

Shortly after that, Frank met with Bishop Luciani once again. "I give you permission to organize a Prayer Group," the bishop said. "I entreat you, please do not allow any of the members to become fanatical," he added. Bishop Luciani was evidently thinking of the unfortunate happenings from the past. Frank assured him that all would be well. Before parting, Frank said, "Your Eminence, if you had allowed me to finish my story when I last spoke to you about Padre Pio, you would have known then that you were going to be appointed the Patriarch of Venice." Bishop Luciani smiled at Frank but said nothing.

On March 5, 1973, Pope Paul VI elevated Bishop Albino Luciani to the rank of Cardinal. Cardinal Luciani was elected pope on August 26, 1978. He chose the name John Paul I in honor of his two immediate predecessors, Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI.

Frank had the good fortune to be able to greet Albino Luciani, now Pope John Paul I, on September 20th 1978 in the Vatican Hall of Audiences after a Wednesday General Audience. Frank was with 150 other pilgrims from Vittorio Veneto, passing through Rome on their way to San Giovanni Rotondo for the occasion of the ten year anniversary of Padre Pio's death. Pope John Paul I, often called the "smiling pope" because of his kindness and friendly demeanor was declared a Servant of God by his successor, Pope John Paul II, on November 23, 2003, the first step on the road to canonization.

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Padre Pio and Frank Cavicchi



Padre Pio Prayer Group Meeting

Padre Pio and Frank Cavicchi

Frank Cavicchi had the highest esteem and respect for his spiritual father, Padre Pio. On one occasion, after Frank made his confession to Padre Pio, Padre Pio said to him, "When you go back to your home, I would like you to form a Prayer Group." Frank agreed to do what Padre Pio asked of him. However, he really had no idea what a Prayer Group was or how to organize one. He imagined that it consisted of a group of people gathered together to pray but he was not entirely sure. As he was thinking about what Padre Pio had just asked him to do and wondering how he would be able to accomplish it, Padre Pio said to him. "Do not worry too much about it. You will manage." To Frank, it almost seemed like Padre Pio had read his mind.

As soon as Frank left the monastery he walked over to the administration office at Padre Pio's hospital, the Home for the Relief of Suffering. It was the headquarters for the worldwide Prayer Groups. He spoke to the person in charge, Miss Lucibelli, and explained all that Padre Pio had said to him. She replied that Padre Pio was in the habit of giving out such tasks. "Do not worry," Miss Lucibelli said. "Padre Pio knows what he is doing. Since he has given you this job, he will certainly help you to do it." She gave Frank a booklet with detailed information about the Prayer Groups. He learned that he would need to receive permission from the Bishop of his diocese and would also need to find a priest to act as the spiritual director.

When Frank returned to his home in Vittorio Veneto, he made an appointment with Bishop Albino Luciani. The Bishop listened to Frank's request but refused the permission. He explained that there had been some unfortunate incidences with the Prayer Groups in the past. The bad conduct of some of the Prayer Group members had caused many problems in the diocese. Because of that, he could not agree to the request. Frank tried his best to persuade Bishop Luciani but he was not able to do so. He returned to his home feeling deeply disappointed. He dreaded telling Padre Pio the news.

About two months later, on August 18, Frank was back in San Giovanni Rotondo. He had an opportunity to speak to Padre Pio once again in the St. Francis room. "What shall I do, Padre?" Frank said. "I tried to organize a Prayer Group like you asked but Bishop Luciani will not give his permission." "Don't do anything," Padre Pio said. "He will call you. You shall have the permission from the Patriarch." Frank realized immediately that Padre Pio had his facts mixed up and quickly replied, "The 'Patriarch' that you refer to has nothing to do with it. He is not the bishop of my diocese but the bishop of Venice. The bishop of my diocese is Bishop Albino Luciani. He is the one that must give the permission for the Prayer Group." Padre Pio said the same mysterious words once again, "As I told you, you shall have the permission from the Patriarch."

Padre Pio passed away on September 23, 1968. Almost one year later, Frank received a telephone call from the bishop's office in Vittorio Veneto stating that Bishop Albino Luciani wanted to speak to him. When Frank arrived at his office, he was delighted to find that the bishop now expressed a sincere interest in the Prayer Groups. He asked Frank to send him all of the available information regarding the rules and regulations of setting up a Prayer Group. He would study the material carefully and if everything seemed to be in order, he planned to give his approval.

At the conclusion of their discussion, as Bishop Luciani was walking Frank to the door, Frank began to tell him about his conversation with Padre Pio several years before regarding the Prayer Groups. Before he could finish his story, the bishop interrupted him. Perhaps he had a number of other appointments scheduled that day and simply did not have any time to spare for lengthy conversations.

A short time later, Frank heard on the radio that Bishop Albino Luciani of Vittorio Veneto had been appointed the Patriarch of Venice. It was a title that held immense prestige and honor. Frank immediately recalled Padre Pio's words: "You shall have the permission from the Patriarch."