How to Keep the Fire Burning

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Introduction

As I travel the nation and the world on the mission to end abortion, and keep a travel schedule that, over the years of my ministry, has averaged four states a week, many ask me how I keep up my enthusiasm and energy, and avoid discouragement and “burn-out.”

For so many, this is the question, and if it’s your question, then this is the booklet for you. You’re already convinced of how evil and destructive abortion is.

You’re already involved in the pro-life effort.

You already know that we have to fight for as long as it takes and that we are on the winning side.

But you need something to keep you going. You need to keep the “fire” burning.

Here, then, are the ways I do so, and I hope they can help you.
The safety announcements on airplanes tell you that if the oxygen mask becomes necessary, you should put your own mask on first, and then help the other person.

To save the lives of others, you must take care of your own.

And first, this means to eat and sleep well. Yes, it sounds obvious and simple. That’s because it makes all the difference in the world.

Eat well and don’t skip meals (unless you’re on a well-planned fast). Each person’s dietary needs differ; my point here is to get to know what yours are and stick to a plan that respects those needs.

Get a good night’s sleep. Essential to doing this is to have a plan, inasmuch as this is possible. Know ahead of time when you’re going to stop for the day, and go to sleep very deliberately, placing a buffer zone of calm, quiet, and prayer between your last activity of the day and your sleep. Place in the Lord’s hands all your problems and responsibilities.

I say to Him at the end of the day, “Lord, I know the problems and tasks I have. I’m giving them back to you tonight, so that I can sleep. I know you can take care of them in the meantime. You can give them back to me in the morning.”
Minimizing or eliminating the amount of TV you watch, and replacing it with some refreshing sleep, is also a great step to take. I try to get at least seven hours of sleep each night. I hardly watch any TV. I get my news from the Internet instead.

All this will greatly increase your energy during the day, and with that energy will come more optimism and positive thinking.

And keep the right balance in your life. Be sure that your time for family, friends, solitude, exercise, reading, prayer, and the other activities that balance out your work are all in place.
We are opposing the greatest evil of our time, the killing of children by abortion. If it doesn’t make you angry, something’s wrong. Remember, anger isn’t bad. Anger is one of our passions, which are neither good nor bad in themselves; it all depends on how we use them.

And here’s the secret: **Anger is energy!** Some people try to “turn off” their anger, because they think, “Christians are supposed to be nice people; it’s virtuous to be calm. So I shouldn’t get angry at anything.”

The thinking I find more helpful, however, goes like this: “I’m human. Of course I’m going to get angry over the killing of babies. I will allow myself to feel that anger, and then channel it, under the grace of the Holy Spirit, into creative and fruitful activity in the defense of life.” Scripture says, “Be angry and sin not” (Eph. 4:26).
Anger is energy. If you turn it in on yourself, it becomes depression. If you let it out in an uncontrolled way, it becomes destructive. Instead, you must channel it, harness it, under God’s guidance, and direct it towards your work for life. The guidance of God in channeling your anger will assure that the activity it leads to is always non-violent and a life-giving blessing to others. Not only can you use anger when it comes, but you can foster it. Pay attention to what the “other side” is doing. See how they attack life and hate the Lord. Learn about how outrageous their behavior is. For instance, did you ever visit www.rcrc.org, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice? They distort the faith, using the Bible and liturgy to justify and even honor the “choice” of abortion. It’s outrageous.

Let yourself feel the outrage, and then use the energy to support your activities in defense of life!
I long ago realized that the biggest obstacles in my way were not Planned Parenthood, the IRS, or any of the enemies of life. Rather, the biggest obstacles to my success have always been the words of doubt or fear that I speak to myself. Hesitations, second-guessing, intimidating worries -- these all flow from the weak spots within our own mind and heart.

**You must banish them.**

You must make your own, day by day and moment by moment, the following passage from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, Chapter 4:

> 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Notice that rejoicing and dismissing anxiety from your mind is a command. That means you can do it, you have control over it. I remember my first spiritual director, when I was a high school student, saying to me emphatically and repeatedly, “Let nothing ever, ever disturb you!”
I have made this Rule Number One for each day of my life. You should neither be burdened by the hurts of yesterday nor anxious about the events of tomorrow. Each day, think fresh, aware of the opportunities you have in the present moment, and not delaying to take advantage of them! So many miss the opportunities of today because they’re thinking either of the sorrows of yesterday or the fears of tomorrow.

In particular, stop worrying about what others think of you. You need nobody’s approval to do what is right, and to defend the unborn. And nobody’s disapproval can hurt you. At the judgment, you will not have to answer for someone else’s cowardice, only your own. At the judgment, it will not be the other person’s opinion about you that matters, but only God’s.
4. Pay Attention to the Signs of Victory!

All of us want to be part of a winning team. The more we notice we are winning, the harder we are inspired to work.

And we are winning!

One of the talks I give around the country is “Ten Reasons Why the Pro-life Movement is Winning.” (You can download a PDF of this article here.) The signs are all around us. I have absolutely no doubt that we are winning, and I know that many on the other side have no doubt that we are winning either.

The flow of conversions, for instance, is from pro-abortion to pro-life. The pro-abortion side is out of arguments. The status of the unborn child, in law, medicine, and public consciousness, is increasing rather than decreasing. The number of abortionists and abortion mills continues to decline. And on and on it goes.

Be sure to learn about and keep reading about these victories. It will keep you energized and motivated, and will give you a tool to motivate others.
We are not alone. History has been marred continually by the mistake that some human beings are less equal than others. Great struggles, and great heroes and heroines of those struggles, have gone before us, battling child-killing, genocide and oppression, slavery and segregation. You are not the first to be faced with the task of uprooting a deeply ingrained evil in the habits and laws of society. Others have done it before you, and have taught some of the basic principles of social reform.

They have shown us that it can be done, and how to persevere in doing it. They have shown us that it takes a long time, and that every push forward against evil involves pushback. This is one of the reasons the Church canonizes saints. They spur us on to victory by the example of their own struggle. This is also why, in the secular arena, we honor great figures of history and preserve their memory. Be sure to get to know these people. Read about the struggles and triumphs of St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. Read about William Wilberforce and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and numerous others. Read not only their words, but study their actions and their strategies and the movements they led. You will be encouraged and energized.
I travel to four states a week. I usually give several talks a day, leading rallies and prayer services, preaching in Churches, speaking at banquets and conventions. When I go to an event, I want to be the first person there and the last person to leave. I want to shake every hand, hear every story, and answer every question. To me, it’s not a matter of having energy. It’s a matter of receiving energy. I draw energy from the very people I am there to meet, speak to, and serve. Seeing the enthusiasm, hearing the stories, receiving the gratitude, learning of the sacrifice and commitment -- all of this fires me up. I meet children who tell me how they gave all the money in their piggy bank to Priests for Life “so that we could save more babies;” I meet priests who tell me our homily hints helped them preach a powerful pro-life sermon; and the stories go on and on. If I have several speaking events in the same day, I am more fired up and energetic at the end of the final talk than I was when the day began!

6. Draw Strength from One Another.
And this dynamic can be true for all of us, as we do our pro-life work, provided we stay connected with each other. God calls us not just as individuals, but as a movement. We need to be with one another and to listen to one another. We need to learn from each other and be inspired by each other. This is the present tense version of my advice to learn from history. We have to also learn from history as that history is being lived out right here and now around us. The Letter to the Hebrews sums it up when it says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25).
One of the fastest, most effective ways to lose energy is to lose focus. If you are scattering your efforts in all directions, the fire will go out. Each day, it is essential to ask yourself again, “What am I trying to accomplish? What is my goal? What does victory look like?” The goal of my life is simple: I want to end abortion. Once I know that this is what I want to achieve, I judge my decisions of where I am to go and how I am to spend my time and energy in the light of whether they will bring me closer to that goal.

To foster desire for the goal -- a desire which is more than a wish, but rather a passionate longing and yearning -- I keep reminding myself what abortion is. Yes, we all know what it is. But here, we’re not talking about getting the answer right to the question, “What is an abortion?” We’re talking about keeping the fire burning.
And to do that, the startling reality, the disturbing fact, of what abortion is must jolt you every day.

To fuel this awareness, to confront myself and awaken every fiber of my being to the need to end abortion, I use two sources above all.

One is simply the reality of who the baby is and what abortion does to the baby. I use our own website. www.Unborn.info, to keep in touch with the reality of the unborn child and of abortion, through photos and video footage.

The other source is to listen again to the testimonies of the women and men whose lives have been devastated by abortion. At www.SilentNoMoreAwareness.org, our ministry has compiled these testimonies.

Of course, when you do focus on the evil you are fighting, focus just as intensely on the power and mercy of God, which will give you complete confidence that this evil cannot and does not have the last word.
8. Foster a Deep, Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, keep the fire burning within you by welcoming the Eternal Fire, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fire of zeal and enthusiasm is, in the final analysis, the fire of love, and that is fueled by your union with God.

A solid prayer life, regular worship and sacraments, daily immersion in Scripture, and spiritual guidance are all essential elements to success. Pro-life is not just a movement or a cause. It is a spirituality. It is not simply a response to Roe vs. Wade. It is a response to Jesus Christ. This truth is at the basis of the Missionaries of the Gospel of Life, a movement I founded to help people live pro-life as a spirituality.

The presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ has to be uppermost in your
awareness. There is one among us who holds the keys of death and of hell. **Jesus Christ is Risen from the dead!** Although thought to be overwhelmed by the agents of death, He trampled death by His death. As a result, death has been robbed of its power. “O death, where is thy sting?” Because of Christ’s Resurrection, death no longer has the final word in the human story.

Our final destiny is heaven, not the grave! This means that the power of abortion – which takes more life than anything else – has also been broken. Our pro-life movement does not simply work for victory ... **we work from victory!** Victory is our starting point. We joyfully proclaim to the world that Christ is Risen, and that for this reason, we must choose life.

We then work to apply that victory to every sector of society.

The labor is intense and the obstacles many. But we do not cower before the culture of death and wonder how we will ever overcome it. Rather, we stand before it with victorious confidence and declare:

“**Begone! You have no room here! No place here! No further authority to menace the human family.**

“**Your Kingdom has been conquered and Christ reigns supreme!”**
“Though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.” (Exodus 3:2). When God sent Moses on a mission to set free his oppressed people, God showed him a burning bush. The fire symbolizes who God is, and who Moses was to become. One cannot set people or society free from oppression without fire -- a fire that burns in one’s soul and body, consumes one’s life, and energizes each day and night.

The good news is that nobody has a monopoly on that fire. It is yours for the taking, because it comes from the God who gives you the mission to defend life!

You have my assurance that the tips I have given you in this short booklet will help you be a more effective and energetic pro-life activist. But even more of an assurance is that God Himself calls you and equips you for this task. Take His hand, and let nothing deter you from defending life!

Together, my friends, we will celebrate the victory!

-- Fr. Frank Pavone
Fr. Frank Pavone was appointed in 1993 by Cardinal John O’Connor to serve as National Director of Priests for Life, and has also served as an Official of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family, which coordinates pro-life activities for the entire Catholic Church. He was also named a member of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy for Life. He is a priest of the Diocese of Amarillo, TX and leads Priests for Life with the permission of his bishop.

Priests for Life aims to encourage God’s people to respond to the tragedies of abortion and euthanasia, and is an association recognized under Canon Law of the Catholic Church.

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