

END OF YEAR REPORT 2018 - Fr Denis G Wilde, OSA

In my 20th year in the ministry of Priests for Life I have joined Father Frank Pavone and others in recalling the growth of this unique family of ministries over those years and before that with two telethons specifically showing the growth and diversification of the organization. Each were three hours and they were masterfully “collaged” with photos and videos and audios from over those years. On one hand bringing back the materials in times of growing pains and financial shoe string projects – though the strings were carefully tied and balanced! – reflects a miracle of sorts in tracing organizational sapling to tree, and still growing. On the other hand the confident ability to project these two telethons with fundraising purpose as well as demonstrating to the social media recipients taking it all in shows the fast growth of the PFL media engine starting from a few computers in a Staten Island office space in the late 1990s that hardly had bytes to breathe now repositioned to our new Florida campus (2017) with high tech “followers” and “likers” on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and programs well beyond. Hovering around the millions in number. That we are now situated across from Cape Canaveral’s Kennedy Space Center reminds us that in God’s plan the sky’s the (limitless) limit, and in regaining the legal protection and the solid heart and mind of the American citizen and then beyond to defend all human life, from conception to natural death, and to end abortion, our efforts and vision must embrace a goodly array of visions and ventures and venues where the sky is the limit.

Quoting Fr Frank’s words from the earliest years of Priests for Life’s *raison d’etre* we note:

The mission of Priests for Life is to unite and encourage all clergy to give special emphasis to the life issues in their ministry. It also seeks to help them take a more vocal and active role in the pro-life movement, with predominant emphasis on the issues of abortion and euthanasia. Priests for Life exists in order to show the clergy how to fight the culture of death.

From that call to “unite and encourage” the sapling, shoestring venture has either welcomed ongoing pro-life ministries (Rachel’s Vineyard) or developed from its members (Silent No More, Civil Rights for the Unborn, Missionaries of the Gospel of Life, etc). In the process, as more diversification entered the picture our travel and presence for encouraging and uniting continues to be employed in the original priestly goals of homilies at Masses and presentations to schools (priests) and then beyond that to training youth for activism (Stand True) or citizens to maximize our civic responsibility to vote to defend life and roll back the legal murder of unborn children (Voter Training seminars).

As social media opened up new windows of opportunities to reach out via screen, another dimension – constantly shifting and developing – came to the fore: virtual presence and virtual galvanization of ideas and promotions, initiatives and objectives.

And so my past year has been a combination of all these areas including telethons, Facebook Live and some blogging, with various pastoral team core communications and updates, as well as Board Meetings by phone.

As a priest and called-on counselor of sorts I am privileged to reach out to people who call for prayerful help – loss of a loved one, unsettled marriage, etc. This is certainly a needed area of “encouragement” - and not just to laity but also brother priests. That mutual support is especially delightful. I work out of a parish setting (two adjacent parishes) and bring the dignity of life and defending it to the pulpit in churches in my Philadelphia region.

But for missions specifically worked out with and through the Travel office (Speakers Bureau at Priests for Life) receiving invitations or my receiving an invitation and then synching that information with the office, here are some of the year 2018 ventures.

March for Life in DC, Jan 17-19. After being part of the ever-growing prayer vigil at the newly located Planned Parenthood in DC in the early morning as I networked with the priests concelebrating at the vigil Mass at the Basilica Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and the following morning, the day of the March, I was celebrant and homilist at the Mass Priests for Life offers for people arriving at Constitution Hall in DC for the annual ecumenical prayer service for the unborn which gathers some 1100 people.

I gave several parish missions in 2018. Besides the homilies on Saturday evening and Sunday as a rule, people are invited to delve in deeper both in understanding the faith and committing to follow up in some action. Typically I give a presentation on four successive evenings. I was first in Bally, PA, Blessed Sacrament Parish, dating back to 1740s, years before we were a country. That was February 17-21 as we were entering Lent.

I returned to EWTN in Birmingham, AL for seven recordings with Janet Morana on the Defending Life series which was then broadcast in the Fall throughout the world several times each week.

Part of our responsibility as believers is to protect our religious values in our country. I have been representing PFL at several Faith and Freedom forums in Delaware and Maryland in the past year. Topics are both short-ranged and long-ranged. 2018 being a mid-term election year, the assembled were given opportunities to hear from candidates running for house and senate. Sacred Heart Center in Wilmington, DE was the venue of a two-day gathering, on May 12-13.

In late June and early July I was privileged to lead a pilgrimage to the Marian shrines of Central Europe. It was a great opportunity to weave church history and the pro-life movement, especially our PFL work, in homilies as well as land travel presentations.

For the past seven years I have been involved as chaplain of sorts to the Defend Life Maryland Face the Truth Tour occurring during the last week of July. About 20 core members who stay for the whole time and 20 others who are more local to an event join in prayer and street witness to the unborn, as they hold signs in busy boulevard entrances to malls, or on rush hour highways in Baltimore, Frederick, Westminster, Bowie, and just under 20 total venues. Three each day, with Mass after the first, lunch and a challenging prolife leader's presentation afterwards, a final thrust out on the streets in the afternoon and an evening debriefing and

fellowship. Jack Ames has masterfully organized this for, I believe, annually since 2000. All wear "Defend Life" shirts that stand out with the unborn baby depicted on the same shirt. It is great company and I am always enriched by the faith and humility of the youth in our group. It's a boost for me to be sure!

In mid-August I have been invited for the past 4 years to the Kolbe Center (pregnancy care center and informational center) adjoining St Joseph Church in Macon GA, to give a morning presentation and an evening piano concert. Then I celebrate some of the Masses for the weekend at this magnificent gothic church. Afterwards I join with my good friends from Newnan, GA, Ann and Norm Lundin to record some of my piano classics, which are eventuating into CDs and on line files people can download. Still in process. Will get the word out when they are technically up to snuff.

Columbus Ohio has a delightful stately St Therese Retreat Center, conveniently near the airport (though the retreat center was there first I think!) and an equally impressive longtime established men's group that meets several times yearly for a weekend retreat. I rendered the parish mission presentations now into seven talks from Friday evening to Sunday noon. That was Sept 7-9

Next I was invited to Cleveland Ohio, and this time for a presentation at the kickoff of 40 Days for Life in the Fall, Sept 22-26. I salute John Noall for putting this together and going from parish to parish promoting 40 Days for Life.

I did my annual retreat at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, with the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception just before Thanksgiving.

I gave pro-life talks in our local schools here in Philadelphia, spoke at street, church or home meetings of 40 Days for life gatherings in West Chester, PA, Wilmington, DE, and Saturday morning prayer vigils in the area spaced throughout the year - hopefully "encouraging and unifying" those already actively with us, and for the enlightenment by the Spirit to change and fire up the hearts of those who will make a difference in rolling back the culture of death to the Gospel of Light and Life.

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