Bishop Patrick Zurek to allow Fr. Frank Pavone, the President of Priests For Life, to resume full-time anti-abortion ministry. Picketers will represent a coalition of anti-abortion organizations.

To ensure that the Diocese understands exactly what is at stake in Bishop Zurek's decision to "suspend" Fr. Pavone from pro-life work outside of Amarillo, CBR's picket signs will include large, color photos of aborted babies.

Pickets will be conducted at many of the Diocese's forty-nine parish churches, with special emphasis on St. Laurence and the nine other parish churches in the City of Amarillo, proper. Parental warning signs will be posted as a courtesy near targeted churches, to caution parents of small children that they may wish to attend Mass elsewhere. Demonstrations will also be staged at Holy Cross Academy to encourage students to contact Bishop Zurek on Fr. Pavone's behalf.

Although Bishop Zurek is actively attempting to discourage Catholics from donating to Priests For Life, we will not stoop to any reciprocal attempt to discourage Catholics from donating to the Diocese of Amarillo.

Street pickets will be supplemented by the operation of a fleet of large billboard trucks bearing signs which will also depict aborted babies and urge Amarillo Catholics to tactfully contact Bishop Zurek to request that he "FREE FR. FRANK!" The trucks will be accompanied by aircraft towing large aerial billboards which will also bear aborted baby imagery and exhortational text messages.

These pickets will continue until Bishop Zurek releases Fr. Pavone from what amounts from ecclesiastical “house arrest.”

A global battle is raging within Catholicism between clerics who believe the church should do more to fight abortion and those who believe the church should do less. With Bishop Zurek’s confused and confusing decision to sideline Fr. Pavone’s pro-life ministry, the fault line in this divisive dispute now runs directly through the center of Amarillo, TX.

For decades, senior Catholic clerics have hindered efforts to protect the safety of school children. Apparently learning nothing from this appalling lapse, a senior Catholic cleric is now hindering efforts to protect the safety of unborn children. This indiscretion is no less scandalous.

Bishop Zurek has announced “Deep concerns regarding his stewardship of the finances of the Priest’s For Life (PFL) organization.” He claims there have been “Persistent questions and concerns by clergy and laity ...” to which “... no clear and adequate answers...” have been forthcoming.

Fr. Pavone counters that “Priests for Life has consistently provided every financial document requested by Bishop Zurek, including annual financial audits, quarterly reports, management documents—even entire check registers! Priests for Life has been completely transparent with Bishop Zurek and any other bishops who have requested information regarding our management and finances.”

Someone is not telling the truth.

Many pro-life activists are disturbed that Bishop Zurek has chosen to convert a routine personnel conflict into a proxy for the wider ideological war being fought over the Church’s response to abortion. His Draconian handling of this matter is reminiscent of the Star Chamber proceedings employed by Ferdinand & Isabella during the Spanish Inquisition. Vague allegations are rumored by unnamed accusers. Bishop Zurek hints at just enough specificity to smear Fr. Pavone without granting him the information required to formulate a coherent rebuttal. We respectfully challenge Bishop Zurek to take the honorable course and publicly issue a bill of particulars, allowing Fr. Pavone to confront his accusers, refute these specious charges, and clear his name.

We also insist that Bishop Zurek immediately rescind his arguably unlawful and coercive threat, made in writing, that he would permanently ban Fr. Pavone from pro-life work if Fr. Pavone ever dared exercise his legal right to appeal to Rome any of the bishop’s orders restricting his anti-abortion work. This is the same sort of bullying evident in the Bishop’s written complaint that Fr. Pavone has retained “a formidable civil and canonical counsel” to defend the interests of Priests For Life in this controversy. Bishop Zurek apparently believes that he is entitled to legal counsel but Fr. Pavone should be denied similar representation.

The Guttmacher Institute currently reports that the percentage of professing Catholics who abort is identical to the percentage of woman who abort with no religious affiliation at all. These are hardly the kinds of statistics which inspire confidence in the assertion that the Church is doing enough to fight abortion.

The Church has over 40,000 diocesan and religious-order priests in the U.S. but Priests for Life has only 4 priests fighting abortion full-time. Where is the logic in reducing the numbers of priests fighting abortion by adding them to the 40,000 priests already available to celebrate Mass and hear confessions -- while savable babies are being tortured to death in the millions?

In his September 9, 2011 letter to U.S. bishops, Bishop Zurek characterized himself as Fr. Pavone's clerical "father." In that spirit, the Bishop might do well to meditate upon Colossians 3:21, which warns, "Fathers, do not be hard on your children, so that their spirit may not be broken." Perhaps contemplation of this passage should be the focus of the Bishop's oddly timed, two week vacation in Latin America, inexplicably scheduled to coincide with the date of Fr. Pavone's ordered return to Amarillo.

Activists interested in participating in Amarillo pickets may learn more by visiting [www.abortionNO.org](http://www.abortionNO.org), or emailing CBR at [cbr@cbrinfo.org](mailto:cbr@cbrinfo.org). Please direct media inquiries to Gregg Cunningham, at 714-240-6976.

## CBR's Earlier Appeal To Bishop Zurek, To Which He Refused To Respond.

The Most Reverend Patrick Zurek

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Amarillo, TX 97117

Your Excellency,

We have never met but my name is Gregg Cunningham and although I serve on one of Fr. Frank Pavone's pro-life boards, it is in my capacity as the director of The Center For Bio-Ethical Reform that I write. I must emphasize that I speak only for myself.

I want to thank you for your great generosity in giving Fr. Pavone the latitude required to provide coherent leadership to Priests For Life, an organization which is arguably the most important pro-life group in the world. With vocations down from coast to coast, I can only imagine how great must be your need must be for Fr. Pavone's assistance in Amarillo. Please accept this expression of my heart-felt gratitude for your forbearance.

I have known Fr. Pavone for twenty years and have worked closely with him for fifteen of those. He is the most spiritually mature and strategically visionary pro-life leader I have ever met. He has marvelously transformed Priests for Life and is influencing the entire pro-life movement in ways which give us our first real chance to change the culture on abortion and related issues.

Prior to Fr. Pavone's involvement with this apostolate, I met with the priests who directed Priests for Life out of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. They were impressive men, clearly committed to saving babies and protecting mothers. But their lack of progress was foreordained by their inability to focus exclusively on the daunting task of defeating the Culture of Death. Fr. Pavone is succeeding where they failed, in no small measure, because you and Bishop Yanta and Cardinal O'Connor have allowed him to invest himself fully in this great and historic cause.

Our adversaries in the struggle to end abortion are almost entirely full-time, paid-staff professionals. That pro-life movement, however, is staffed largely by part-time, amateur volunteers. This creates a disastrously asymmetrical relationship between their leadership, which is focused, and our leadership which is distracted. This disparity enables the other side to conduct large, sophisticated projects, while we are relegated to initiatives which are far less ambitious and therefore much less effective.

The sacrifices you are making to free Fr. Pavone from competing diocesan duties are a great encouragement to all of us who realize that we must professionalize the leadership of our movement if we are to have any hope of undertaking the immense, complex projects without which we will never change public opinion at the levels required to change public policy.

Your kindness in letting Fr. Pavone truly lead Priests For Life is all the more commendable because you must certainly be hearing from brother bishops who do not believe the church should be involved in activism of any sort – and certainly not activism which spawns controversy. Alas, if only killing babies

were as controversial as saving them. These are fine men who are, no doubt, sincere in their opposition to abortion. I greatly respect their clerical authority, but we have principled differences on matters of strategy and tactics.

Some years ago, I was indirectly involved in the controversy which arose from Edward Cardinal Egan's initial decision to reassign Fr. Pavone from the presidency of Priests For Life to parish duties in the Archdiocese of New York. Some of Cardinal Egan's USCCB colleagues opposed the very existence of an organization such as Priests for Life and others insisted that, at a minimum, it should be reformed by new priests whose opposition to abortion was more academic and less activist.

As word of this crisis quickly spread throughout the American pro-life movement, activists of every denominational affiliation reacted with shock and dismay. Tens of thousands of letters poured into the New York chancery office. The work of both the Archdiocese and Priests for Life slowed to a near standstill. Rome even became involved and by God's grace, His Eminence was eventually convinced to reconsider his decision. A public relations catastrophe was only narrowly averted.

Had Cardinal Egan not reversed himself, the story would eventually have come to the attention of the secular press and a media frenzy would have ensued. Biased journalists would have sought to mischaracterize the controversy as scandalous evidence of hypocrisy. The story line would have been the church saying one thing but doing another on a matter of grave moral significance. People in large numbers would have taken sides and the divisiveness would have been ruinous.

I have always admired Cardinal Egan's consistent and outspoken defense of life. I was inspired by his steadfast refusal to accommodate pro-abortion politicians who sought to receive the Holy Eucharist. But I most appreciated his fair-minded willingness to rethink the wisdom of reassigning Fr. Pavone. He showed himself to be both entreatable and persuadable.

Eviscerating the leadership of Priests for Life, whether completely, in one dramatic deposition, or partially, in gradual increments, would have sent exactly the wrong message at precisely the wrong moment. Our adversaries would have been energized and our allies devastated. Outspokenly pro-life priests might have mistakenly concluded that the church cares more about avoiding controversy than stopping abortion. The damaging consequences of such misapprehensions are not merely a hypothetical hazard.

David Solomon, director of The University of Notre Dame's Center for Ethics and Culture, on August 31, 2010, blogged criticism of the University's mysterious firing of Associate Vice President Bill Kirk, the only senior administrator who had publicly expressed opposition to the school's decision to invite Barack Obama to deliver the school's 2009 commencement address.

Mr. Kirk's wife had also served as faculty advisor to the student pro-life club so Notre Dame lost her as well. Mr. Solomon laments the resulting reticence of other administrators and untenured faculty members who are now "... unwilling to get involved directly [in unpopular pro-life activism] for fear of reprisal." He adds that "A number of other administrators have told me that in light of Bill Kirk's treatment, they will in the future keep their heads down rather than dissent from the policies of the central administration."

I pray and urge that you will continue to resist the many pressures I am sure are conspiring to draw Fr. Pavone away from his pro-life leadership responsibilities. Conventional wisdom suggests "no one is irreplaceable" but the history of leadership in every field of human endeavor exposes the absurdity of that cliché. Time and again, the right leader in the right place at the right time made all the difference in

the world. The fight to end abortion has reached a critical juncture, a “tipping point” if you will. There is a very real possibility that the next election could give us the most pro-life president and Congress since Roe v. Wade. Fr. Pavone is unusually well qualified and uniquely positioned to take advantage of what will almost certainly be the fleeting opportunities this governmental sea-change could present. But the church must allow him to do more.

Fr. Pavone celebrates ecclesiastical condemnations of abortion but the true genius of his pro-life activism is the profound insight that merely stating conclusions, important though they no doubt are, is no substitute for proving the facts which compel those conclusions.

The vast majority of Americans don’t believe that the embryo and early fetus are developmentally entitled to rights of personhood. Nor do they believe that first trimester abortion (the period of pregnancy when 90% of abortions occur) is worse than a nominal evil (the “lesser of two evils”) and that nominal evils are best left to personal discretion -- not government intrusion. They will never accept government intrusion until we prove that the baby really is a baby and that abortion is an evil of sufficient enormity to justify criminalizing the act.

We now have stunning prenatal development imagery which removes any ambiguity concerning the humanity of the unborn child -- even at the earliest stages of development. Fr. Pavone helped produce that footage. We have abortion imagery which was acquired only recently. Fr. Pavone helped fund its acquisition. He understands the history of social reform. He realizes that no great evil has ever been outlawed by activists who covered up its indescribable horror.

He has also spend years establishing a respected presence in sectarian and secular radio and television as the most effective means to though which to broadcast this imagery and explain our arguments to our increasingly visual culture. He has shown himself charismatic enough to attract an audience but humble enough to remain entirely unaffected by the resulting celebrity.

This humility further strengthens his already broad, ecumenical appeal. When Fr. Frank celebrates Mass at a major pro-life event, half the people in the invariably crowded room are evangelicals. Non-Catholics come for his soundly Biblical homilies and Catholics for his uplifting mastery of the liturgy. He is, as was Archbishop Fulton Sheen, a truly magnetic ambassador for Catholicism. His ministry has inspired more converts (and vocations) than those of many full-time missionaries. In the process, he has become the de facto chaplain of the pro-life movement -- and he has done so by acclamation.

Fr. Pavone is the most effective fundraiser in the pro-life movement and by far the most selfless. He regularly but quietly assists the growth of smaller organizations which are doing important work they are struggling to fund.

He has spent years carefully cultivating behind-the-scenes relationships with influential members of the news media and political establishment. No one has worked more tirelessly to reach out to our adversaries on the other side. He has helped found numerous new pro-life ministries which have seized the initiative with highly pro-active agendas. He is a moderating and unifying influence in a fractious movement. I know of no one else who is so widely respected by so many other pro-life leaders. When he convenes a meeting, he draws a crowd. And once he has filled the room, I know of no one else who is blessed with such keen pro-life insights and so remarkable a facility for expressing them.

I do not presume to tell you how to run your diocese, but God has given you the power to directly enhance or diminish the effectiveness of the most effective organization currently defending life. If I may be permitted to say so, you have shown great statesmanship in your exercise of that power.

History is being made here and you are helping to make it. I thank God for your beneficence and I thank God for you.

Respectfully,

Gregg Cunningham

Director, CBR