

*Fr. Frank Pavone recently interviewed His Excellency, the Most Reverend Salvatore Cordileone, Archbishop of San Francisco about his pastoral letter on human dignity of the unborn, Holy Communion, and Catholics in public life called, "Before I Formed You in the Womb, I Knew You." Here is a transcript of that interview.*

**Fr. Frank Pavone:** This is a time when more and more bishops and the Bishops' conference as a unit are paying attention to and speaking out about this whole question of what we do with politicians who claim to be Catholic but are pro-abortion. And of course this matter is brought to a head because of the actions of Biden, who is proving to be the most pro-abortion extreme president in history, but also claims to be a devout Catholic as does Nancy Pelosi who's out there in San Francisco.

So the Archbishop and other bishops at this point in time feel it necessary to make some strong clarifications.

The Archbishop and I go back a long time. Some 25 years ago we were together in Rome both working at different offices in the Vatican, but living in what is called the Villa Stritch, which is an apartment complex for American priests, diocesan priests who work in the Vatican offices. So I got to know him well before he became a Bishop but was very happy when I heard that he was named a Bishop because I knew that he would be a clear and strong teacher of authentic Catholic doctrine. Also, our connection with his Archdiocese of San Francisco is very meaningful to us at Priests for Life because that's actually where Priests for Life began.

You may not know that, but back in 1990-1 it was a group of priests in the San Francisco Archdiocese that got the idea and laid the groundwork and got the organization of Priests for Life up and running. At the same time, I was getting a similar idea over on the other side of the country in New York and through Cardinal John O'Connor, I connected with those San Francisco priests and everything else after that is history. I was very happy to interview the Archbishop just briefly. Please spread his important words.

**Fr. Frank Pavone:** I am delighted today to welcome Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, the Archbishop of San Francisco, who recently issued this pastoral letter, "Before I Formed You in the Womb, I Knew You." Archbishop, thank you so much for being with us.

**Archbishop Cordileone:** You're welcome, good to be with you.

**Fr. Frank Pavone:** What led you to issue this letter at this particular point in time?

**Archbishop Cordileone:** For some time now I've known I would have to say or do something on this issue because it's creating so much confusion among our Catholic people and it seems to be becoming more and more urgent. I some time ago decided this would be the best approach. Basically, this is a teaching document, so something that would be succinct but very clear and precise. So this letter has been in my mind for quite some time. All through last year I've been working on it but I decided to wait until after the election to publish it because I didn't want this to be misinterpreted or hijacked as some kind of a political ploy. It's not a political ploy at all.

**Fr. Frank Pavone:** You focus in this document on the issue of Holy Communion. What in a nutshell is the connection between the reception of Holy Communion and our commitment to defend the unborn?

**Archbishop Cordileone:** I tried lay out the church teaching very clearly. A lot of Catholics unfortunately don't understand anymore what it means to receive Holy Communion. It means that one accepts all the teachings of the church, professes those beliefs, and is living their life in conformity with those.

When it comes to defense of the unborn and I would say it's the same with any issue of fundamental justice. A Catholic cannot be in a state of grace and favor something that's a grave injustice, and I can't think of one more serious than depriving an innocent person of life. So we're talking about the killing of innocent human beings. So this is a deprivation of a fundamental right, this is a very grave injustice. Any Catholic who cooperates with that formally or in an immediate material way, as I explained in the letter, is putting themselves in a very serious situation of cooperating with it with serious evil, and they're not properly disposed to receive Holy Communion.

**Fr. Frank Pavone:** As you say, Archbishop Cordileone that applies to every Catholic and specifically in this letter you plead with public officials. What is your message to those public officials at any level of government who do not protect the unborn?

**Archbishop Cordileone:** I would repeat what I put in the letter. Please stop the killing. You're in a position to do something. You have a lot of influence over societal attitudes and practices. You have a lot of influence here. You are in a position to do something, to stop the killing. We're killing innocent human life. Stop the killing. Recognize the evil that's being perpetrated here. Have a change of heart and come back to the fullness of your Catholic faith. We await with open arms to welcome you back.

**Fr. Frank Pavone:** Well, we will certainly echo your message and as we have many, many pro-life activists that tune into these programs and in conclusion, would you just give a word of encouragement to those that are there in the trenches? We especially appreciate, of course, the many who come to San Francisco for the Walk for Life each year. You and I have walked in that many times, but a word of encouragement to our pro-life Catholics.

**Archbishop Cordileone:** I'm very grateful to all of you who have persevered new and old in the Pro Life movement. This is the critical issue of our day, every generation has one. This is ours. Some of us have been trudging forward with this for very many decades now. I have my whole priesthood my almost 40 years as a priest, been actively involved. Father Pavone, of course your outstanding in that. So keep going. We have to keep moving forward with this. I do believe that someday people will realize the evil and turn away from it. But it's only if we persevere. I say you know this issue of abortion; it's perpetrated because of a cultural blindness. Nowadays we're horrified to think that people tolerated lynchings in the pre-civil rights South. Civil rights was the issue of the day. The preeminent issue in the mid-20th century. How could... we just shudder in horror. Someday that will be the case with abortion if we persevere. So thank you for what you're doing and keep going.

**Fr. Frank Pavone:** Thank you Archbishop. I know you have to get to another interview. God bless you and we look forward to being in touch.

**Archbishop Cordileone:** Thank you very much.