



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF KNOXVILLE

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November 21, 2009

My dear friends,

I greet you in God's peace. In the eight months since my ordination and installation as bishop of this wonderful diocese, I have been greatly impressed by the strong commitment and witness of our Catholic faithful in defending the sanctity and dignity of every life, from conception to natural death. Though Catholics make up less than three percent of the population of East Tennessee, it is no exaggeration to say that we have been more than 97 percent of its moral voice and witness to the truth of the human person, especially in defense of life, marriage and family.

I am especially aware of how this diocese has grown in solidarity in promoting a culture of life and the critical part played by members of the Deacon and Lay Associates of the Priests for Life, the *Missionaries of the Gospel of Life*.

It was only a year ago when the abortion industry was threatening to bring its genocidal operations back to Chattanooga after a 17 year absence. Among those whose decisive efforts led to a successful blocking of this attempt were members of the Missionaries of the Gospel of Life. When during this past summer, Planned Parenthood attempted to expand its abortion services in Knoxville, again, members of the Missionaries of the Gospel of Life were instrumental in helping to neutralize this threat. And most recently, another very successful *40 Days for Life* campaign was completed in great part by members of the Missionaries of the Gospel of Life. And of course, there are those whose work in our pregnancy help centers is a critical part of the Gospel of Life.

We know that for peace to truly be possible in our world there must be peace in the womb. If our society does not value the life of the unborn it will not value the life of the infirm and the elderly. Our care for the environment falls terribly short of our call to be responsible stewards of creation if the first and most precious environment – the womb – is neglected and exposed to such violence. Without a correct understanding and respect for the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person, a correct vision for society does not follow and necessarily fails.

And so it is with much gratitude that I recognize in our diocese the efforts of all who defend life, and particularly this day, those who will make their final promises as members of the Missionaries of the Gospel of Life. May your many labors through a program of prayer and sacrifice, study and parish involvement help provide for the common good of our community and the building up of a culture of life.

May God bless you this day and all you do for the Gospel of Life.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Richard F. Stika
Bishop of Knoxville