

## Bishop Zurek's "Never" and "Now"

### ■ Pro-life Leader Frank Pavone

There were several priests in the room, including me and my chief canonical advisor. It was the Spring of 2017.

Bishop Zurek reiterated that he didn't want me doing my fulltime pro-life work. I asked if he saw any value in having me do work in the diocese. He said no. Nor did he want me to transfer to another diocese.

"So you want me out of the priesthood altogether, don't you?"

"NO, never, never!," the liar said. A few weeks later he sent me a letter telling me he wanted me out of the priesthood.

He gave various reasons, which consisted of gross inaccuracies and fictions.

First he complained about a video in which I showed an aborted baby. My problem with that complaint is that the bishop never asked me what happened regarding the aborted baby. Never. There was no "investigation" if that means seeking the facts. He just had his own version of the "facts" and ran with them, even after we provided him with the facts. There was no exhuming of a body – the body had not been buried yet. That's why I had the body – because a pastor gave me the baby to bury. The pastor was holding it in a memorial chapel – that doesn't mean the baby had been buried, nor does it mean I had access to that place, nor does it even mean I had any say over what happened before.

The bishop made no acknowledgment at all of the letter of clarification to the faithful that he subsequently asked me to write and that I did, nor (not apologizing for showing the baby, but for inadvertently confusing people about the "altar"), or of the documentation that the baby was buried, which wasn't because of anything the bishop said but because that was exactly what we were doing. No reply; not a word.

My second problem is the timing of his tantrum about the video. I had done numerous videos of aborted babies and funerals for them in the past... but only this time did he complain...in Nov. 2016 -- just after I had sent him the formal request for excardination and the paperwork. He didn't respond to that, but simply created a new obstacle to it.

Third, to call what I did "exploitation" is a ridiculous and insulting sham. We did just the opposite. We honored the child. We allowed others to honor him. We provided a reverent burial. The violence against these children is done in secret. We in the pro-life movement expose it to the light of day, and will continue to do so. The bishop was and continues to be judgmental of me, my motives, and those of many other pro-life leaders and activists who engage in the work of mercy of burying the dead, and about whom he knows nothing.

The bishop dismisses [the people who were inspired by the video](#), who contacted me by the thousands. [Msgr. Michael Colwell, one of the bishop's staff who was in the meeting and knows me well, told me on the phone that about half the comments they received about the video were positive.](#) Why does the bishop dismiss half of even the people who contacted him?

Fourth, the bishops complains I engage in partisan politics. As for being partisan, the bishop completely ignores the decades of work I have done, and continue to do, to advance the **non-partisan** teachings of the Church on political responsibility. It's like they don't exist – the equipping of priests and laity to understand *Living the Gospel of Life*, for instance, and much more. [www.gospeloflife.net/](http://www.gospeloflife.net/).

As soon as the bishops stop being partisan in favor of the Democrats, then we can have a discussion about me being “partisan.” Meanwhile, we may want to ask how many of them have read my open letters to them about this topic ([here in June 2020](#) and [here in August 2021](#)), including the provision of Canon 287 which acknowledges that there are circumstances that would permit a priest to be partisan – like the defense of fundamental human rights. The fundamental right to life and the freedom of the Church have to be defended against the actions of the Democrat Party.

Also, the bishop wrongly claims that I did not cooperate with Cardinal Dolan when the Vatican asked that I work with him to clear the good name of Priests for Life against our detractors. (We were based in New York at the time). [I did indeed cooperate.](#) But Cardinal Dolan does not run Priests for Life. He was not making requests of me as a priest under obedience to him. He wasn't even my Ordinary. He was making requests of a ministry with its own governing board and advisors. The Congregation for Clergy has always respected that independence and has acknowledged that not even they can force the ministry itself to do anything. [I followed the advice of my Board of Directors and canonical and civil advisors in regard to what requests of Cardinal Dolan we could and could not fulfill.](#) The Cardinal wanted to put his own people on our board. We even cooperated by reaching out to them and giving them an opportunity to meet with us (none of them responded). But the Cardinal did not have any juridical authority to force a change on our Board. Otherwise that threatens the legitimate legal independence of every other ministry that has its own governing board.

As for recommendations of the Congregation for Clergy (following our Visitation in 2012), we fulfilled them all, even though [the Congregation made it clear that they were optional, not obligatory.](#) The fulfillment of them by our Board can be seen [here](#) and [here](#).

As for my alleged “disobedience,” we have the pot calling the kettle black. It was he, the bishop who disobeyed the Vatican by not giving me generous permission to do pro-life work. He misrepresented to me their instructions, telling me I could not travel, broadcast, or even concelebrate mass in public.

Here's an excerpt from [frfrankpavone.com](http://frfrankpavone.com) on this point:

After the Congregation's ruling, the bishop also told Fr. Frank -- in person and in writing ([letter of May 29, 2012](#)) -- that "I was instructed most firmly by the Archbishop Celso Morga Iruzubieta, Secretary of the Congregation of the Clergy, to delay my decision concerning your pro-life ministry until the completion of the visitation" and therefore "I am obliged to wait." After hearing this, Fr. Frank flew to Rome and met with Archbishop Morga, and asked the Archbishop if what Bishop Zurek had told him was accurate. Archbishop Morga told him no, that this was not the case. On the contrary, the Archbishop said, he had instructed the bishop to "be generous" in his permission to Fr. Frank to continue his Priests for Life work. [A letter from the Congregation for Clergy to Fr. Pavone on 11 July 2012 \(Prot. N. 20122139\)](#) made clear that Bishop Zurek "is free to grant or to withhold permission for you to minister outside of the Diocese."

I have obediently accepted every assignment I've been given:

Cardinal John O'Connor: assignment to St. Charles Parish upon ordination  
Cardinal John O'Connor: permission in 1993 to be fulltime National Director of Priests for Life.

Cardinal Edward Egan: assignment in 2001 to St. Roch's Parish, Staten Island  
Bishop John Yanta: 2005 assignment to pro-life office with the Diocese of Amarillo, with permission to do Priests for Life national work

Bishop Patrick Zurek: ***left me unassigned (can't obey an order you don't have)***

Bishop Patrick Zurek: assignment to return to diocese in 2011 and be chaplain to the Disciples of the Lord Jesus, PrayerTown, TX

Bishop Patrick Zurek: ***left me unassigned after 2012 (can't obey an order you don't have)***

To those who question my obedience, of course, I ask, when the bishop asked me to leave the priesthood in 2017, should I have obeyed that request?

As for my ministerial actions in the meantime, I followed the guidance given by my canon lawyers as to what I could do while these matters were under appeal.

Another point the bishop raises in his abusive letter is the fact that he didn't want to give me permission to conduct the funeral of Norma McCorvey. It was her desire, and that of her family, that I conduct it. we did not have it in a Catholic Church, because of the bishop, but the funeral home had a nice chapel, where her friends, family, and other pro-life leaders gathered with me to pray for her. Of course I conducted the service. The bishop expected me to sit there, not speak, and not explain why. This was a totally outrageous request, showing no respect for the **relationships** that exist within the pro-life movement, and that I had nurtured for decades, starting with Norma herself, the Roe of Roe v Wade, whom I had received into the Catholic Church in 1998. So I did what any layman can do: prayed out loud and shared my thoughts among friends.

After I appealed to the Vatican, yet again, about the bishop's complaints, they dismissed those complaints and punishments from Bishop Zurek in 2019, and authorized me to start anew under a different bishop.

However, that did not work out because of the subsequent added requirement that I only do pro-life work half the time, which again backs up my primary point – that this is not about disobedience or any of these other so-called “scandalous” actions, but about trying to limit my commitment to fulltime pro-life leadership.

Ultimately, there are differences here that may be irreconcilable. Obedience does not wipe away conscience. Part of human dignity is the right to speak, and especially to speak up in defense of what is right. At the judgment, I won't be answering for what Bishop Zurek understood or had the opportunity to do, but for what I understood and had the opportunity to do.

[Finally, this letter of Alveda King](#) was an additional response to the Bishop's offensive effort to dismiss me from the priesthood.