

News broke on Dec. 17 that Fr. Frank Pavone, the longtime director of [Priests for Life](#), has allegedly been laicized by the Vatican. *Catholic News Agency*, who broke the story, [reported](#): “In a Dec. 13 letter to U.S. bishops obtained by CNA and confirmed by multiple sources as authentic, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, wrote that the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy issued the decision on Nov. 9, adding that there was ‘no possibility of appeal.’”

“In an email to CNA on Saturday,” the article goes on, “Pavone said that he was not aware of the Vatican’s action,” and quotes him as saying, “How did CNA learn about this before I did?”

The following day, *The New York Times* likewise [reported](#) that Fr. Pavone “was removed from the priesthood by the Vatican, according to a letter from Pope Francis’ representative to the United States that was obtained by The New York Times,” while similarly specifying that he “was dismissed from the clergy on Nov. 9 with no possibility of appeal, the letter states.”

## Letter to U.S. Bishops from Apostolic Nuncio

Neither outlet saw fit to publish the full text of the documents they claimed to have obtained. Subsequent to those reports, journalist Bree Dail [posted](#) what appears to be a copy of Archbishop Pierre’s letter to U.S. bishops on social media. Here is what the letter (Protocol No. 1333/22) says in full:

“Your Eminences / Excellencies,

I have been informed by the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy [[Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik](#), Archbishop-Bishop emeritus of Daejeon in South Korea] that, on 9 November 2022, a Supreme Decision admitting of no possibility of appeal<sup>[1]</sup> directed that Rev. Frank Pavone be dismissed from the clerical state.

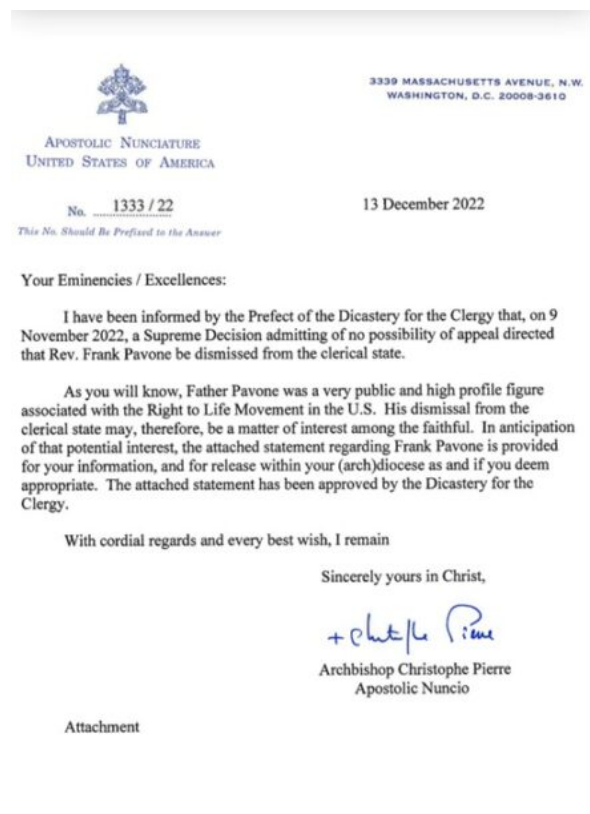
As you will know, Father Pavone was a very public and high profile figure associated with the Right to Life Movement in the U.S. His dismissal from the clerical state may, therefore, be a matter of interest among the faithful. In anticipation of that potential interest, the attached statement regarding Frank Pavone is provided for your information, and for release within your (arch)diocese as and if you deem appropriate. The attached statement is approved by the Dicastery for the Clergy.”

The “attached statement,” according to what Dail posted online, reads as follows:

“Rev. Frank Pavone, the founder of the organization, Priests for Life, Inc.,[\[2\]](#) was dismissed from the clerical state by the Holy See on 9 November 2022. This action was taken after Father Pavone was found guilty in canonical proceedings of blasphemous communications on social media, and of persistent disobedience of the lawful instructions of his diocesan bishop [[Patrick Zurek](#) of Amarillo, Texas].

Father Pavone was given ample opportunity to defend himself in the canonical proceedings, and he was also given multiple opportunities to submit himself to the authority of his diocesan bishop. It was determined that Father Pavone had no reasonable justification for his actions.

Since Priests for Life, Inc. is not a Catholic organization, Mr. Pavone’s continuing role in it as a lay person would be entirely up to the leadership of that organization.”



#### Statement on Frank Pavone

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A copy of the letter and statement issued by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio

to the United States.

This author sent a press inquiry to the U.S. Apostolic Nunciature on Dec. 18 requesting confirmation of the authenticity of the letter. The Nunciature has yet to respond.

## Fr. Pavone's Response

A few hours after CNA broke the story, Fr. Pavone live-streamed a [video response](#) to the news, reiterating that he has yet to receive "any communication from anybody at the Vatican."

[@frfrankpavone](#) on Dec. 17: "By the way, I haven't received any communication from anybody at the Vatican. I haven't received anything. I haven't seen anything. Somebody ought to look into the communication going on between [@cnalive](#) and the Vatican..."

ATTN: [@HolySeePress](#) [pic.twitter.com/c7A1CShYZs](https://pic.twitter.com/c7A1CShYZs)

— Matt Gaspers (@MattGaspers) [December 19, 2022](#)

Regarding the charges specified in the above-quoted statement, Fr. Pavone speculated that the "blasphemous communications on social media" refers to a single instance of him using profanity (taking the Lord's Name in vain) in a moment of anger on Twitter (he has since deleted his comment), which he admitted was wrong and for which he said he went to Confession.

On Dec. 17, [@frfrankpavone](#) stated his belief that the accusation of "blasphemous communications on social media" refers to a single instance of him using profanity (taking the Lord's Name in vain) in a moment of anger on Twitter (he has since deleted his comment and confessed). [pic.twitter.com/8x4huZfrtF](https://pic.twitter.com/8x4huZfrtF)

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He also cited his placement of an aborted baby's body on what appeared to be an altar<sup>[3]</sup> during a live video (for the purpose of illustrating the horror of abortion just prior to the

2016 presidential election) as a possible cause of his alleged laicization, saying that “some of the bishops lost their minds” in response to the incident.[\[4\]](#)

During his Dec. 17 livestream, [@frfrankpavone](#) mentioned the Nov. 6, 2016 incident during which he “showed an aborted baby on TV,” in response to which he said “some of the bishops lost their minds.” [@Priestsforlife](#)

Video source: <https://t.co/9i389Cow4k> [pic.twitter.com/DSjCHRggll](https://pic.twitter.com/DSjCHRggll)

— Matt Gaspers (@MattGaspers) [December 19, 2022](#)

As for “persistent disobedience of the lawful instructions of his diocesan bishop,” Fr. Pavone indicated that he and Bishop Zurek have long since been at odds due to Zurek’s disapproval of Pavone’s work with Priests for Life. According to Pavone, Zurek sent him a letter in 2017 asking him to request laicization from the Vatican, and that if he refused, Zurek would make the request. This letter was allegedly sent just “a few weeks” after Zurek told Pavone in person that he would “never, never” want Pavone out of the priesthood.

According to [@frfrankpavone](#), Bishop Patrick Zurek of [@AmarilloDiocese](#) refused to give him a parish assignment in 2017 (though Father was willing), then sent him a letter “a few weeks later” asking him to request laicization, and that if he refused, Zurek would make the request. [pic.twitter.com/qrbY1To3Xt](https://pic.twitter.com/qrbY1To3Xt)

— Matt Gaspers (@MattGaspers) [December 19, 2022](#)

On Dec. 18, Fr. Pavone published a formal [written statement](#) as another means of responding “to what is still only second-hand information I hear saying that the Vatican has dismissed me from the priesthood.”

“Since Cardinal [John] O’Connor granted my request in 1993 for permission to work fulltime to save the unborn from abortion,” Pavone explains, “that has been my consistent — and only — request of Church authority: allow me to devote my life and ministry to saving the unborn. That has not changed in any way.”

He goes on to say he “would like to address some specific people with a few further

observations.”

First, to the Holy Father, Pope Francis:

You have encouraged me personally in my work, in the several conversations we have had over the years. In particular you have encouraged me to move forward with the work of healing, through Rachel’s Vineyard, and you have written to my pastoral associate Dr. Theresa Burke to offer the same encouragement.

Your Holiness, I want to continue serving as a faithful priest and fulltime pro-life leader. You can allow me to do so under a supportive bishop, and many of the faithful understand that this is the most reasonable solution.

Next, he tells “the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Christophe Pierre,” that his “communication to the bishops dated December 13th contains serious errors and omissions. But that has marked this process all along, so there is no surprise there, and those errors will be addressed separately and thoroughly.”

“And finally, to the individual bishops of the United States,” Fr. Pavone says:

“To those of you who continue to support my pro-life work, I thank you.

To those of you who have been part of this travesty publicly or in the shadows, we will be taking all appropriate canonical and civil action as well as public communications to the Faithful.

I also strongly suggest that you exercise prudent regard for the reputations of my supporters and me if you communicate anything to the Faithful in your dioceses about this decision. Before you issue any statements, read the letter sent to you by Dr. Alveda King some months ago about my situation and the details leading up to this decision. She has worked fulltime with me and my ministry for 16 years and serves on the Board of Priests for Life to this day.

We will be following up with each individual diocese, and the Faithful within them, regarding any communications that are made.”

## **Stark Contrast: Pavone and Rupnik**

This news about Fr. Pavone stands in stark contrast to the case of Fr. Marko Rupnik — the Slovenian Jesuit convicted by a canonical court for absolving an accomplice in sins against the Sixth Commandment (thus incurring automatic excommunication per Canon 1378 §1) but whose penalty was reportedly lifted within just “[a] few hours” by Pope Francis.

*LifeSiteNews* [reported](#) last week that, despite his grievous crimes, Rupnik has been “enjoying a flourishing ecclesiastical career in” Rome in recent years, including “directing the Centro Aletti and teaching at various pontifical institutions in the city,” as well as “a number of curial positions, including that of a consultant for the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation.”

And just today, *The Pillar* provided an [approved English translation](#) of an interview with one of Rupnik’s alleged victims originally published by *Domani*, an Italian news agency — abuse which the victim, whose identity remains anonymous for privacy, describes as a “descent into hell” (reader discretion is advised).

Whatever one’s opinion of Fr. Pavone’s methods in his work, including his alleged canonical crimes, the news of his reported laicization coming within less than two weeks of Fr. Rupnik’s case — and the stark contrast between them (on multiple levels) — is quite disturbing.

Dr. Taylor Marshall has commented on what clearly seems to be a grotesque double standard in favor of the Slovenian Jesuit:

And further, Dr. Anthony Stine of [Return to Tradition](#), a regular CFN contributor, reported on comments allegedly made by Pope Francis to a Spanish news outlet over the weekend (posted on Twitter [here](#)): “When a priest gets involved in politics, it’s not good.... The priest is a pastor. He should help people make the right choices. Accompany them. But don’t be a politician. If you want to be a politician, leave the priesthood and become a politician”.

As we approach the Feast of Our Lord’s Nativity, let us pray that the truth of all these matters will be made manifest and justice done, according to the will of “Sun of justice” (Mal. 4:2) Whose birth we are about to celebrate.

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[1] Fr. Gerald Murray, a canon lawyer and priest of the Archdiocese of New York, [told CNA](#): “Only the Pope, who enjoys ‘full and supreme power in the Church’ (canon 332, 1), can issue such a decision against which there is no possible appeal.” This implies that Pope Francis is surely aware and approving of the Dicastery for the Clergy’s reported decision.

[2] According to the Priests for Life website, Fr. Pavone was not “the founder of the organization” (see [here](#)).

[3] In comments [quoted by CNA](#), Fr. Pavone explains that it “was a table in our office, not a consecrated altar in a chapel,” and also, “In retrospect, I should have made the baby video in a different location so as to avoid any confusion to begin with.”

[4] The Archdiocese of New York, in which Priests for Life was headquartered at the time, did issue a formal [statement](#) against Fr. Pavone’s actions.