

Abortion foe vows to fight suspension order

by [David Gibson](#)

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NEW YORK (RNS) One of the highest profile anti-abortion activists in the Catholic Church in the United States says he will abide by but appeal a suspension order from his bishop following allegations of financial mismanagement.

The Rev. Frank Pavone, who developed a huge following through his nationwide campaigns against abortion as head of the New York-based Priests for Life, is under investigation for mishandling his organization's budget.

Pavone said Tuesday (Sept. 13) that he had appealed the suspension order issued by Bishop Patrick J. Zurek of Amarillo, Texas, but said he would return to Amarillo as Zurek ordered.

Pavone is the third high-profile conservative Catholic leader this year to face charges of misconduct, following allegations leveled against two other priests in different organizations.

Zurek sent a letter to all U.S. bishops on Sept. 9, announcing that he was suspending Pavone from ministry outside his diocese after "persistent questions and concerns" from clergy and laity about how Priests for Life is spending "millions of dollars in donations."

"My decision is the result of deep concerns regarding his stewardship of the finances of the Priests for Life (PFL) organization," Zurek wrote in the letter, which was first reported on Tuesday by Catholic News Service. "The PFL has become a business that is quite lucrative which provides Father Pavone with financial independence from all legitimate ecclesiastical oversight."

According to CNS, Internal Revenue Service records show the organization took in \$10.8 million in 2008, the latest year tax forms were available.

The records also show that Pavone has taken no salary from Priests for Life, as he promised when he became national director of Priests for Life in 1993.

In a statement released Tuesday, Pavone said he was "very perplexed" by Zurek's demand, and argued that under canon law Zurek's order is automatically suspended while Pavone appeals his case to the Vatican.

Pavone said Priests for Life is "above reproach" in its financial management and noted that the group has "21 bishops and cardinals who sit on our Advisory Board, and they are kept fully informed about our finances."

In fact, Pavone has developed an impressive base of hierarchical as well as grassroots support around the U.S. and in Rome, making any showdown between him and Zurek a close match.

Since taking charge of Priests for Life, Pavone has led something of a nomadic existence. He initially moved the organization's headquarters from California to New York, where he was ordained a priest in 1988 by the late Cardinal John O'Connor.

Pavone reportedly had a falling out with O'Connor's successor, Cardinal Edward Egan, and in 2005 he put himself under the jurisdiction of the Amarillo diocese, and moved some PFL operations there. In 2007, Pavone tried to establish his own religious order dedicated to the pro-life cause, but abandoned it for lack of recruits.

PFL's offices are now based in Staten Island, N.Y., but Pavone remains a priest of the Amarillo diocese.

Last January, the Rev. Thomas J. Euteneuer, the charismatic head of Human Life International was suspended from ministry over misconduct with a woman during exorcisms. And in June, John Corapi, a popular conservative speaker and television personality, resigned from the priesthood after religious superiors detailed allegations of extensive

sexual and financial misconduct.