

Marriage, Contraception and Human Life

Marriage and Life in the U.S. Since 1960

- The US marriage rate in 1968 was 10.3 per 1,000 couples. By 2010, the rate had dropped to 6.8.
- In 1970, there were 426,000 Catholic marriages in the U.S. By 2015, that rate was only 151,000.
- In 1960, 24 babies were born per 1,000 people in the US. In 2016 the rate of 12 babies was half that.
- In 1968: 7% of US families were single-parent families. By 2016, 25% were single-parent families.
- 8% of Catholics and 4% of all Americans consider using contraceptives to be morally wrong (2016)
- 51% of Catholics and 44% of all Americans consider abortion morally wrong (2016)

[Sources: The World Bank; the Centers for Disease Control; the Pew Forum; the US Conference of Catholic Bishops]

Presbyterian Woman Converted by Church's Teaching on Birth Control

During marriage preparation with her Catholic fiancé, Meg Kilgannon was a Presbyterian when she was introduced to Pope Paul VI's groundbreaking encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On Human Life).

"I was immediately struck by the beauty of the Church's teaching. The great gift of marriage is the couple's creative cooperation with God," she said.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the encyclical, we have come to understand the huge disconnect regarding **marriage and procreation**. Society views a woman's fertility as a threat to her life plans and as a medical problem to be controlled with drugs. In contrast, the Church teaches that "each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life."

A Catholic now, Kilgannon was so inspired by the Church's teaching on contraception that she became a "fertility care provider," teaching the **Creighton model** of natural family planning. She said that many women are under pressure to develop their careers and delay plans to have children. Many question a method that requires a woman to chart her cycle and periodically abstain from sex. Their sexual and reproductive lives have been separated from the practice of their faith. She believes, however, that the Church's teachings are the path to personal fulfillment and **marriage happiness**, not an obstacle.

Powerful secular currents have been successful in ignoring the Church's stance on personal dignity and human procreation. After WWII, Western culture turned its

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"When I Married I Felt Very Strongly That I Could Only 'Handle' Two Children"

That was "a decision that both my husband and I deeply regret," says Terry Polakovic, writing in the *National Catholic Register* (7/22/18). "Even though I was a cradle Catholic, I had strayed from the wisdom of the Church, particularly about **contraception**."

It was through John Paul's theology of the body that I was introduced to Pope Paul VI's historic encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, often referred to as The Regulation of Birth. Up until that point, I had never read it. Like so many women, I had rejected this teaching before really knowing anything about it.

After spending time with it, I realized that it was about so much more than contraception. Pope Paul presses each of us to ask: Can God be trusted – can we trust Him with our lives, fertility, marriage, children, our dreams? Each of us needs to come to terms with that very question if we are to grow in faith.

That's why I now lead a Catholic women's group, **Endow** (Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women) to help

women grasp the Catholic understanding of authentic womanhood. There has been an abundance of testimonials from women who said their lives were positively changed after studying *Humane Vitae*, several of whom said they



simply could not imagine life without the child(ren) they otherwise would not have had.

Anyone today would find it difficult to deny that Pope Paul VI was a prophet. He predicted that widespread use of contraception would lead to increased **marital infidelity** and the general lowering of morality. He expected men would **lose respect for women** and that governments would use contraception as a means to institute forced family-planning programs. The pope's most serious warning was that contraception would lead both men and women to think that they have unlimited dominion over their own bodies.

[Polakovic is the author of *Life and Love: Opening Your Heart to God's Design* (Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2018).]

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back on the vision of God-given marital fruitfulness. Population-control campaigns arose, amid dire predictions of an overpopulation crisis [ed.: one that never materialized], and the FDA approved the use of oral contraceptives. By the mid-1960s the sexual revolution was fully underway, promoting a **permissive view of sexuality** in which the pursuit of pleasure took priority ahead of marriage and having children.

In his “theology of the body” John Paul II reaffirmed the Church’s fundamental truths about the inalienable dignity of the human person who is called to communion through his physical body. Pope Benedict XVI also took up these themes in his encyclical *God Is Love*: “love between man & woman is where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an irresistible promise of happiness.”

Today we face an upside-down world, says Catholic University professor Michael Hanby. Doubts about the existence of a loving God are directly connected to the culture’s view of sex, marriage and procreation. The result is a rapid decline in marriage and fertility rates, promotion of same-sex “marriage” and the more recent campaign to separate gender identity from one’s biological sex. [Joan F. Desmond, *The Goodness of Creation*, *National Catholic Register*, 7/22/18]

Developments in fertility awareness since the 1960s have given rise to natural family planning organizations such as the Billings Ovulation Method, Couple to Couple League and the Creighton Model FertilityCare System, that actively provide formal instruction on the use and reliability of natural methods of birth control. To help young Catholic couples preparing for marriage, **twelve dioceses include teaching of natural family planning**. This trend is based on data showing that over 90% of married couples who practice NFP stay together, most likely due to their strong commitment to one another. Interested readers are encouraged to obtain more information on these groups via the internet.

Resources to Support Marriage and Intimacy

The Institute for Marital Healing offers expert marital and child counseling as well as articles and a webinar on the resolution of selfishness in spouses. It helps couples evaluate the **barriers to happiness** in their marriage including selfishness, excessive anger, control and anxiety. Visit www.maritalhealing.com

How to find a lifelong compatible marriage partner? Young adults should view **TheDatingProjectMovie.com**, a documentary that gives hope and direction to millennials for relationship maturity and meaning.

Graphic Billboards Spark Discussion

The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform [www.AbortionNO.org] takes an aggressive stance against abortion by traveling to campuses with its **Genocide Awareness Project** that includes displaying very large posters of aborted babies. The group believes that “abortion is child sacrifice and it represents depravity so unimaginable that it cannot be fathomed unless seen. Invisible atrocities can never be overcome until they are made visible -- and making them visible invites persecution.”

A recent campus visit to San Diego State University generated raised voices, angry faces and accusations by protestors, all of which were countered by patient and calm explanations of the pro-life position that thoughtfully challenged the untenable views of detractors. One man said he was neutral on abortion, but later said: “Looking at this display has made me more against abortion.”

Team members talked about the science of conception, and the **human equality of all people including preborn children**. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta said, ‘It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.’ What is the so-called ‘right to choose’ if not the sacrifice of children to the gods of personal autonomy & self-fulfillment? Past president Jimmy Carter’s latest mission is a campaign against discrimination (and worse) against girls and women. He said: “160 million girls are now missing from the face of the earth because they were **murdered at birth by their parents**” or were “selectively aborted. It’s the worst human rights abuse on earth, and it’s basically unaddressed.” [*National Review*, 6/11/18]

For these and other reasons, it is as important to identify abortion as “child sacrifice” in the church as it is to identify abortion as “genocide” in the secular culture. The terms are rightly stigmatizing words which more accurately describe the magnitude of the evil each represents. Calling your enemy by its proper name is vital to accurately understanding and effectively responding to the threat posed by that adversary. Pastors and politicians often resist the use of these terms because their adoption imposes obligations they wish to avoid.

Catholic Bishop Mark Davies, Bishop of Shrewsbury, UK, was quoted in an article in the *Catholic Herald* (5/14/2015), saying the disregard for human life in the western world today bears a resemblance to the Aztec practice of human sacrifice. Both societies held a **belief that some human lives can be discarded**, the bishop said, adding: ‘We cannot regard any human life as inferior to our own whether we meet them in the helpless refugee, the unborn child or the abandoned elderly person.’