

*Fr. Frank Pavone:* Well, hello friends, Father Frank Pavone here, National Director of Priests for Life. It's so good to have you with us, and today it's a real joy to have Bishop Joseph Strickland. He is the Bishop of the Diocese of Tyler, Texas, and as many of you know, so many people from around the country, indeed throughout the church universal, have benefited from the Bishop's witness, his teachings, his strong statements, and so, Bishop, we are just so grateful for you and not only the leadership you give your diocese but the pastoral encouragement you give to us all around the country. Thank you so much.

*Bishop Strickland:* Thanks, Father Frank.

*Fr. Frank Pavone:* So I just want to ask you, Bishop, obviously so many people who are aware of the church's profound advocacy for the unborn child and the church's deep concern about the tragedy of abortion are inspired by those teachings and want to get involved in their local churches. And I wanted to get your insights as to how the local churches, especially the parishes, can help the faithful to be more involved in the pro-life movement and how the faithful can better help their parishes to be more engaged in this great cause for life.

*Bishop Strickland:* Well, thank you, Father Frank. As it so happens, we've just established a committee for the sanctity of life here in the diocese. We've had different groups working, but this committee's trying to really address the issue from as many different facets as possible, getting a lot of people involved. So really, I think it's an attempt, at least, to address exactly the question you raise.

Certainly, we need to pray for hearts to be changed and to understand that a child conceived in the womb is really the greatest gift that God gives us, another person created in His image and likeness, and we just have to move away from the destruction of those greatest gifts that happens all too often in our society. So I really encourage people to become involved, certainly to pray, but if there is an abortion facility, Planned Parenthood or otherwise, in their area, to get – there's a sidewalk ministry that people can get involved in.

But I think the basic answer I would give, Father Frank, is yes, go take the next step after prayer. Never stop praying, especially praying the rosary for the sanctity of life and for the unborn and to an end to abortion. But then taking the next step after prayer to get active, and people can do that in many different ways.

Some people may be homebound, and they say, well I can't go and do sidewalk ministry, but there are ways if we get creative and we really, in our prayer, ask the Lord to help us to really be active in supporting life, there are many ways to do that. Even to do things in the local parish, to bring people together in prayer, I think that's maybe even - just as I'm thinking out loud - in the sense of to encourage people praying alone certainly is beautiful but praying in groups and praying publicly.

Like here in Tyler, we have a courthouse square, and I think people need to see the public prayer. Many people do that, and we've had groups throughout especially in October a lot of times, there's a focus on praying for an end to abortion. Thankfully, here in the Diocese of Tyler and Northeast Texas, many who are not Catholic are still very much with us in the evangelical Protestant community, very much with us in recognizing that life is sacred from conception to natural death. And so even to reach out to other Christian churches, or even anyone who wants to join with us and recognizes that life is sacred from conception to natural death, and especially the threat of abortion is so very real and so overwhelming, so horrendous, to join up with other faith communities or other organizations to just, as much as possible, get people involved.

*Fr. Frank Pavone:* Yes. Thank you for that, Bishop. As you well know, the year 2022 is a year of midterm elections here in the United States. How would you explain to people how our commitment to defend the unborn should shape our voting?

*Bishop Strickland:* Well, I think it has to start there, really. As all of us began as a newly conceived person in the womb, a tiny person but a real person, the whole package of the person is there. And I think the fallacy that it's really not another person, we just have to get beyond that. And I would encourage people to really recognize that all the ways that we can express the sanctity of the life of the unborn and to encourage our legislators to make that foundational. I would pray that I really try my best to be nonpartisan because no party is perfect, and there are flaws in all the different parties, but to – I think we need to pray for a time when both party platforms just take it as a part of their platform that life is sacred from conception and that abortion needs to be eliminated as something that is somehow taking care of the issues and the problems in society. There are plenty of them, but abortion is never the answer.

And so I really believe it is the preeminent issue, and I know that you've spent your priestly ministry working for this issue. And I

think that we've got to make it foundational, and especially as Catholics. It's so disheartening that too many Catholics either are opposed to the idea that abortion should never be available, and we should just eliminate it from our society. To me, Catholics don't agree with that, and certainly a lot of other people.

Primarily it's about changing hearts – changing hearts to be more in line with the sacred heart of Christ and the immaculate heart of the Virgin Mary. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Lord of life, and He – if we grow close to His heart, we're not going to say, well we can stop the heartbeat of an unborn child.

*Fr. Frank Pavone:* Right. Exactly. And praise to State of Texas, where you are, of course, for that Heartbeat law. That's really been a great encouragement to the whole country.

Finally, Bishop, as you know, there are many priests, deacons, and lay people who associate themselves with our ministry of Priests for Life, and they're very involved in activities that we just discussed, whether political activities or involved with their parishes, and also involved very much with the ministry of healing people of the wounds of abortion. And I wanted to invite you just to say a word of encouragement to all of those priests, deacons, and laity who are involved with our ministry.

*Bishop Strickland:* Well, I certainly do support and encourage everyone – lay people, clergy, really every facet of the Body of Christ, the Church and beyond, those who are not technically part of the Church. Really, as we know, all the baptized are part of us, part of our family, part of the church that Christ has established, and I'd encourage all of us to know that we have a role. It can be very different. Some can look very active and need to be. Others may be very much behind the scenes, but I'd encourage all of us to teach our children and our young people to recognize that all of us need to be part of the effort to uphold the sanctity of life, one of the greatest gifts that God gives us, and I certainly commend those who have already put such great effort into it.

I'm proud to be known, if anything, known as a bishop who speaks for the sanctity of the life of the unborn because I believe we're in a critical time where we need to choose what side we're on. Are we on the side of life or on the side of the culture of death? And I commend all of those who have made great sacrifices at times, and especially in our society, the sacrifices seem to be multiplying for those who are unwilling to compromise on just how sacred every life is, beginning with conception.

And the final thing I would say is to remember – and this is where I've grown in my own journey – to recognize that when there's a child in the womb, there are three people who are affected by that reality and need to be treasured: the child absolutely; the woman in whose womb the child is, and the man who was there and helped that child to be conceived. That's God's plan.

Certainly in God's plan, it should be in the context of a commitment of a marriage for life where a child is conceived, but many times it doesn't happen that way. But a man is involved, and he is sacred to God as the woman is and as the child in the womb.

So I think we need to, more and more in our conversation, remember there are three people. Anytime we're talking about a child in the womb, there are two other people who need to be treasured and considered – the man and the woman – who through their relationship, through their intimacy, brought that child about, certainly by God's creative will, but also it takes a man and a woman for that child to be there in the womb. And I think all three, we need to remember they are a treasure, they are beloved of God, and we're here to help all of them to seek a change of heart if necessary and to recognize the precious gift of life that they are part of.

*Fr. Frank Pavone:* Well, thank you, Bishop. As you mentioned, you're proud to be known as one who stands up in a particular way for the unborn, and all of us recognize that and are encouraged by that, so we want to thank you for that. And could we ask you please for your blessing?

*Bishop Strickland:* Sure. Almighty God, in these days approaching Christmas, we thank you for all of your blessings, and we ask your blessing for everyone participating in the effort to guard the sanctity of life – in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*[End of Audio]*