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Dinner Remarks for Pro-Life Volunteers

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Dear Friends in Life,

It is wonderful to be here with so many of you who have led so many aspects of our Diocese's apostolate for Life. What a beautiful mission we have: to bear witness, even to the point of some suffering, to the truth of the innate value of human life, and the dignity of every human person. In persevering in this sacred work we bring glory to the Eternal Father who has created us, to His Son Jesus who lifted up our flesh in the Incarnation, and redeemed us through His own dying and rising. We want to be moved and docile to the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us for a supernatural work – dare we say it?, a BATTLE wherein we already know the final outcome – namely, that Christ has indeed already conquered sin and death, and life will be victorious!

Be careful of this last point, the “battle.” There are some who don't want you to know we are in a battle, even while they themselves never cease to attack. Friends, when we do get attacked and clobbered, then let us know that Christ has gone before us. He told us, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world” (John 16:33)

As we come together this evening, your presence and your untiring work is a great inspiration and consolation to me. You are accepting your authentic call to draw close to Jesus Christ, to grow in holiness, and – as a leaven in society – you are beginning to transform the *Culture of Death* into a **Civilization of Life and Love**. Particularly as laity, you will fulfill this vital work in every common endeavor and setting, in the workplace and marketplace, in law and journalism, science and healthcare, technology and business, in the daily conversations you have with other men and women, in what and how you teach your children. Life!, life in Christ!; Human life must be safeguarded from its very first moment, through all the travails, joys and challenges we share, even to the moment of natural death.

For just a few moments tonight I want to address the theme of moving **from ideas to action**. This is our work in common and, in it, our Lord can use each and any of us to accomplish great things. We must be courageous and respectful; daring but reverent. We must be trusting of God and generous in His service. God asks, “Who will go in My name to announce and defend the timeless truth?” And we must be ready to say, “Here I am Lord, send me!”

As bishop, I accept my part, as I must, in this work for the sake of human life. I asked myself in preparing, “How do I see my role?”

- 1) First: I believe, as you do, in the truth of life's dignity and I believe passionately, as you do, that we must continue to pray, speak and act: Always with love, peacefully, and

within the parameters of lawful justice. We believe. We invite all people of good will to join us in the fundamental convictions of the natural law, written in every human heart: We all want to live. The lives of other persons is something as important as our lives. We may not directly take another innocent human life.

Our Christian/Catholic faith teaches us even more: That our life is a gift from God and therefore He alone is its master. We have a destiny to live with Him forever in heaven; Jesus made this possible by the supreme act of His love: His death and resurrection for our redemption.

- 2) Second: What we believe – what has been entrusted to us about life - must be **taught**. We must be patient and persevering teachers of these basic truths, in what we say and how we act. We somehow have to get across, first and foremost, that there is such a thing as objective truth; that there is such a thing as right and wrong. This is no easy task in a culture of “choice;” in a society that values a kind of personal dogmatism – whatever I think is true, is “true” **FOR ME!** This becomes very threatening when those who have a voice can determine what happens to those who do not. Even within the community of believers, we must be careful of the notion of “subjective conscience,” because an ill-formed conscience can give license to destructive tendencies within our lives, and can even cause people to neglect, or take advantage of others – particularly those who are vulnerable. We must teach, and we have a Holy Mother, the Church, from whom we take our lead.
- 3) Third: It is important that we keep in mind that we are involved with something that has a supernatural dimension. Man, wounded by sin, is subject to temptations: to comfort and convenience, for example, that even allow him to disregard the sanctity and inviolability of human life – and so we must pray. The conversion of hearts takes place under God's grace. **Prayer** must be a very big part of our efforts.
- 4) Fourth: We must find ways to **act**: We must both, do good and actively seek to eliminate what is evil. We must win hearts through charity; we must do advocacy; we must vote responsibly - to change laws which allow the wholesale destruction of life and disregard its true value. We must do even more than we have already done, to provide alternative paths to persons in desperate situations. I have to be willing to get involved, even if it costs me something, even if it means that I have to sacrifice my convenience, or risk being misunderstood.

So these are the basics: Live my beliefs; teach the truth; pray hard; and be willing to get involved.

Dear friends, I don't think you will be surprised if I now suggest that these are essentially the same things that you must do! You may be surprised if I say that these are, in some ways, more **YOUR** responsibilities than they are mine! In **some ways**, mind you, I believe this is true. At the very least I want to assure you of my conviction that ***I cannot accomplish the work without you.*** God wishes to use me and you. Are you willing to do each and every one of these things?

Think first about your passionate beliefs. As we do so, we must make an examination of conscience to see where our beliefs are strongest, and where we still have doubts. Is the life of the unborn child precious, but what about the heinous criminal on death row? – is he of value

in God's eyes? Is he beyond hope of redemption? What about the foreigner? The poor and homeless? It is true that, in some instances, the horror of the injustice may not be as vital; as immediately life threatening; affecting as many lives. It is right to think of the priority of issues, and, for example, every edition of the U.S. Bishops' document on Faithful Citizenship makes such distinctions. Nonetheless, when we do our examination of conscience, we must ask ourselves if we love each person as a child of God. We must purify our love. We must ask the Holy Spirit to teach us. We want to live and act as people of integrity, of consistency.

You must be teachers. You must explain the truth about human life to your children. Here is where your deep beliefs about the life and dignity of each human person will be most convincing. Teach and learn from those you love most – and then you will be able to go out in conversation with your work associates, or even go out to a broader audience, or to a stranger in need. Write or speak in accord with your God-given abilities.

Pray – Pray a lot. One modern day Saint used to say that when we are trying to change a person's heart for the good, pray 80% and talk or act 20%. Pray for the conversion of any and every heart you encounter in this work for life. You don't know who will become, by God's grace, your greatest ally in the cause of life.

Pray as you begin an effort, large or small. Pray while you work. Invoke your Guardian Angel and the Guardian Angel of those you are encountering. This was a favorite strategy of Pope John XXIII, now "Blessed," from the time he worked in the Vatican's Secretary of State as a nuncio.

One of the most powerful prayers we have to push back evil is the rosary, centered as it is on the very mysteries of life conquered by Christ. And, of course, Mary, the Queen of heaven and earth, the Mother of God, the Mother of Life, and our Mother is our most powerful intercessor and ally.

Pray in atonement, in reparation (to repair) the tragedy of abortion and the other sins against life. There is so much hurt and damage that has been done – almost countless crimes against human life, and yet each one is held as a deep wound in the heart of persons, individuals and family members. They need our prayer for healing and we must beg God to forgive and reconcile; to join our sufferings to those of Jesus Christ, so that they can become redemptive rather than cause despair and lasting bitterness. A most powerful prayer for atonement is the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Here we offer to the Father in heaven, the one perfect sacrifice that atones for sins. We unite ourselves with the offering of the saving Body and Blood of Jesus, whose sorrowful passion is the one acceptable offering for our sins.

Don't forget that if we are to be agents of a supernatural transformation, we **must live in Jesus Christ**. We must be repentant of our own sins. We must live and act in the State of Sanctifying Grace as a means of holiness and a fortification against the devil. We must use confession frequently and receive Communion worthily or our efforts will be merely human. They will fall short in a battle which is supernatural.

And now **you must act**. I must act but **you, also**. I'll tell you a secret: I cannot do it without you. I am shepherd and I must lead. The Holy Spirit will speak also to you – precisely to act in consonance with the Church, never contrary.

What are the "marks" of the Church? She is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. What we do flows from holiness, it must flow from the apostolic succession to whom was promised a special grace of the Holy Spirit. But then – and this I have said over and over again to thousands of high school students presented to me for Confirmation: You must be apostles! You must be

witnesses for Christ in every circumstance and to those you meet each day. I cannot be there when a work associate or school mate is in need. You may be called – indeed you are – to be Jesus Christ at that moment. You will save lives.

I said we must take initiative. Our Lord said to the apostles in the boat after they had fished all night unsuccessfully, “Duc in altum! – Put out into the deep!” Every week I get calls or emails, “Bishop, I think we should do this ... Here is a great program I have heard was successful. I think you should start this.” I know Adrienne gets these calls also. Our Office for Respect Life has done so much and I know we will persevere in doing all we can. But I say to you: Take initiative. Make sure, first, that what you do is in accord with the principles of our efforts and the teachings of the Church. Then, check out the proposal with some good level-headed friends. If it reflects on your parish directly, get permission from your pastor. Never act contrary to your pastors, to whom I have entrusted a most solemn responsibility. But then, do little things, and do great things! Act to accomplish some good when and how you can. Don't be reckless, but be daring! IN the Gospel passage I mentioned, after the miraculous catch of fish, when the nets were full, St. Peter realized what had happened. In humility He begged our Lord to leave him. “I am a sinful man.” Jesus said rather, “Don't be afraid. You will be catching men!”

In our work we must do much good and – just as important - we must act against what is clearly evil. We must take this responsibility. It is possible to commit sins of omission where there is grave responsibility. The US bishops, for more than thirty years have held a strategic principle that Roe v. Wade must be overturned. Why is this? Because it is a grave evil that has become a fundamental element of law in our country. It must be opposed. We always seek to do it legally, but with the fervor of American freedom, and the fiery insistence born of the Holy Spirit. We must overturn unjust laws. Obviously and with great urgency, we must change a law that exposes human life to the terror of abortion. It seems a long road. Progress is so slow. Through many courageous and hard-fought battles we have put in place – particularly in the States – some small but important limits on abortions: waiting periods, parental notification requirements, use of ultrasounds, alternatives counseling, etc. We have also been able to establish limits on tax dollars used for abortion, and conscience protection for individuals and, for example, for our Catholic Health Care institutions.

Before I go further, it is very important to note: We, the Catholic Church, continue to do MORE than any other private institution – bar none – to support life at every stage. We do more to help the poor, the sick, the hopeless, certainly women in difficult pregnancies and those with young families. We will never stop doing these things. We must not. We will do them out of a conviction about the dignity and value of every human person, and out of a motive of love of Christ. But these things are NOT enough! We have to stop evil where we can. We must defeat or overturn destructive laws. As private citizens, we have to support elected officials who support life and defeat or remove those who boldly declare a pro-choice, anti-life agenda.

Because the efforts to dislodge what is evil are so arduous – we know that evil will not give up without a fight; It shouldn't surprise us that certain groups – even those under the banner of “Catholic,” have set a different agenda, one that while supporting a public work of assistance to those in need, nonetheless chooses not to address unjust and destructive laws that take their daily toll of thousands of human lives. They seem to tolerate and even support, at times, a program that systematically continues its clearly declared strategy to remove all limits on access to abortion. They say, “Let us forget about Roe v Wade – concede it, because we have not yet been able to defeat it. ... Let such evils run their course. We will try to do some good and this will be enough.”

I assure you, evil and selfishness looks for us to drop our guard. The Freedom of Choice act has not been enacted; but piece by piece all its elements are finding their way into our law. The efforts that had been won painstakingly over the last generation – limits on abortion that can be shown, statistically, to reduce the number of abortions in our country by hundreds of thousands per year - are today being nullified. We must do much charity, much work in mercy, and develop more safety nets for those who are in need. But, at the same time, we must work for the change of what is unjust. Our first call is to provide and protect justice – and the primordial human right is life – for those who are most vulnerable, who have no voice of their own. We will act with respect and we will not ever, ever, resort to violence, but we **must not cease** to work actively against evil, anymore than we would abandon the initiatives of active charity that mark the work of Jesus Christ. You and I must do these things. I am counting on you!

A year or so ago I didn't know what a "Community organizer" was. I'm still not so sure. But perhaps you must become community organizers, provided that the organic foundation of what you do is of the Holy Spirit; that it is an authentic work of the apostolic Church. Do everything prayerfully, faithfully, peacefully, but with courage and the fire of the Holy Spirit. Work together so that the ONENess of the Church is notable in your efforts. Do the truth in love.

This evening we will spend some time – as I understand – to plan out some of the principles and initiatives that must guide us in the next year. In doing so I am very conscious of a significant transition that is underway in the work in our Diocese. Mrs. Adrienne Doring is soon to give birth and, as you know, she has reluctantly decided to step down as the founding director of our diocesan Respect Life office and apostolate. Adrienne's was a trial by fire, as she entered this apostolate in the height of the "cloning debate" and the effort against Amendment 2 – a state constitutional amendment that tragically placed unfettered human embryonic stem cell research under the protection of the law. Outcomes aside, Adrienne became known throughout Missouri – and in many parts of our country - as a true dynamo of energy, authentic faith, and powerful witness for life. She has lead us to Washington and helped to set in motion all the initiatives about which I spoke. I talk. She does it! Adrienne has helped to recalibrate the moral compass of our community. Your own untiring efforts are more focused, better organized and more effective because of the faith-filled electricity generated in the heart and soul of our Adrienne Doring. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Adrienne, and God bless you, Greg, and baby Doring, now and always!

Friends, thank you for your prayers and work which so much please God, cause you to grow in holiness, and prosper the defense of life and the promotion of human dignity. May our Blessed Mother assist us to love more deeply every human person as an unrepeatable child of God in the image of Christ.