

The mission of Priests for Life is to end abortion. We are a worldwide pro-life organization, based on Catholic principles, and a 501(c)(3) corporation. With a full-time staff of some 50 people, we are a family of ministries, encompassing Deacons for Life, Seminarians for Life, Rachel's Vineyard, the Silent No More Awareness Campaign, Civil Rights for the Unborn, Parliamentary Network for Critical Issues, Stand True Youth Outreach, and more.

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National Director and Chairman

Fr. Denis G. Wilde, OSA
Associate Director

Janet A. Morana
Executive Director
Co-Founder, Silent No More Awareness Campaign

Evangelist Alveda King
(Niece of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)
Pastoral Advisor and Board Member

Dr. Theresa and Kevin Burke
Founders, Rachel's Vineyard Ministries

Mr. Bryan Kemper
Director, Youth Outreach

Marie Smith
Director, Parliamentary Network for Critical Issues

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Activating God's People to End Abortion

Statement of Rev. Frank Pavone, National Director of Priests for Life

Submitted to House Judiciary Committee Chairman and Ranking Member:
Chairman Jerrold Nadler
Ranking Member Jim Jordan

For the hearing

“Undue Influence: ‘Operation Higher Court’ and Politicking at SCOTUS”
Thursday, December 8, 2022, 10:00am

May I express first of all my respect and gratitude to this committee and its members for their work on behalf of our nation, and my gratitude for the opportunity to contribute this statement to today's hearing.

I do so because for the better part of the last three decades, I have had a personal and professional relationship with Rev. Rob Schenck and with his brother, Rev. Paul Schenck. This began at the outset of my own fulltime role in national pro-life leadership as Director of Priests for Life. Priests for Life is one of the nation's leading pro-life organizations.

The ministry teams of our two organizations collaborated on many projects. My ministry rented office space, and still does to this day, at 113 Second Street NE. When we began doing so, that office was the ministry center (along with 109 Second Street) that Rob Schenck administered.

I served for a number of years as a member of the Board of Trustees for P&R Schenck, Associates in Evangelism, Inc., AKA Faith and Action in the Nation's Capital and the National Pro-Life Center on Capitol Hill.

Rev. Paul Schenck, Rob's brother, served for some years as a fulltime pastoral team member of Priests for Life. I was privileged to receive him into the Catholic Church during that time.

And I was party to many confidential meetings and conversations with the Schencks throughout this period.

The projects and activities we engaged in took place under various names, like the Ten Commandments Project, Operation Save Our Nation, and Operation Higher Court. Two points were always clear: first, that all our activity was pastoral and religious in nature, and second, that all our activity was legal and Constitutional.

First, the religious and pastoral nature of our activity can be summarized in the words found on the Certificate of Appreciation that Rob and Paul sent me on January 19, 2008 (attachment one). Those words read:

“For your partnership with us in challenging Capitol Hill with Biblical Truth and changing the nation, one policymaker at a time.”

Consistent with this mission, Rob would always sign his letters with some variation of the phrase, “Your missionary to elected and appointed officials,” as you can see on the attachment.

By definition, “missionary” activity means bearing witness to the Word of God, in a way that is consistent with the mission of every bible-believing Church in America. If this is to be reframed as “undue influence,” it puts under a shadow the legitimate efforts of every follower of Christ to carry out his command to “make disciples of all the nations” and to “teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

Moreover, there would be no religious reason to limit this missionary activity to two rather than three branches of government. Of course, the outreach included the Courts.

Second, I would have never consented to one day of service with this ministry if I thought that we were participating in or planning an effort to “unduly” influence the Court – that is, to do so in any way that is not part and parcel of the Constitutional right of every American to express their views to elected and appointed officials, or that would involve the breach of protocols of confidentiality – or of any kind – that are in place vis-à-vis the Court.

As Rev. Rob Schenck communicated in a letter to me of June 21, 2004 (attachment two),

“[E]verything we are doing and saying related to the Justices is fully legal, ethical and protected by the United States Constitution...”

As part of our activities, I became a member of the Supreme Court Historical Society. So did others who were associated with P&R Schenck. This enabled us to understand the workings of the Court better, and to have opportunities, at lectures and at the Annual Reception held every June by the Society, to meet the Justices.

At the time, Mr. David Pride was Executive Director of the Society. When I joined, both he and Rev. Rob Schenck made clear in no uncertain terms what I already knew, namely, that it would be inappropriate to raise with the Justices any matters that were or might be the subject of cases which they would have to decide, and that if we used our membership to try to do that, such membership would be terminated.

We utilized only avenues that were legitimately open to everyone, including having qualified people within our ministry contacts become members of the Board of the Supreme Court Historical Society, all as part of the stated religious mission to bear witness to the Word of God, and not for the purpose of gaining confidential information or exercising undue influence.

It is my sincere hope that the work of this Committee, and the fruits of this hearing, will serve to strengthen rather than to chill the religious freedom of ministries like mine and of all Americans to be missionaries of the Word of God to our elected and appointed officials, without having to worry that such activity will be redefined as inappropriate.

I renew my sentiments of gratitude to the Committee for receiving my input.



Fr. Frank Pavone
National Director, Priests for Life
President, National Pro-life Religious Council