



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Priests and People for Life – Part 1

Guest(s): Frank Pavone

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and I hope with Christmas fast approaching that you've found some time to enjoy this festive season amidst the hustle and bustle of all your holiday preparations. Now today's classic program, you're in for a real treat, it features Frank Pavone. Frank has been a loud voice and advocate for the pre-born for several decades. He serves as the national director of Priests for Life. And what you're about to hear is a program we've included in the 2023 Broadcast Collection.

Now before we begin, just a reminder that all throughout the month of December, thanks to some very special friends of our ministry, we have a matching grant in place. That means when you make a donation to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute this month, it will instantly be doubled. You can give a gift online when you go to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org. And please know how much we appreciate your ongoing financial support as we are a listener supported broadcast outreach.

Well, there's a lot of ground to cover on today's program, so let's join our own Dr. James Dobson and his good friend Frank Pavone discussing a challenging period of change in his life. That's coming up right now, right here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, welcome everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, and I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm pleased that you've chosen to join us. Our guest today is Frank Pavone, who was ordained on November the 12th, 1988, and I've known him for 40 years. We've been good friends and I appreciate this man.

This is a man of great courage and conviction, and he is dedicated particularly to the sanctity of human life. He's given his life to that purpose. He is my longtime friend. Frank, it's good to have you. You are coming to us through a computer hookup today. It's a pleasure to be able to talk to you.

Frank Pavone: Well, the pleasure is mine. I've been looking forward to this interview for a long time, and I should note, as you said, Jim, that our friendship goes back a very long time.

But every time that I'm in my headquarters, which now, we're in Florida, I see you because I have a picture up there of when I first visited your office, and you had me on your radio show the first time back in those days. And so, every time I see that picture, I offer up a prayer for you, and for all that you continue to do for our nation and for the kingdom of God, so thank you for that.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that love and appreciation is mutual, and it's a pleasure to be able to talk to you today. It's a critical time for you because you're going through a transition. Explain what has happened. It's breathtaking to me, and I'm sure it is to you too.

Frank Pavone: Well, as you know, we have a cancel culture going on in America today. An effort to cancel everything that is true and good in America. And also, it has infected the church. It has taken root in every institution really, where we see the different processes and institutions being weaponized against those who stand for things like pro-life, and other positions that you and I share and teach about all the time.

In the Catholic community, and you've been a front row witness to this in my own life and work over these years, although we have had tremendous strong support within the church at every level and in all denominations, we've also had some church leaders try to block and impede our work. Now, our work being that we're trying to put abortion front and center. We're trying to urge the church to put more priority on protecting the most defenseless babies, and on healing the wounds of abortion, and on electing pro-life candidates. Well, some bishops have been very uncomfortable with that.

They've been uncomfortable likewise with the growth and influence of our ministry of Priests for Life because they feel they can't control it. Or maybe they feel, oh, the people that are donating to them could be donating to us. And we've heard all these things over the years. They've said, "Oh, you're being too political," and whatnot.

For the last 21 of the 30 years that I've led Priests for Life, we have been involved in a battle against some of these bishops who have been, again, trying to obstruct or cancel our work. And most recently, they got Pope Francis to say, "Oh, Father Frank, you can't be a priest anymore."

And it's outrageous because that kind of a step is taken only when one has committed a pretty serious crime or other act of blatant rejection of some truth of God, or of the kingdom, or of the church. In this case, it's because they've looked at our work and they've said, "You haven't been following our lead here." And their lead has been to try to tamper down the message and get me

to go away from this full-time pro-life commitment. So, it's a sad story, it's a long story. But in a nutshell right now, they're saying, "Oh, well, you can't function as a priest in the Catholic Church."

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I think that many Protestants believe that the Catholic Church is very deeply committed to the sanctity of human life.

Frank Pavone: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: That's obviously not entirely true, is it?

Frank Pavone: Well, it goes back to, and I think we discussed this in the early years, when people hear about Priests for Life, they ask me, "Well, isn't every priest for life?" And my response is, "Well, we just help them to say so." And that's the distinction.

I mean, you look at the doctrine, you look at the unbroken series of teachings throughout the history of the Catholic Church, very, very clear against abortion. Very clear. But the teaching is one thing, how much emphasis the leaders in the church give to the issue is something else.

It's one thing to believe in the teaching, it's another thing to fight a cultural battle, and many of these leaders are uncomfortable with the battle. Literally afraid of it. That's where we run into the problem.

We have been, in that sense, a reform movement within the Catholic Church. Not to reform the teaching, but to call people to greater courage. And any reform movement is going to get pushback from the institution it's trying to reform. That is what we've been facing.

Dr. James Dobson: Is it enough to defrock you? That's essentially what has happened. You're not a priest anymore.

Frank Pavone: I can't function as a priest in the Catholic Church. Now, the good thing is-

Dr. James Dobson: That's pretty radical.

Frank Pavone: It's radical. It really is. And again, that gets done only when there are some very seriously wrong actions committed. We can go into what they said the reasons were.

First of all, they said, "Oh, well, you've given blasphemous communications on social media." Now, blasphemy is a pretty big sin to accuse somebody of-

Dr. James Dobson: Of course it is.

Frank Pavone: Except that they haven't told me what posts they're talking about. People figure that, oh, well, you've been working through this process, you must know what they're talking about. I don't.

And secondly, they said, "Oh, well, you've been persistently to your bishop." Now, we all can acknowledge the role of authority in the church. I acknowledge it certainly and always have. And I in fact have been obedient to any assignment that they've given me.

So, again, I don't know what they're talking about. And it's sad that you make a statement publicly like this, then you take an action that has these public repercussions. And then, you don't explain in more detail what it is that's going on? Like you said, it's quite a radical step to take.

Dr. James Dobson: Does it come down from the Pope?

Frank Pavone: Yes, this was signed off.

Dr. James Dobson: That's shocking.

Frank Pavone: This was signed off on by Pope Francis. But I know for a fact that the Pope has been advised by a number of cardinals who are very supportive of me and of my work, that there was a better solution here.

If there's a conflict between a bishop and the priest who is under his authority and that conflict cannot be resolved, the church provides for that priest to be able to transfer over to a different bishop. And there are other bishops willing to receive me and to support my ministry.

The Pope was advised that, "Well, why don't we just do that?" And for reasons that have not been explained, he did not take that option. But I think I know what the reason is. That would solve my problem, it wouldn't solve their problem. And by them, I mean the bishops who oppose this work.

Because if I were under a favorable bishop who supported my ministry and gave me the permission to keep doing what I've been doing the last 30 years, the work would just grow greater and greater in its size and influence. And I'm convinced that's exactly what a lot of these bishops don't want.

They want to control everything that is going on, especially in regard to this effort against abortion. And I think that many of them are afraid that our advocacy, our clear advocacy for the unborn, and for the priority of the abortion issue, and for electing pro-life candidates offends their Democrat friends. And that's a lot I think of what's going on here.

Dr. James Dobson: I don't know of anybody, Frank, that has done more to promote the sanctity of human life than you.

Frank Pavone: Oh, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, you have been on that frontline for a long time. And this, I use the word radical, this is very radical to anybody who really supports the value of life and is opposed to abortion. This must have taken your breath away, although, you probably saw it coming.

Frank Pavone: Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, you'll appreciate this. When I first got the word of this, I was doing what we're doing now. I was standing in front of a microphone and a camera and I was taping some spots. So, one of my team came in and showed me the message, gave me this news. I said, "Okay, thank you very much." I turned around, went back into the studio and kept taping for another hour.

And that's not a sign that I don't care about this, but that for 21 years, I had been subjected to an ever-changing narrative of ever shifting goal posts, opposition from bishops who no matter what I did, and no matter what I said, just could not be satisfied. It's a long story.

I've actually documented it. I have a special website, F-R frank pavone.com, where I've put up the whole long story of this. But that's why I had been already, I guess, so accustomed to the mistreatment from some of these men. It was a one-sided narrative. In other words, they knew what they wanted to do and they weren't listening to anything that we were trying to tell them.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you have a gracious response to it. I think it makes sense that anybody who is opposed to this pro-life movement is going to be threatened by you because you're so effective. What you have done is just breathtaking.

It's a wonderful ministry, and I just can't imagine life in this battle without you. Are you going to oppose it? Is there a trial? Is there any kind of adjudication of it?

Frank Pavone: Well, the thing that has to be done now is really very simple. It is a personal appeal to the Pope to reconsider this decision, because it has gotten to that level. We've been through a lot of processes over these years, and in those processes, Jim, the Vatican has backed me up multiple times.

So, this is not like they've been constantly against me. They've backed me up, they've supported our ministry, they've defended me against bishops who have misused their authority against me. So, it's not so much about them against me as it is about a church divided within itself. And like in politics, personnel is policy. So, at different times, different people take over different offices within the church, and then, we've seen the difference that makes for us whether we're treated favorably or unfavorably.

But right now that it's gone through all these ups and downs and ins and outs over the years, it's gotten to the point now where it is directly in the hands of Pope Francis. Now, here's another irony of this whole situation. Pope Francis and I have spoken four or five times over the years face to face, and he has strongly encouraged me in my work. So, now, I mean, this is what makes this so difficult-

Dr. James Dobson: And he had to approve this.

Frank Pavone: He personally approved it and signed off on it. And that's why I think that, well, in fact, I know that a number of American bishops have put into his ears some very negative things about me. And what I'm requesting now of the Holy Father is the opportunity to refute those things to him directly.

Again, the irony is he already knows a lot of the good fruit that has come about through our work, like the Rachel's Vineyard retreat program, for example. Largest ministry in the world for healing after abortion, helping the moms, the dads, the grandparents, and he knows it.

I mean, the second time of the several times I've spoken with him, he said, "Oh, you head up Rachel's Vineyard." He said, "Oh, that is excellent work. Keep going forward with that." Because he's a pope who, as we know, he emphasizes a lot this theme of mercy and reconciling those who have sinned.

And we're reconciling people who've had abortions, and who have turned to the Lord asking His forgiveness for that. So, I'm in a position now where I'm requesting the Pope to reconsider this whole decision, because I don't think he's badly disposed to what I'm doing. I think he's badly informed.

And my hope is that we can indeed bring him to the point of realizing that. I mean, look, I'm a sinner. None of us is perfect. Can we all learn? Do we make mistakes? Can we all learn from situations like this? Absolutely. And I want to learn.

If anything that I've done that needs correction, I want to be corrected. We know that that's of the Lord not to spurn correction, and to allow circumstances to make us more humble and aware of our own limitations. I mean, this is part of the Christian life.

Dr. James Dobson: What changes as a result of this? I mean the things that you lead, the presidencies that you hold and so on. Do you have to give all those up?

Frank Pavone: No. In fact, none of them. I have a team that is with me a thousand percent. I lead a few different ministries as you know. The boards of all of those ministries, and the staff, and the team are with me a thousand percent. They want me to continue in my leadership.

And of course, some people might say, "Yeah, but if you're not functioning as a priest, how can you lead these ministries?" Interestingly enough, most of the functions that I do in leadership in these ministries do not require priestly ordination.

For example, I'm broadcasting, I'm publishing, I'm leading meetings of pro-life leaders. We're able to continue doing that. The only thing that changes is, of course, part of my ministry has been publicly celebrating the mass in Catholic churches. Can't do that, but that doesn't mean I can't teach the Scriptures.

And so, I continue to give the Scriptural teachings and exhortation. Sharing the Word of God is something that not only all of us can do, we must do. We're commissioned by the Lord to do, so a lot doesn't change and that's the good news.

The good news too is that I'm convinced that our supporters, many of whom I'm sure are listening to us right now, don't support us because the Pope or some bishop tells them to. It's very much the other side of the coin. They're supporting us because we're saying and doing the things they wish their priests and bishops were doing, but they're not.

And so, therefore, they come to ministries like ours and they say, "Hey, this is what we need. Let's keep doing it together." So, I'm convinced that we've got a great army of people who are going to make sure that the pro-life work I've been leading for all these years continues, flourishes, and most importantly, gets the job done.

That we protect these babies. We've gotten *Roe v. Wade* cast out of the way, which means now that all the things we've been doing have even more of an effect. Because any laws we end up passing, instead of getting struck down automatically by the courts are going to be more than likely upheld, and we go forward with protecting these babies and their families.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you have a wonderful attitude toward it. I'm not sure I would handle it quite as well. You're not thinking of moving on?

Frank Pavone: Moving on from this work that I've been doing?

Dr. James Dobson: Yes.

Frank Pavone: Oh, not in the least, no. In fact, I am as enthusiastic about this work and eager to do it today as I was the very first day, and it's been that way all through these years.

Which is why so many people have said to me, "Oh, you're doing exactly what God is calling you to do. It's very evident, not only from the fruits of the work,

but from your joy, and your peace, and your energy in doing it." So, I mean, nothing has changed on that score.

Let me back up a little bit. People know that in the Catholic Church, we're a very hierarchically structured church, that each priest has his assignment from his bishop. And bishop might say, "Take charge of this church today. Next year, I'll go over to this other city and take charge of that other church," and you follow orders.

But this assignment that I've had to be director of Priests for Life didn't come about because a bishop told me that I had to do it.

Dr. James Dobson: Where did that originate?

Frank Pavone: 1993 under Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, and who was a great pro-life advocate himself, as you recall. I went to him. I had been serving in a parish for a few years. He ordained me and I was very happy doing the parish work, but my pro-life involvement was increasing.

And I felt at a certain point early in 1993, at a certain point I felt with such great conviction, a call to devote all my time and all my energy to defending the unborn, and advocating for them, and ending abortion. So, I brought this to the cardinal and I said, "I would like your permission to devote my ministry entirely to fighting abortion and protecting the unborn."

He carefully considered it, consulted those that knew my work already, and he gave me that permission in September of 1993. So, it's 30 years now that I've been doing this full time.

I look at that as this is part of my calling. This is a calling from the Lord. This is not simply an assignment or a job. This is something that with all my energy and passion I have been doing and longing to do all these years, and it brings a great amount of fulfillment.

Dr. James Dobson: Does this mean that people like me who love and respect you for what you do and for the man you are can't go on calling you Father Frank?

Frank Pavone: Jim, I think what it means is that I'm not supposed to refer to myself as Father Frank in the sense of presenting myself as a priest. But the very fact that you asked the question I think raises a point that we should discuss briefly.

So, many people have said to me since they heard about this decision, "I will never stop calling you Father Frank." Now, they're not saying that because they don't respect the authority of the church.

They're saying it for another reason, which is that there has been a relationship. That there has been a relationship not only of friendship, respect, like in our

case, collaboration in the battle, but that there have been for so many people they have experienced that I have been a spiritual father to them.

Whether it's through my preaching or through other ways that I've helped them to live out their faith, there's a spiritual father. Now, we know biblically that all fatherhood comes from God. We know we have only one teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ and so forth.

But it's a matter of people witnessing to and bringing others to that one source of truth and salvation, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. And St. Paul talks about this, "I became your father in Christ." It's a spiritual relationship there, and that doesn't come from a bureaucratic process or a piece of paper, even if it's signed by the Pope.

It doesn't come from that. It comes from the grace of God and a Holy Spirit working through us and doing exactly what we see all through Christian history, that people who are united in Christ, united in the Spirit, bearing witness to the gospel, and nurturing one another are sharing that spiritual life.

I can only honor and thank those who have said that to me. People from all across the country, all around the world. And again, it's not out of any rebelliousness, it's about, hey, wait a minute. There's a reality here. There's a relationship here that we're grateful for.

Roger Marsh:

You've been listening to Family Talk, and what you heard was part one of Dr. Dobson's classic interview with Frank Pavone. Now, there's still much more to hear about the challenges that Frank has gone through, and his thoughts on the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, so be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of this classic broadcast.

If you enjoy listening to Family Talk programs and who doesn't? Then you will certainly enjoy getting your own copy of our 2023 Broadcast Collection. We'll be happy to send it to you as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today. You can request the 5 CD set or get it as a digital download. To reserve your copy, simply go to drjamesdobson.org/2023. That's drjamesdobson.org/2023. You'll find everything you need to secure your copy right there on that page. Keep in mind you can also make your request over the phone. Simply dial 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825.

And keep in mind as I mentioned at the start of the program, thanks to some special friends of our ministry, we have a matching grant in place for the entire month of December. That means every dollar you donation is doubled during this most crucial time of year as we work to share God's word to impact families everywhere. Please carefully and prayerfully consider making a gift to the JDFI today. And thanks also for keeping us in your prayers for the ministry as well. Your kindness and generosity will bring hope and encouragement to even more

families in 2024. Remember you can donate online to take advantage of this special matching gift when you go to drjamesdobson.org. Or when you reserve your copy of our 2023 Broadcast Collection, you can do so over the phone and take advantage of the matching gift, 877-732-6825.

I'm Roger Marsh and I hope you'll join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of this powerful two-part conversation featuring our own Dr. Dobson and his good friend, pro-life advocate and warrior, Frank Pavone.

Until then, may God richly bless you and your family as you grow deeper in your knowledge of and relationship with Him.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.