



Activating the Church to End Abortion
www.priestsforlife.org

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Year End Report: 2015

Preaching, Presentations, Media

The year 2015 was ushered in with a mission centered around the **March for Life in Charlotte, NC**. Trip coordinators Tina Witt and Jon Capen arranged my keynoting talks at downtown sites, followed by Masses at several large churches in the vicinity for the weekend, and a visit to **Belmont Abbey**, also a plaintiff in the HHS mandate court proceedings PFL is paralleling as a separate plaintiff. I had the opportunity to express our solidarity to the Abbot Placid Solari, OSB, over lunch together. One is moved by the vitality and growth of the Church in the Charlotte area, one of the largest metro areas in the booming South today.

Jan 15, a welcome return to the Atlanta area, also an encouraging area for Church growth, especially in the newer booms of the outlying areas of the city, in this case, Holy **Trinity Church, Peachtree City**. I gave another piano concert at Peachtree City and then spread the word for the babies at weekend Masses at that beautiful parish community. Pastor Father John Murphy, and associates, Fr. Pavel and Fr Dairo gave me another very warm welcome.

March for Life, Washington, DC, had me staying with the Dominican House of Studies, near the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which made it convenient for the Vigil Mass before the March itself. In addition to meeting and mingling with brother priests from all over the USA as we awaited the concelebration of the largest annual indoor gathering in the USA for Mass, we shared a growing hope that abortion will become a thing of the past, not just legally, as specifically focused on Jan 22, the 41st anniversary of Roe v Wade, but socially. In my conversation I could see among fellow religious and priests the extent that Rachel's Vineyard and Silent No More Awareness Campaign have made on priests and parishes alike. It was encouraging to see many priests vitally engaged in promoting the Gospel of Life in their home area and sharing that with me as we assembled Jan 21 for the evening vigil Mass. Afterwards I enjoy the hospitality of the Dominicans at their Solemn Compline (Night prayer) and light refreshments, another opportunity to gather and share faith and encouragement.

On the same day early in the morning I was with others from PFL staff at a large prayer rally on **16th St at the Planned Parenthood** center which now is repositioned at Florida and 4th Sts NE, where we will gather en masse in January 21, 2016.

In addition to this of course was the March itself and the display of faith and love for the unborn, as well as the courage of the **Silent No More** mothers – and this time including fathers and even former abortionists and siblings in the mix, expanding the awareness of how deep and wide are the ravages of abortion, all presented in the shadow of the Supreme Court building with its “Equal Justice Under the Law,” looking

down on the results of that maxim's gross violation. There was more joy and resolve than sadness and complacency in the amassed – typically young – survivors of the abortion holocaust; and for that we are so grateful.

My next trip was to **St Ambrose Church in Old Bridge, NJ**, in the Metuchen Diocese on Jan 24, right after the March for Life. Fr Joemar Garbozo, pastor.

Catherine Petruzzi of the National Life Center in Long Island invited me to participate on the team of **Rachel's Vineyard** personnel conducting the February retreat at the former seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Hunting, NY. This was my 4th year with the varied group. It is always amazing to relate to the deep emotional rending that abortion on one hand has gripped someone, fathers and mothers both, from their past decisions; but more significantly, the positive movement from self-hatred to a new lease on life afforded by a new relationship with the Lord which the well-crafted choice of scripture and sharing affords each participant. That was February 6 weekend.

I enjoyed returning to one of the Augustinian High Schools we staff in Richland NJ, **St Augustine's Preparatory School**, for a full day of classroom instruction and mingling afterwards with students on issues of defending life, from womb to tomb. I also spoke at the Mass in the morning which was a general assembly for the students. The pro-life "climate" is very good, and they had some instruction in basics in their regular curriculum. This is a growing school, though it is in a somewhat rural area between Philadelphia and Atlantic City. February 24. President, Rev Donald Reilly, OSA.

Again, I was privileged to help on team as chaplain for a South Carolina **Rachel's Vineyard retreat, this time in White Oak**, between Charlotte NC, and Columbia, SC. March 13-15.

In May (2-18) I conducted a **pilgrimage to Italian Shrines, including the Shroud of Turin, Rome, Assisi**, and other significant points of God's grace. This was done through a premier pilgrimage company, "206 Tours" which I highly recommend. In the bus hours from place to place I had the opportunity – now a captured audience! – To speak about pro-life developments in the US and specifically our Priests for Life outreach in various social media and legislative development. Of course it was a labor of love to connect each famous local scene with the precious gift of life which the Church's historical figures and saints valiantly defended, even though abortion was not legal in a thoroughly imbued legal system with Catholic life and liturgy. I also brought some literature from PFL for handouts and further on line reference, which we are easily able to refer and "tour" given the devices readily at hand.

Other midyear trips for Priests for Life included a cemetery memorial **service for aborted babies buried in Elkton MD**, (11353) but under the auspices of people from Wilmington DE (Nan Freeman, inviting); A presentation for a men's **group in Barnegat, NJ over the Fourth of July weekend** (Bud McFarlane, Ron Chamberlain) (11267); and a **women's day of recollection in suburban Baltimore** (Timonium, Sandy Korzick) on August 7 (11411)

In the last week of July each year, an activist witness group called **Defend Life** travels through some 15 stops in **Maryland**, under the longtime direction of Jack Ames of Baltimore. The group of some 25 participants, youth and beyond, begin the week by canvassing malls and trafficked intersections of the Annapolis and Washington areas on Monday and Tuesday. I drive down annually (fourth time, 2015) from Philadelphia early Wednesday (29th) and join the group to celebrate Mass at historic Sacred Heart Church in Bowie, MD. It was here where the first Catholic bishop of the newly formed United States was nominated and name sent to Rome for confirmation – Bishop John Carroll. Of course this is a perfect opportunity to connect the historical dots to what is Catholic, wholesomely American and pro-life. I believe the young

people got it! They are awesome too! (I enjoyed the hospitality of the Cathedral of Baltimore Rectory. Rector Fr Andrew DeFusco is a strong pro-life supporter).

From there we divided up the days into three venues, generally suburban and urban Baltimore, at large shopping malls where shoppers had to stop at inner intersections where now images of babies on 6 foot by 4 foot signs, some 30 of them, began to register pictures of what abortion does. These had been quickly dismantled from the Defend Life truck and set up paced along the highway for about 1.5 hours each stop. Having gathered the signs again, we would pack them on the truck, and then on to lunch prepared at a local parish by many volunteers at a church hall or school cafeteria. Feeding bodies and spirit, lunch was capped off with a luncheon speaker addressing the legal, medical, or social dimension of abortion. Clergy, legislators, local movers and shakers in the battle stirred up juices to go out and do more... which we did! We even heard inspirational talks from the youth with us, showing that this passion was deep and enduring, not just for a week of trekking through the area. Mass was celebrated each day at a different church, and evening cookout after the last of the three daily witness stops, given at a generous volunteer's home. Afterwards young people entertained, song and guitar, or even did a skit or two, with a good time to "debrief" the day, strengthening faith in one another, such as sharing important points of interest – such as convincing a person on one of the stops to move from "pro-abortion" to "pro-life", . This sharing is one of the most fruitful part in this grace-filled venture. It solidifies "the troops."

Five solid days of interchanging, mixing witness with Mass with prayer, with getting to know new warriors in the Lord's defense of human life - and great food to boot! I have to hand it to Jack Ames who has cultivated a veritable army for **Defend Life**, produces a newsletter with good freelance articles for local prolife edification. (11355)

In August I made a return to a vibrant faith parish in **Macon, GA the beautiful church of St Joseph** (#11273), standing proudly like a jewel on a high point near the center of the city. One of the four "cathedral-like" churches built by the Jesuits well over 100 years ago, this one is most remarkable in its beauty and architectural design. I gave a concert there and preached weekend homilies, but also celebrated the Feast of St Maximilian Kolbe and the Assumption by offering several talks in a symposium I was privileged to share with Mike Aquilina (who appears often with Dr Scott Hahn on EWTN programming). The pregnancy help center (Kolbe Center), under the tutelage of Dr Richard Rowe and his wife Suzanne, asked me to speak at the evening **banquet for their annual fundraiser**, and the parish had Mike and I share the podium for a **morning symposium followed by a Holy Hour and later a Mass**. Mike spoke from his expertise on patristics on the conflict between pagan and the newly establishing Christian faith of the Roman Empire, particularly on protecting innocent life.

I picked up the Old Testament scriptural "growth" in defending life and then returned after Mike's presentation to show this in the lives of the saints, particular in the heroic Saint Maximilian Kolbe. In the evening, I gave a **presentation on The Blessed Mother and Defending Life** (Feast of the Assumption) at the fundraiser. (11273)

I then spent a few days with friends in Peachtree City again and recorded more piano music, visited the botanical gardens and **joined with Alveda King** in a presentation she gave in **Marietta, GA**, August 20. It was a combination of talks and music making to a stirred-up group of ecumenical lovers of Life.

We combined back to back weekends in Georgia, taking advantage of the week in between, return to offer Mass at Holy Trinity in Peachtree as well, before heading to Augusta the following weekend. George Vozniak coordinated another dinner-concert which I performed Saturday evening at **St Mary's on the Hill, Augusta**. I also celebrated Masses that weekend and gave the homily for that weekend. (11370)

For the annual **Memorial Services** for the buried unborn babies, held on the second Saturday of September at various spots around the country sponsored in part by Priests for Life (at time of feast of Exaltation of the Holy Cross) each year, I joined a group at a cemetery near Tom's River, with Ed DiMarco coordinating the event. From **that sprang an invitation to come to do a mission at local parish, with details to be finalized.** (11353)

TriState Pregnancy Center is so named due to its location where NY, PA and NJ converge at beautiful Milford / Matamoras, PA. Near the Delaware Water Gap. This foundation for women in need, hosted their annual fundraiser and, through an invitation to Priests for Life, I was asked to speak and to give a short piano concert at the Sunday afternoon dinner and auction, Sept 19. I also celebrated and spoke at Masses at St Patrick's Church in Milford that evening and Sunday. There were over 250 people at the dinner, Saturday. (11305)

This led almost immediately to the mammoth **World Meeting of Families** (11912) back in Philadelphia where Priests for Life had our booth amidst nearly 1000 booths in the immense Pennsylvania Convention Center, Sept 21-25. The whole event was enormous and the streets of Philadelphia were alive with – not traffic at all, as vehicles were not allowed in the latter part of the week – but with travelers from all over the world for this largest ever conference of its kind. The climax of course was the entrance of Pope Francis to the city and the events that followed. Thus the vehicle restrictions. But that made it all so convention friendly too.

In the midst of the week, a definite highlight, perhaps the biggest event in the non-scheduled program of the official World Meeting, Priests for Life held its own **Wednesday evening presentation** with over 1000 people attending. It was far greater than a "breakout session" of which there were a goodly number convention center. Planned well over a year in advance, it promulgated a forum for defending pre-born life and for those all over the world to hear what Priests for Life has been doing in its variegated ministries. The results were hugely successful and resonated with so many who now have our contacts and literature to bring back to their own countries. This was again part of the international outreach of Priests for Life without the expense of sending members overseas. They came to World Meeting of Families and to us.

A sideline, here, as beyond even the unofficial events of the convention hall massive areas, a number of events took place in the center city area of Philadelphia, of course including Holy Mass, especially for the time between the WMF and the arrival of Pope Francis on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. I had the opportunity of giving the **homily at a Mass on Sunday** morning to a packed **St John the Evangelist Church**, many again who had come from distant lands, such as a group from Chile with whom I mingled afterwards who knew our Augustinian parishes in Concepción.

As chance and the blessing of God, more importantly, would have it, I wound up among the hundreds of priests awaiting Pope Francis in the Philadelphia Cathedral **Basilica of St Peter and Paul** to be ushered to begin the group placing me in the first row and center aisle of the Cathedral for the entrance of His Holiness.

Then, St **Monica Parish of Mercer Island (Seattle area) Washington** called for PFL to supply for a series of week-end Masses. I had an opportunity to meet with several pro-life activists from Olympia and Edwards WA as well. October 8-11. (11466)

I flew to **Raleigh Diocese, NC** for a parish mission at **St Mary St Edward Church**, Roxboro, Oct 17-21. (11093)

I preached at all Masses at suburban Philadelphia's **St Albert the Great Parish**, Saturday and Sunday, 10/23-24. (11393)

I made a presentation and gave a concert at **St John the Evangelist Church**, Waynesboro, Virginia, 10/26-28 (11433)

The **Kingsmen** (www.thekingsmen.org) is an organization that promotes men's spirituality as *Leader, Protector and Provider*. Solidly Catholic and Eucharistic, it builds upon the skills of the men "in the wild" or as in the case I served as chaplain, in "Samson," a healing four days with talks, Mass, projects, etc. around the Cross of Christ. This was held at Discovery House in Hammonton, NJ, Nov 5-8 (11467). I had opportunities to weave in pro-life talks, and indeed a few of the men spoke on their post-abortive pain and anger. It was a very positive experience. Similar to Cursillo or Rachel's Vineyard but with different components of both scripture and work-related items.

The last trip of the year was to **St Andrew's by the Bay Church in Annapolis**, MD (11408). It was the 25th anniversary of the respect life committee at the church and Maureen Sansell, who I got to know through Defend Life Maryland (above). I gave a presentation at the parish hall and then Sunday afternoon gave another piano concert. Monday I concelebrated Mass at the US Naval Academy, joined Maureen for lunch and headed back to Philadelphia in the afternoon.

I look forward to furthering our inroads into parishes and especially schools in 2016 after a pilgrimage I am leading to the Holy Land over the upcoming New Year. What a magnificent way to celebrate the coming of the Lord of Life during the Christmas season.

This is the Day the Lord has made. Come let us rejoice and be glad in it!

SUMMARY AND PERSPECTIVE

Priests for Life grew out of the Fr Frank Pavone's instrumental vision to preach and encourage other clergy to preach on the tragedy of abortion and the need to defend life from conception to natural death. Over the years it expanded, bringing in the post-abortive healing ministry of Rachel's Vineyard, then the development of Silent No More Awareness, those mothers who after a certain healing take it a step further to let society know the ravages of abortion and to call a halt to the killing of babies in the womb. Needless to say, the organization developed closer ties with legal, medical and legislative personnel to help roll back the immense damage of Roe v Wade. In that sense it becomes "political" but only inasmuch as Priests for Life recognizes that the government created the problem by unleashing abortion on demand; therefore the government is responsible for reversing that. Priests for Life now has a strong liaison in the Afro-American community with Dr Alveda King, and a savvy opening to youth under the aegis of Bryan Kemper. Priests for Life has become a central weight in the Pro-Life effort here and abroad, promoting activism and coordinating, spearheading and driving on efforts to lay before society the responsibility to act in many faceted ways to defend life.

As a Catholic Priest I am engaged in the core effort that brought Fr. Frank Pavone to co-founding Priests for Life - preaching and encouragement to clergy and faithful in this area. Abortion is not fundamentally a political issue as it sometimes is painted, especially by those who are comfortable in letting what became a political issue by the Supreme Court in 1973 remain complacently in that realm, or worse, justifying it politically in order to assuage conscience's prodding to put it to an end.

Abortion should not be just illegal, it should be unthinkable. Therefore it is a *moral* issue, indeed a *human rights* issue of the greatest magnitude.

We have reaped in this country the deficiencies of a current president's slogan of "leading from behind." From a parallel moral standard, we as priests, and certainly the hierarchy, we cannot afford to "lead from behind" in pursuing the promoting solid moral basics in conjunction to a loving and merciful Church in the face of Christ's words: "If you love me, keep my commandments" and "what you do to the least of my brethren you do unto me." The babies are the least, not the least valuable, but the least protected, and therefore the most incumbent on us to protect them. This rises above all other considerations and situations in the social moral sphere, for without beginnings we cannot have any further continuation or continuity; without defense of life in the womb we cannot long hold onto protection beyond the womb. This is so fundamental that it is not even a Catholic – non-Catholic issue, a political "right or left" issue, a progressive – conservative issue (except that there will ultimately be no way of progress if we don't conserve life).

The priest must be at the epicenter of this defense because he roots his ministry in Christ, the same, yesterday, today and forever, not in the vagaries of civilizations, to say even less of nations or modalities rising or falling like dazzling leaves in the fall. The challenge still remains to instill the courage to speak out and for us to encourage our brother priests, well intended, to step out in courage and defy the purposely impeded "political" barriers of bogey-man tax-exemption fears made to stop first amendment freedom of speech, assembly and religion. Father Pavone's new book, *Abolishing Abortion*, centers on the need to address what has been all too passively and conveniently accepted as more Gospel truth than the Gospel itself – the scandalous posture of the Church and its civic legal counsels placing more fear about a very improbable penalty incurring from a forthright exposing of evil among political leaders, from the president on down, and the courts as a measure of that same government who insist that baby killing remain legal (among other fundamental moral contradictions to basic church teaching relative to "keep my commandments" as the pre-requisite for "loving" the Lord). No concept of Mercy can authentically mitigate or sideline the honest and positive essential of observing – "Thou shalt not kill" as primary among essential commands representing mercy and love.

I look forward to 2016. We see youth "survivors" of abortion telling their story, or being positively persuaded by their peers in moving from the false "tolerance" of relativism, to truth and life, not because of philosophical arguments, themselves good, but because of seeing the results and damage in action. I believe we need to look to other methods of bringing the power of conversion to bear, God's time and grace, to be sure, but our skill at moving the message to the heart, especially in this year of Divine Mercy. Not accommodation, not chipping away or turning away from the defense of life, but mercifully saving those misguided by a culture of ease and quick fix. It will be the task of the priest to pray for the wisdom and the grace of the Lord who is always with us – Emmanuel – but who demands that we protest evil and promote biblical truth and putting that truth in action for the defense of those most vulnerable – our brothers and sisters, whether unborn, elderly, misguided or ensnared. We will not back down, we will not "lead from behind," but from leadership, where the laity are hungering for us to be, even and especially as servants for the salvation of their immortal souls.