

Fr. Frank Pavone's Interview with Bishop Joseph Coffey

Fr. Pavone:

Well hello friends and welcome to EndAbortion.TV. Father Frank Pavone, here National Director of Priests for Life

And today we're happy to be joined, we're honored to be joined, by a long-time friend of Priests for Life, someone who, as a priest has been very active in our ministry, very active in the pro-life movement and more recently was called by our Lord and by our Holy Father to be a Bishop of the Church. He is an Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese for Military Services in the United States. Bishop Joseph Coffey. Bishop so good to have you with us, welcome.

Bishop Coffey

Thank you, Father Frank. It's always good to spend time with you. I've been a big fan of your ministry for many, many years, as you know.

Fr. Pavone

Yes, and I wanted to talk about that and about your involvement in the pro-life movement in many different ways. But let's give our audience a little bit more about your own background. I know you were ordained as a priest of Philadelphia, where I think you spent much of your young life. And Cardinal Bevilacqua, of course who we also knew fairly well, ordained you and then you asked his permission to become a Navy chaplain, which he granted. And you spent time in the service in that way and then of course, as I mentioned, you were called to be a Bishop.

This has been quite a journey for you and was it a surprise when you were asked to become an Auxiliary Bishop?

Bishop Coffey

Well, I know, everyone knows that priests are not allowed to lie, especially bishops. So I just say please believe me when I tell you it was a total and complete shock. It was a bit overwhelming. Absolutely.

Fr. Pavone

And for our viewers that aren't familiar with, usually we think of a diocese as a geographic territory. But of course the Archdiocese that you serve for the military services is a little bit different. Explain to us how that's set up in the church.

Bishop Coffey

Well, it's very unique because as you mentioned, geographically, we are the world's largest archdiocese, we believe, because we have U.S. military all over the world.

And so whenever someone is in the US military Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard while they're in the military, they belong to the Military Archdiocese. So we have bases all over the world. Archbishop Broglio is headquartered in Washington DC. He has four auxiliaries who help him. Bishop Spencer is on the East Coast. Bishop Buckon on the West Coast. Bishop Muhm in Europe and Asia covers

10 time zones and I have all the veteran's hospitals around the US. So my job is to visit our priest chaplains who work in the veteran's hospitals. I'm just coincidentally sitting in the airport right now, BWI. I just landed after a rather long trip out West where I visited San Francisco, San Diego, Albuquerque, Saint Louis. I've been on the road, so I live out of a suitcase.

Fr. Pavone

Wow and well, we're certainly grateful for all of our veterans, all of our military personnel and all the priests who serve them and for you, serving them in turn.

We have, of course, Archbishop Broglio you mentioned. He and I go way back as well as you know. We both served together in Rome in the late 90s under John Paul II. We were both working at different Vatican offices, but we were living in the same complex, The Villa Stritch. And I remember from all the way back then just the pleasure of knowing him and seeing in him a great a man of the Church.

Bishop Coffey

Right, that's a nice place. We visited there when we had the baby Bishops conference just a few months after I was ordained, and then a few months after that, we had the Ad Limina visit. So I got to meet Pope Francis twice in just a few months.

Fr. Pavone

Nice, nice. Well Bishop it's a joy to have you with us and as you said, you've been actively involved in the pro-life movement and Priests for Life for many, many years.

Let's talk about some of the connections. I know that you know very well the family of two of our pastoral associates here at Priests for Life, Dr. Theresa Burke and her husband Kevin. And of course they are the Co-founders of Rachel's Vineyard, the world largest ministry now for healing after abortion and that has been one of the ways that you've been very involved in the movement. And that, of course is a key commitment of the Church and of Priests for Life and should be of every pro-life person, to bring that mercy, to bring that healing to the terrible wound of abortion.

I always say it this way, that we who reject abortion do not reject those who have abortions, but rather we embrace them with the love of Christ. Can you talk to us a little bit about your experience in that whole arena, the importance of that and the value that you see specifically in the Rachel's Vineyard Ministry?

Bishop Coffey

I'll be happy to. I'm incredibly proud of Theresa and her husband, Kevin. I've known them for many, many years before they were married in fact. I think I first met Theresa through my sister, Rose Anita and Theresa and her sister Katie and I both worked at the village camps in Switzerland where we were ski instructors back in the winter of 1984, and then I went on to sell cars in Europe for five years, then to the priesthood.

So I have been friends with Theresa and then Kevin for many, many years. And I always try to remember whenever I'm preaching about pro-life to always mention that healing power of confession. That God's mercy is available to all of us, and that we are all sinners. So I always try to remember to do that, and I think that Teresa and her and her husband Kevin, their ministry of Rachel's Vineyard is so critically

important and I know that they're all over the world now giving these retreats. I'm incredibly proud of their ministry and quite frankly, I was overjoyed when they joined forces with you 'cause I knew that would have an incredible effect that would just magnify both of your ministries and make it really one Ministry of Healing. Very, very proud of them. Very, very proud.

Fr. Pavone

And it really has done exactly that. That's it's a good way to describe it. It has magnified the ministries because for us it shows that this is integral to the work of the priest.

We are, as Saint Paul says, ministers of reconciliation. And so we want to bring people back to that saving mercy.

And of course, as you know, the retreats need priests because we are ministering the sacraments of the Church together with the word of God, together with this solid, the solid psychological research on which Theresa has founded this retreat program. We know that many dioceses have used Rachel's Vineyard as part of their outreach of Project Rachel. I think especially now in the Church and Pope Francis has so effectively repeated this over and over. We need that accent on God's mercy, don't we? I mean, there's so much woundedness in the world. We really need to seem to me...and when I give seminars to the clergy on preaching on abortion I always tell them lead with mercy. Begin with the message of mercy. So that you make people feel like whatever else we're going to say, just know we're not against you. We're on your side.

Bishop Coffey

We are absolutely on the same page, Father Frank. That's exactly the same advice I would give any priest or Deacon who is going to preach about this. I have gone on these retreats as a priest invited to here confessions and I've heard some amazing stories of women who have suffered for many, many, many decades from a decision they felt they had to make.

And these weekend retreats can bring them incredible healing and knowing God's forgiveness. So, I thoroughly recommend this ministry. Every priest needs to know about this so they can recommend these retreats to people they have in confession so that they can bring that healing of God's mercy that is available to every single one of us.

Fr. Pavone

For those of you that are just joining us, Father Frank Pavone here of Priests for Life. We're talking with Bishop Joseph Coffey, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese for Military Services in the United States.

He's a friend of Priests for Life and has really, really been active in the pro-life movement for the longest time and we're talking about the various dimensions of pro-life ministry. So Bishop, another person on our team that you know very well is Father Denis Wilde, an Augustinian priest also, out of Philadelphia. He has been our associate director for many years. In fact, he came to me in 1998, asking to join the team and has been with us ever since. He's going to be honored, by the way, in September by the Pennsylvania Pro-life Federation for his lifetime service to the movement. And he's a reminder and I'd love to get your thoughts on this, of how fighting for the unborn is not something we add on in a sort of artificial way or an extrinsic way to our priestly ministry. Rather, it flows from the very essence of who we are because as John Paul II taught us so well, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Gospel of life. The pro-

life message and movement is not something that we have to sort of have to append to the faith. Father Denis is a great example of that. We all try to be. Give us your reflections on the role of priests in this great pro-life movement and why maybe sometimes some of our brother priests are afraid to address abortion and ways that we both priests and also laity who are watching now can encourage their priests in this movement.

Bishop Coffey

Well, that's great. Thank you for asking about Father Wilde. He is a very, very dear friend of my families. I've known Father Wilde probably about as long as you've known him and I love to have him come over to my brother Tom's house where he plays the piano. I think many people know he's an absolutely gifted concert pianist and we just love to have many discussions about many things, especially life.

And when it comes to Priest for Life, I often say, well, every priest is a priest for life. But your particular ministry gives a much-needed material that's so freely available through your various websites and what not. That you give the material to the priests and the deacons so that they can be better suited to preach with more good information, solid, solid homilies and you've been sharing those for very many years. That's why I've supported your ministry 'cause I've used those materials myself for my preaching. I would encourage other priests to use those materials because I know that your desire is for every Catholic priest to be a priest for life and to use the materials that you've gathered over all these many years with the support and the great generosity of your benefactors to make these materials available so that priests can feel like they have the information that they need, the resources that they need so that it can make their job just a little bit easier rather than reinvent the wheel because you get so many homilies for so many different Sundays of the year. So priests just have to have courage. John Paul II, our saintly Pope, said it so well when he said to "be not afraid."

So we have to have the courage to preach about this issue. It's obviously not going away. It hasn't gone away and these many, many years of Roe V Wade. It is the preeminent issue of our time as the majority of bishops have said.

So we need to continue to fight for this. And as I've quoted you many times, Father Frank, I know you know that, where I say to people, as Father Frank says, we need to make abortion not only illegal, but unthinkable, just as slavery is. And I use the example of, you know, if you ask a modern teenager, hey, should we come back to slavery? They would think you're absolutely nuts because it is unthinkable. So that's where we have to get to with abortion that it'll be unthinkable.

Fr. Pavone

You know, Bishop, in regard to that, one of the dimensions of this whole battle is the political dimension. We at Priests for Life try to really reflect what the church teaches. If we go back, rooted in the Second Vatican Council, the church does not in her essence, have a political mission in the sense that the Church is a political party. She isn't. Our Lord gave us a religious mission to bear witness to a Kingdom that is not of this world. And yet, at the same time, the Second Vatican Council, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the encyclicals of the popes all make it so clear that there is not to be a disconnect between the religious mission of the Church to proclaim the Kingdom of God and the political life of the very people who do belong to the Church. There's obviously an intersection there, and yet it seems to me that we are struggling, especially

now in in America, to live out that intersection. We don't want to be apathetic or clueless or disconnected or irrelevant and at the same time we don't want to be political in an inappropriate way. Could you share with us your vision here? How do you formulate within your own mind, in your own pastoral activity, the church's is duty here to speak the word of God into politics in an effective way, especially for the protection of the most fundamental right, which is life itself?

Bishop Coffey

Father Frank, you are absolutely right. We are on the same page with this.

Politics have been around for many, many thousands of years. You go back to Aristotle and Plato and Socrates, it's really how people interact with each other so people can live in a society in peace and in harmony. And so it's that interaction..that's what politics is.

So we cannot divorce ourselves from the political process. We should be involved with it, not partisan. In my 25 years as a priest, I've never told anyone who to vote for but for every election I've talked about the issues and what the church teaches, and these fundamental issues that every Catholic should be concerned with. And I've had people walk out of my homilies, and they walk out of the church, but that doesn't bother me at all because we have to have the courage to teach and to preach the truth. And if sometimes that makes people uncomfortable or they think we're being too political well, that's not something we can be concerned with, but we have to preach the truth and we have to talk about these issues for every issue, every, every election. So Priest for Life can help us to walk that maybe minefield where we are not political as far as partisan or who to tell telling people who to vote for. But we're certainly going to let people know what the Candidates stand for. I'm from Philadelphia. I remember growing up we had our Catholic Standard and Times. The voter's issue, the voter's guide, where the Standard would send out questions to all the candidates of all the major parties.

Some candidates would refuse to answer them; others would answer them honestly. The Catholic Standard and Times would then report on those answers and then the priest could feel free to preach about those answers. So we're on the same page with that Father, and we need to continue to spread that message that we can't be afraid to mention things of a political nature and then we can't worry about being accused of being too political.

Fr. Pavone

You know, Bishop, when we are accused of that, I point out to people that it's not a problem of the Church being too political. The problem is our politics have become too pagan, and when they're embracing things like this Holocaust of unborn children, the Church would not be the Church if she didn't speak out plainly and clearly on the issues, as you as you just explained.

You know you've also been with us out in front of abortion facilities. I remember in Washington, DC prior to the March for Life, I think a couple of years when we always coordinate a prayerful presence in front of the Planned Parenthood there in Washington, DC. You've joined us there. You've encouraged the activists. You remember we had also the women there of our Silent No More Campaign speaking about their abortion. Could you give a word of encouragement to the folks that are involved in in these prayerful vigils which we often coordinate across the country and with many other groups that are coming out there very often? They're enduring, you know that not only the weather, but the ridicule of

others who don't think they should be there. And yet we know again this is another manifestation of the Church as the Body of Christ present to the people and trying to replace their despair with hope.

Bishop Coffey

Sure, and you know if you've been in the movement for a little while, most of us have had experiences where people have come up to us and said "I would like you to meet my son or my daughter. 10 years ago I was on my way to an abortion and I needed some kind of a sign that I shouldn't do it and there was one person praying the rosary in front of a clinic or there were a dozen people praying."

So I've tried to be involved ever since I was in high school going to the March for Life, college, seminary and as a priest, and as a Bishop. So, I continue to encourage people to be on the front lines praying the rosary quietly, silently. Praying for the sanctity of life and really giving time for the sidewalk counselors who maybe have a little more training to go up to the women and offer them the alternatives. The key is not to condemn. That just turns people away and that makes the abortion clinics seem to be the safe place.

So we have to be have a spirit of love and openness and forgiveness, willing to help the woman who is in crisis at that moment. That so many of the people who have had abortions, they feel they have no other options. So we need to be a welcoming, kind, loving presence at these clinics praying peacefully, and offering help. And we need to continue to do that for as long as it's necessary.

Fr. Pavone

Well Bishop, we are really happy to have you with us. I'm just going to ask you one more thing and then of course, you're at the airport, and we want to let you get home and settle in from your trip. But we're so grateful for your support, encouragement, guidance. It's always a blessing to have a priest promoting and supporting the people in the pro-life movement and even more so, a bishop now as you are serving our Lord. So thank you for that and would you give finally just a word of encouragement to all of our Priests for Life members, supporters, those that are involved in our projects and our prayer campaigns. You have supported our ministry so, so strongly over these years would you pass on that encouragement to those who are newer, newer supporters of Priests for Life?

Bishop Coffey

Sure, when you're in the movement, you welcome anybody and everybody of every age or even people of different religions, different philosophies, different politics. When they're supporting life we're all on that same team. So I encourage all those who are with you in your ministry. All the people who work at Priest for life. I want to thank them for the work they've done over these many years. Thank you for all the materials you provide. I want to really sincerely thank the benefactors who might be watching right now. Telling them to please continue to support Priest for life and anybody may be watching this for the first time that has not been involved thinking well maybe it's too late to get involved. No, it's never too late to get involved. So all you have to do is probably go to the priest for life website, find out how you can get involved, how you can contribute and then just get out there and don't be afraid. John Paul said it so well "be not afraid. "

Fr. Pavone

Amen, and to that end Bishop as we conclude. Would you please give us your blessing?

Bishop Coffey

Happily, May almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Fr. Pavone

Amen. Thank you Bishop. Friends, we've been joined by Bishop Joseph Coffey, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese for the Military Services in the United States and a strong pro-life advocate. We are very grateful. Bishop, thank you and we will talk to you again.

Bishop Coffey

Thanks Father Frank, talk to you soon bye bye.

Fr. Pavone

And thank you friends for watching this episode of EndAbortion.TV. Please spread it to others. Share this video. Make sure you're signed up for the notifications when we go live and stay involved. EndAbortion.US is our main website. Please stay connected with us. God bless you all.