

END OF YEAR REPORT 2019

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The year 2019 certainly has been a year of political and church related challenges wherein Priests for Life has come to play a major beneficent role, not just in strategy but in defining the points at issue in both of these areas of concern that play out in our national life. The eminent “flavor” or scent wafting through the PC air that “separation of church and state,” a supposed golden calf of our social behavior as a country, that supposedly never the twain should meet between the two, is being forced into the open to reveal the danger and fallacies of such a position. The clause, not just absent from the Constitution, was adopted to protect the church (religion) from the encroachment of the state (government), not the other way around. In the last 70 years and acceleratingly so today it *is* usually the other way around. The Church is attacked by super-minority entities, legally and politically well-positioned “plaintiffs” to encroach on the freedom and properties of the church. And of course government grows on.

Priests for Life comes into play quite legitimately and legally sound in calling out the attack on freedom of religion as it variously plays out in the courts but also supporting the opposite alliance, again legally and legitimately, siding with those organizations that promote religious freedom, including the close relationship with the Trump agenda of protecting religious rights and especially the rights of the unborn. The right to life and the right to freedom of religion rise or fall together. It can be shown how the fall of both in the Obama years played out. We are now happily seeing the reversal going hand in hand with the Trump administration. Father Pavone, Dr Alveda King and Janet Morana have been closely connected and influential in this regard with various pro-life and faith coalitions established by the present White House. “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” have been protected on a safer road in these past three years.

I personally have noticed that in my conversations both with organization leaders and the salt of the earth pro-life local parish leaders around the country this past year. In such diverse political venues as red state **St George, Utah (May 24-29)** and cobalt blue state **Brooklyn NY (June 1-2)**, people understand the very central factor, abortion – and now infanticide and assisted suicide – play into the religious factor, the political factor and lie at the roots of the division, even though polls may not exhibit these vital issues at the top of the voting list when all is said and done. It is vital that we continue to get the message across that “social justice begins at conception.” The (media-prompted) narrative is that the GOP or even the traditional church is mean to the little guy (on the border, in depressed areas, or wherever else a victim can be spuriously heralded).

We need to continue to counter their accusations of so-called “oppression,” “bullying” and even – using the left’s favorite bludgeon word – “racism” , by exposing the real oppression, abuse, bullying and racism in the mean affair of abortion. It’s that turning the negative accusations back at the real perpetrators which helps turn the tide in this battle for life.

In my retreats, missions (**Utah, South Carolina, Buffalo**) and school presentations (**Grand Island, NY, Orefield, PA**) and regular parish weekends (homilies at all Masses) and other presentations I emphasize the simple – but not proving easy – task of always using pregnant language – such as “mother” rather than “woman, or women” or “father” rather than “boyfriend” when related in any way to abortion. Likewise we should not use “pro-choice” but rather “pro-abortion” unless showing the results of “Choice” in a jar or next to a scalpel. So much of the positioning people take on abortion (or “abortion rights”) is conditioned by language, and the language we choose and spread is either a weapon for life or death. This language discussion is nothing new, I realize, but it is reaching others – Utah or Brooklyn – in a way that is seen as powerful. We would be remiss if we do not expose the false ideals hidden in the cloak and dagger language of the pro-abort lexicon. We all need to work at it as it will have a profound effect. I see others are getting it too, as they see through the trash and cunning.

Although our work needs to always be underpinned foremost by a spiritual even supernatural dimension -- a vocational position that Priests For Life has promoted in liturgical and novena campaigns through the year -- we can never lose sight of nor disengage from the political and constitutional battle we are in as a country. Through my homilies I always lead the assembly to consider what they might do in terms of prayer, persuasion, presence, political responsibility and (the attitude of) persistent perseverance. These I see are the P's of Pro-life activism. The greatest prayer is the Mass followed by the Rosary; persuasion involves right and righting language in commonsense, not elitist, basics of morals; presence as on guard for others' expressing their plight about an abortion in plan or in pain afterwards, or presence at the mills of carnage; political responsibility owning up to why do I vote, and what would happen if I don't protect the most bullied segment of our humanity, the preborn; and finally the steel to patiently “endure to the end” knowing the war is already won by the King of Kings. In so many ways these five pivotal points perfectly parallel what is needed for Catholic and Christian resonant revival.

So it was a pleasure to join forces in **Charleston, SC around the Fourth of July** to render a Patriotic Piano Concert honoring our country and the religious channels feeding and drawing from the nation. I also relished offering the Masses and homilies at the splendid Charleston Cathedral, July 6-7, after having participated in the National Right to Life Convention in the same area's convention center. At this Thanksgiving time as I write this, we have so much to show our gratitude for, and that was much of the sentiment expressed by so many in Charleston as well.

For the past seven years in the last week of July (this year July 31 – August 1,2) I have had the unique privilege of joining and being chaplain of sorts to the **Maryland Defend Life** team that takes to the streets and malls of Baltimore and environs, White Marsh, Bowie, Westminster, et al, where we set up large signs showing what an abortion is to shoppers now driving in queue and passersby. It is peaceful, prayerful, mature and inspiring, even to those whose immediate reactions are negative. Others actually sign up once they circle back to find out what this thing is all about! Three 1.5 hour witness places each day from Monday through Friday (I am there

Weds-Friday) with breakfasts, lunches and dinner prepared by organized local committees throughout eastern Maryland, or dinner at an accommodating family home for 20-30 guests. Besides the core 15 or more, we pick up and drop off as the locale warrants. I lead in the celebration of Mass each day, and besides my homily, every lunch has a well-known speaker who opens up further conversation in the “persuasive” side of this national challenge. I am always amazed at the young folks’ zealous commitment and sensible, compelling answers.

The Kolbe Center in Macon, Georgia invites me each year to give a presentation and then a piano concert on behalf of the center, around the date of Saint Maximilian Kolbe’s feast day (August 14). I preached the Sunday 6 pm Mass at St Joseph Church again and then gave a regional presentation later in the evening.

For over 30 years several parishes in the Toms River, NJ area have conducted a Mass and **memorial for the unborn babies** whose aborted remains were buried in **Ocean County Memorial Park**. This was my second visit and there were about 80 folks in attendance at the Mass (Sept 7). With the efforts of the coordinator I was able to take the Masses and preach on Sunday (Sept 8) at Saint Justin Martyr Church in Toms River.

On Sept 9-10 Priests For Life conducted a gathering of pro-life leaders and activists to head **through the halls of congress** to reach Democratic Members of Congress to prevail on them (especially in red Trump-win states) to have Nancy Pelosi bring to the floor the vote on protecting a child born alive after a botched abortion. The Democrat leaders in the House have refused consideration to such a vote over 80 times so far. Wearing black shirts with lettering against infanticide we all dispersed into various offices. I joined two other lay people from Greenville SC who had driven up to do this and we met with Reps from NJ, AZ, NY, AL and elsewhere.

Of course since then everything has been focused on the impeachment show. But the bill to end infanticide is necessary since states have encroached further (NY and VA in particular) in letting “the parties decide” what to do after birth! Some seem to be more concerned about voting for candidates who defend crossing our borders but are not willing to specifically keep those who cross the border of the womb alive.

October and November were fruitful months in that I got to parishes weekly and in key areas: three in Pennsylvania (Williamsport, St Joseph the Worker [Scranton]; Paoli, St Norbert’s [Philadelphia]; Orefield, again St Joseph the Worker [Allentown]); and Kingsport, TN [Knoxville]; Grand Island NY [Buffalo]... These venues included presentations besides weekend Masses and schools (Grand Island, Orefield, Allentown). It was a pleasure working with the middle school classes, each demographically different. Light bulbs went on in their minds, reflective first in their eyes and then in their responses. We need to get into the schools and – again – “straighten out” the slogans.

These last five venues carried me into November and in the meanwhile I have met with Villanovans for Life, the pro-life organization that is totally student-run. As a result, it varies from year to year as to how effectively the organization runs its events. They have a Spring

dinner and a guest speaker then and another time during the year. I was speaker several times over the years.

Well into my 21st year with Priests for Life, my tenure time about balances my 22 years tenured at Villanova until 1998 when I joined Priests for Life. Both the University and Priests for Life have had much growth and it is fascinating to look at both and work with the question of reaching our youth in a world that more and more glances at headlines and tweets rather than uncovering the truth. Although these students are brilliant and quite competitive, I find a 2019 campus where less interaction is heard, while ear buds are (somewhat) hidden amidst whatever private world is being revealed to the smartphone carrier, rather than the banter and conversation formerly vibrant and collegiate-like. Amidst this, however, it is refreshing to hear others, whether national speakers and nearby students, still searching for the truth and the meaning of life, first and foremost to protect life and bring all along with ourselves to our eternal goal.

We need to do all we can to cultivate that gift of conscience. That is why, especially with the promising direction and in many cases fulfilled promises of President Trump, our healthful and necessary influence on the political, the patriotic and the religious faith in our country, moving from the defensive to the offensive, remains critical in our calculus and strategy. Our role is to lead with every means at our disposal to make abortion unthinkable. The time is ripe for the pickings in 2020!