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Priests for Life leader 'not in prison,' continues to raise money

by Tom Gallagher

NCR Today

Amarillo Bishop Pat Zurek broke his silence to Karen Smith Welch, the *Amarillo Globe-News* reporter who has been ably covering the dysfunctional relationship between Zurek and one of his priests, Fr. Frank Pavone. Pavone is the national director/president/chairperson of no fewer than three anti-abortion charities: Priests for Life, Inc.; Gospel of Life Ministries Inc.; and Rachel's Vineyard Ministries.

According to the *Amarillo Globe-News*:

A Roman Catholic priest restricted to ministry within the Diocese of Amarillo participated in March for Life events Monday in Washington with the permission of his bishop.

The Rev. Frank Pavone had a full calendar during Monday's annual pro-life gathering marking the anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion.

Pavone, a priest under the authority of Amarillo Bishop Patrick J. Zurek, has been barred from performing religious services outside the diocese since September. That's when the bishop raised questions about the finances of Pavone's Priests for Life, the activist priest's nonprofit Staten Island, N.Y., anti-abortion group.

Pavone has said Priests for Life has provided all records requested by the bishop, as have affiliates Rachel's Vineyard Ministries and Gospel of Life Ministries. The priest has appealed to Rome to overturn Zurek's restriction.

The bishop said last week there's no change in the situation.

"There's nothing new until Rome says something," Zurek said.

But Pavone "is not in prison," Zurek said. "He can travel. He can do things just like anybody else. The only restriction is he can't function as priest anywhere outside the diocese."

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Meanwhile, the Pavone money machine keeps cranking out multipage pleas for money. In his most recent Priests for Life fundraising letter, Pavone inserts at the top of the page the question: "Will you recommit to me and the babies?" Pavone hopes for an answer "... sometime today!"

In the letter, Pavone states that Priests for Life is the "face and voice of America's pro-life movement." Pavone writes that Priests for Life is preaching the Gospel of Life to "literally hundreds of millions of people every year" and states that Priests for Life "played a key role in the 2010 elections. We helped put in place what [Republican] Congressman Chris Smith called the 'most pro-life Congress in history.' **It is vital that we repeat that success this year!!!!**" [Emphasis included.]

With his Rachel's Vineyard Ministries pastoral director and chairman's hats on, Pavone issued his December 2011 fundraising appeal. In it, he says "close to a thousand" of his retreats will be given in 2012 in the United States and all over the world "as tens of thousands of men and women come forward."

Pavone then goes on to share interesting math with the donor. He says "**97% of all those involved with Rachel's Vineyard are VOLUNTEERS!**" [Emphasis included.] That means your dollars go to ministry work and little else. ... Since its "labor force" is comprised almost entirely of volunteers, it doesn't take a lot of money for Rachel's Vineyard to sustain its much-needed post-abortion ministry. In fact, its entire annual budget is around \$550,000 ... or roughly **\$45,800 a month!** [Emphasis included.] That's all."

What are the facts?

Rachel's Vineyard Ministries is required to file an annual report on Form 990 with the Internal Revenue Service. The last available filing is for 2008, which offers the following information: The mission of this organization is related to "pregnancy loss," an odd term for an anti-abortion organization. Its revenues were \$362,057, its expenses were \$362,057 and it offered 350 retreats for post-abortive men and women nationally and internationally. The organization has 15,000 emails to which it sends a monthly online newsletter.

Its payroll was reported as follows:

- Theresa Burke, executive director: \$56,029

- Kevin Burke, director: \$53,330
- Tracy Carolla, accountant: \$18,667
- Anthony DeStefano, secretary/treasurer: \$26,400, plus \$162,253 from Priests for Life, where DeStefano served as "vice chairman" of Priests for Life

Later, the 2008 IRS Form 990 states that its compensation to officers, directors, trustees and key employees was \$245,779, plus about \$160,000 in expenses, or \$407,474 in expenses, resulting in a loss of \$28,918.

In the context of Rachel's Vineyard Ministries' most recent, publicly available IRS Form 990 found at Guidestar.org, telling a donor that "97% of the labor force is volunteers" and "that means your dollars go to ministry work and little else" seems grossly misleading.

Good luck to Bishop Zurek in his sorting of these financials claims.

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