

Natural fertility methods are moral methods of fertility control. Couples are taught to identify the signs of a woman's fertile and infertile phases of her ovulation cycle, so that they can time intercourse to either avoid, or try to achieve, conception.

Modern natural fertility methods are very effective, and they can be used successfully by any woman, even if she has irregular cycles, is breastfeeding, or is pre-menopausal. You can learn more about them at www.totalgift.org

Using natural fertility methods to space pregnancies for a just reason is different from using contraception. A couple using a natural method chooses to abstain from fertile acts of intercourse, while a contracepting couple chooses to sterilize fertile acts of intercourse. Unlike the couple who use a natural method, the contracepting couple **does something** to change the meaning of their sex; they do something which prevents them from being fully open to one another and to the possibility of new life.

The decision to embrace the Church's teaching about marriage, sex and family is not without challenges. But while no one should pretend that this is easy, with God on our side, it is both possible and deeply fulfilling.

"Practicing NFP takes self-control, trust in one's spouse, trust in God, honest and open communication, and willingness to sacrifice for each other. But love isn't harmed by these things. Love is these things."³

Paul VI tried to teach us that if we misuse sex, we misuse each other. This can be a hard lesson to learn, and a very hard lesson to teach. It is true and important that Catholics should always 'follow their conscience'. But our consciences are not perfect and we need to make regular efforts to form them properly. Catholics are not free to 'make up their own minds' about what is right and wrong. Our consciences stand under the principles of truth and justice as revealed in Sacred Scripture by a teaching Church.⁴

Pope Benedict recently described the Church's teaching on contraception as "controversial, yet so crucial for humanity's future." Why not use this anniversary of *Humanae vitae* to have a closer look at what the Church really teaches about contraception. Being open to this teaching brings a new openness to life and love, to our spouse and God.

HUMANAE VITAE: a letter about life-giving love.



One Couple's Reflection

When we decided to marry, we decided to always be open to life. The sacrifices we would have to make were not quite clear at the outset, the rewards were easier to imagine. Rewards like the joy of being handed my child for the first time; like watching each child grow and begin to smile at the sound of my voice, run to me when I arrive home from work and say to me as Michael, our third child did at the age of two; "I love you Dad, all day and all night!" And so we became a single-income family. Affordability is always a factor in welcoming another child as we never quite get on top of our finances. Somehow, though, this too has become a reward, a secret pleasure, for although we rarely have money to spare, we never seem to go without. The kids themselves are still the ultimate reward.

Jeremy 31 Carpenter and father.



At twenty two I was frightened of what being open to life would bring and unsure how I would cope. I discovered that surrendering to the will of God has been the greatest reward. Learning to be a child again, trustingly taking God's hand and walking in the way He wishes me to go has brought such peace. Being open to life, as I discovered, sometimes means being open to death, death to ourselves many times a day and sometimes experiencing the death of a child through miscarriage. Pregnancy brings with it many crosses: morning sickness, mood swings, weight gain etc, and labor and birth are frightening and painful. Each time I have experienced it I wished I could be doing anything else and asked, isn't there another way? But there is no other way; you have to endure it. But, as I found, the rewards far outweigh the sacrifices, by about seven and a half pounds! God is never outdone in His generosity.

Catherine 31 Wife and mother

This year marks the 40th anniversary of a letter about love which sent waves throughout the Church. This letter was Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae vitae*.

Before the encyclical was released, many people were led to believe that the Church might somehow relax its teaching against contraception, particularly in relation to the use of the 'pill'. This resulted in a lot of confusion and division amongst Catholics. One of the unfortunate features of this time was that discussion of the teaching, both inside and outside of the Church, often generated more heat than light. Even today, many people have not had the opportunity to hear what Catholic teaching **really** says about marriage, sex and children.

Looking back, any expectation of a change in the Church's teaching about contraception was always unrealistic. The rejection of contraception was always a constant part of the life and faith of the Church, and recently reaffirmed by Pope Pius

XI (*Casti Connubi*, 1930) and the Second Vatican Council. In fact, all Christian denominations were united in opposition to contraception right up until the 1930s when first the Anglican Church, and then the other Christian denominations, broke away from this position. Pope Paul VI was placed under considerable pressure to follow suit. Some of this pressure came from the majority of a special papal commission which included several married couples, doctors and experts in theology. But even though Pope Paul listened carefully to these opinions, he knew that he must shepherd the people of God along a path consistent with the Church's constant teaching in this area. This was because the Church's teaching about marriage, sex and children is both universal and timeless.

(Endnotes)

1. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*, p.8.
2. Christopher West, *Good News About Sex and Marriage*. Freedom Publishing: Melbourne, 2003, p. 108.
3. *ibid*, p. 128.
4. George Cardinal Pell, *God and Caesar*. Connor Court Publishing: Bacchus Marsh VIC, p.48.

Level 11, Polding Centre
133 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000
(02) 9390 5283
www.lifeoffice.org.au
www.marriageandfamily.org.au

lifeoffice
proclaiming, celebrating and serving the Gospel of Life

Published by the Life, Marriage & Family Centre,
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney for Marriage Sunday.



Produced by
Catholic
Communications
Archdiocese of Sydney

Arguably, in the unique context of pregnancy, 'rights talk' overlooks the fact that pregnant women and their unborn children have *shared* rather than *rival* interests. To harm one is always to harm the other; to care for one always requires caring for them both. As such, abortion is wrong because it is an attack against the life of an unborn child and an attack against the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of a woman.

Even where pregnancy poses grave difficulties and evokes tremendous uncertainty and fear, there is always a better alternative to abortion. There is always another way forward – but no woman should have to take this path alone. This is why the Church emphasises the importance of supporting mothers and fathers in the choice to continue with an unplanned or difficult pregnancy. A number of organisations already generously respond to this challenge by providing counselling and emotional and material assistance to women who are vulnerable to abortion. But we all need to be ready to offer love and support to pregnant women in our families, friendship groups and communities. A listening ear, honest information and practical assistance can make all the difference in the world to a lonely or fearful pregnant woman. Sometimes it can be the difference between life and death!

The Gospel of Life explains how moral responsibility for abortion also falls upon other persons: legislators who promote and approve abortion laws; health-care administrators and professionals who provide abortions; public educators or officials who encourage attitudes of sexual permissiveness and a lack of esteem for motherhood, or who oppose social policies in support of families; and international institutions which systematically campaign for the legalisation and spread of abortion. In this way abortion goes beyond even 'the responsibility of individuals and beyond the harm done to them, and takes on a distinctly social dimension.' (*The Gospel of Life*, 59)

As well as directly supporting women and men who are vulnerable to abortion, Christians must also confront these 'anti-life' elements of our culture. This involves the promotion of good laws that protect the value of every human life, the provision of honest information about the reality and effects of abortion, and the development of educational and workplace practices, tax structures and other social policies which are much more family friendly. It requires us to move beyond tried and failed 'harm minimisation' strategies such as value-free sex education and the promotion of contraception. These sorts of interventions have only led to higher and earlier rates of sexual activity, higher rates of pregnancy and higher rates of abortion. They are no substitute for helping men and women to understand that the proper place of sex is within committed and loving marriages.

Healing and reconciliation after abortion

One particularly important way Christians are called to respond to the tragedy of abortion is by extending hope and healing to women and men who have been involved in abortion. This involves spreading and living out the Church's message of forgiveness and reconciliation, as Pope John Paul II writes with so much compassion to women who have had abortions:

'The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains wrong but do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child.' (*The Gospel of Life*, 99)



The Visitation - 'Blessed is the fruit of your womb'

Pope Benedict XVI recently reaffirmed this message of God's love and mercy: 'I make my own the exhortation in *The Gospel of Life* addressed to women who have had an abortion...' Pope Benedict also expressed 'deep appreciation for all those social and pastoral initiatives being taken for the reconciliation and treatment of people injured by the drama of abortion', describing them as an essential element for building the 'civilisation of love that humanity needs today more than ever.' (Benedict XVI, Address, 5 April 2008.)

Research has shown that although most Australians believe that abortion is immoral, they put these beliefs aside for the sake of respecting a 'woman's right to choose' or to improve women's lives. But as we can see, many women don't freely choose abortion and abortion doesn't help women – or men,



or families, or society. Abortion only results in death and despair.

As followers of Christ we must engage in honest, compassionate and constructive personal and public discussion about abortion. We need to face up to the moral reality of abortion and understand more about its tragic consequences. We need to examine ways by which we can help women and men to pursue life-giving alternatives to abortion. And aware of God's mercy and forgiveness, we need to share the good news of hope and healing for women and men who have been involved in abortion.

Protecting human life, strengthening family life and reaching out to the broken-hearted are not optional extras for Christians. They are part of being a disciple of Jesus.

Sometimes this involves tremendous sacrifices of time, energy, money and emotion. Often it only involves a listening ear and a few honest and compassionate words. But if it is to be truly effective, it always requires prayer. We can all do something to put an end to the tragedy of abortion.

Dr Brigid McKenna is the Life Issues Policy Officer for the Life, Marriage and Family Centre of the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Questions for discussion

1. What struck you most in this article?
2. Why do you think the rate of abortion is so high in this country?
3. After reading this article, what do you think of a bumper sticker which reads: 'Abortion – one dead, one wounded'?
4. How would you answer the argument that a woman has a 'right to choose' to have an abortion?

For more information on a healing ministry within the Church which helps women and men suffering after abortion to receive God's forgiveness and healing, go to www.rachelsvineyard.org.au

Photocopying Prohibited

An 18 week-old baby in the protection of his mother's womb

INFORM
faith & life matters

A Woman's Choice?

119

Is abortion a woman's choice? How can we help women who have an unwanted pregnancy or who have had an abortion? **Dr Brigid McKenna** answers these and many other questions.

Published six times a year, **INFORM** is available from:

Catholic Adult Education Centre, Sydney
Locked Bag 888 Silverwater DC NSW 1811
P (02) 9643 3660 F (02) 9643 3669
E info@caec.com.au



INFORM - 50c per copy (minimum order: 10 copies per issue) Single subscription \$10 per year within Australia, 6 issues annually. Single copy of every back issue of **INFORM** still in print - \$40 per set.

What principles can help with medical decision making at the end of life?

The Catholic moral tradition and traditional medical ethics recognise that I can choose, and choose well, to say 'no' to a medical treatment because it is *no longer working* (futile) or because it has become *overly burdensome*, even if I can foresee that death may come sooner as a result of this choice. [EV 65]

This is very different from the choice not to undergo or continue with a treatment because I no longer value my life. It would be wrong to refuse treatment with a 'death wish' because I judge my *life* to be futile or overly burdensome.

There is an important moral difference between a choice which involves the rejection of the gift of life and one which rejects futile or burdensome treatment.

One is a refusal of life; the other is a refusal of inappropriate treatment.

The latter need not be the equivalent of euthanasia or suicide, but may express acceptance of the human condition in the face of death. It may allow the closure of life to be taken up, not by medical treatment, but by time with family and friends, fulfilling responsibilities, praying and preparing for death — perhaps even preparing others for my death.

Yet, even when nothing more can be done to restore health I should continue to undertake basic care of my life, or to graciously accept care from others. I ought to accept food and fluids, even by artificial means, until such time as they are no longer sustaining my life or until their means of provision becomes a burden to me.¹

I do not, however, have to surrender myself to pain and suffering. Christian and traditional medical ethics recognise the value of taking pain and other symptom relieving medications, even if it is foreseen that this medication may have the side effect of shortening my life. Where the intention is to relieve suffering and not to hasten death, the provision of medication can be an important way of helping patients. [EV 65]



Catholic tradition of praying for a good death

Throughout our tradition, Catholics have made it their practice to pray for a 'good death.' A death that would allow us the time to come to terms with our life and those with whom we have lived it — to thank and be thanked, to forgive and be forgiven. A death, too, which would allow us time to deepen our relationship with God.

And Catholics have recognised the value of developing virtues throughout life, especially fortitude and hope, so that when death does approach, we will be better able to face the mystery of our passion and better able to graciously accept the compassion of others.

This *Respect Life Sunday*, as we reflect upon what it really means to die with dignity, let's renew this prayer so that we might be able to proclaim the 'good news' of our faith — the Gospel of God's love, the Gospel of the dignity of the human person and the Gospel of life [EV 2] — *in and through our lives, as well as our deaths.*

Published by the Life Office,
Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney,
for *Respect Life Sunday 2004*.

Polding Centre, Level 11,
133 Liverpool St
Sydney NSW 2000
www.lifeoffice.org.au | (02) 9390 5290

References

1. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)*, 1995.
2. Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Adam: God's Beloved*. HarperCollins Religious: Blackburn, Victoria, 1997.
3. USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, 1995. "In Search of a Good Death: Euthanasia and The Way of True Mercy"
4. Pope John Paul II, Address to the Participants in the International Congress on "Life-sustaining treatments and vegetative state: scientific advances and ethical dilemmas." 20 March 2004

Designed by Catholic Communications

www.cathcomm.org.au | (02) 9390 5300

Photographs of candles and Celtic cross used with permission. ©Ian Britton - FreeFoto.com
Photograph of residents at Albert Court ©Shaun Patterson - winkipopmedia.com.au

Dignity

...NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF DEATH

Now that palliative care has become so good at controlling pain and other symptoms, other fears about dying seem to have come to the surface.

Today we seem to be more fearful and worried about 'losing our dignity' or about having to depend on others. We are more likely to hear people say things like: 'don't let me linger on and become a burden to you,' or 'what matters is that I die when and how I choose, with dignity.'

Australia's own 'Doctor Death', Philip Nitschke and a team of advisers have even formulated a recipe for a home-made pill that they say can provide a 'peaceful and reliable death' for people with these concerns. But would taking a pill to intentionally end my life, even if it is a life of suffering and dependency, allow me to die with dignity? Or would my death mean something else?

Choose life, not death...

Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him... (Deut 30:19-20)

Dignity is a term which is used to describe the intrinsic and inestimable worth of the human person. It reminds us that our value as a person does not depend upon our talents, our beauty, our accomplishments, or our wealth. Our value is found in our very being. We are of great value simply because we are human.¹

Created by God to share in his glory, the human person has a worth which exceeds that of any other creature. The human person is a *manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory.* [EV 34]

This means that in spite of what we feel or think about the 'quality' of our lives, we *can never* lose our dignity.

However we can act in ways which deny the truth of our dignity. We can act in ways which say 'I am not of great worth'; 'my life is not of great value'.

Choosing death — willing our death — is one such way.

Death by euthanasia or assisted suicide is never 'death with dignity'. These are tragic acts of despair; tragic rejections of the truth about the value of our lives; tragic rejections of the care of other people. Such an act — our last choice — would be based on the judgement that our life is no longer worth living. It would be the ultimate rejection of our dignity.

RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY

advancement of public health, without exposing human research participants, including human embryos, to undue risks (2292-95); and opposing threats to human life and dignity such as terrorism and torture. As well as acknowledging the sanctity of the living, we are even called to treat the bodies of the dead with respect and charity. (2300)

“...be profoundly consistent”

CATHOLIC TEACHING on life issues is both comprehensive and radically inclusive of every human being from conception until natural death. No one is excluded. No serious threat to human life is left unopposed on grounds that it is ‘unpopular’ to do so.

“Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to “show care” for all life and for the life of everyone. (Gospel of Life 87)

The concern of the Church to be engaged in the full range of life issues and consistently recognise the claims of each and every human being to our care and compassion is surely Christianity at its best. But ultimately, it is impossible to further the common good without first acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable

rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. (Gospel of Life 101) As Pope Benedict repeatedly reminds us, the protection of human life, from conception until natural death, is a non-negotiable principle – our absolute starting point – in human affairs.

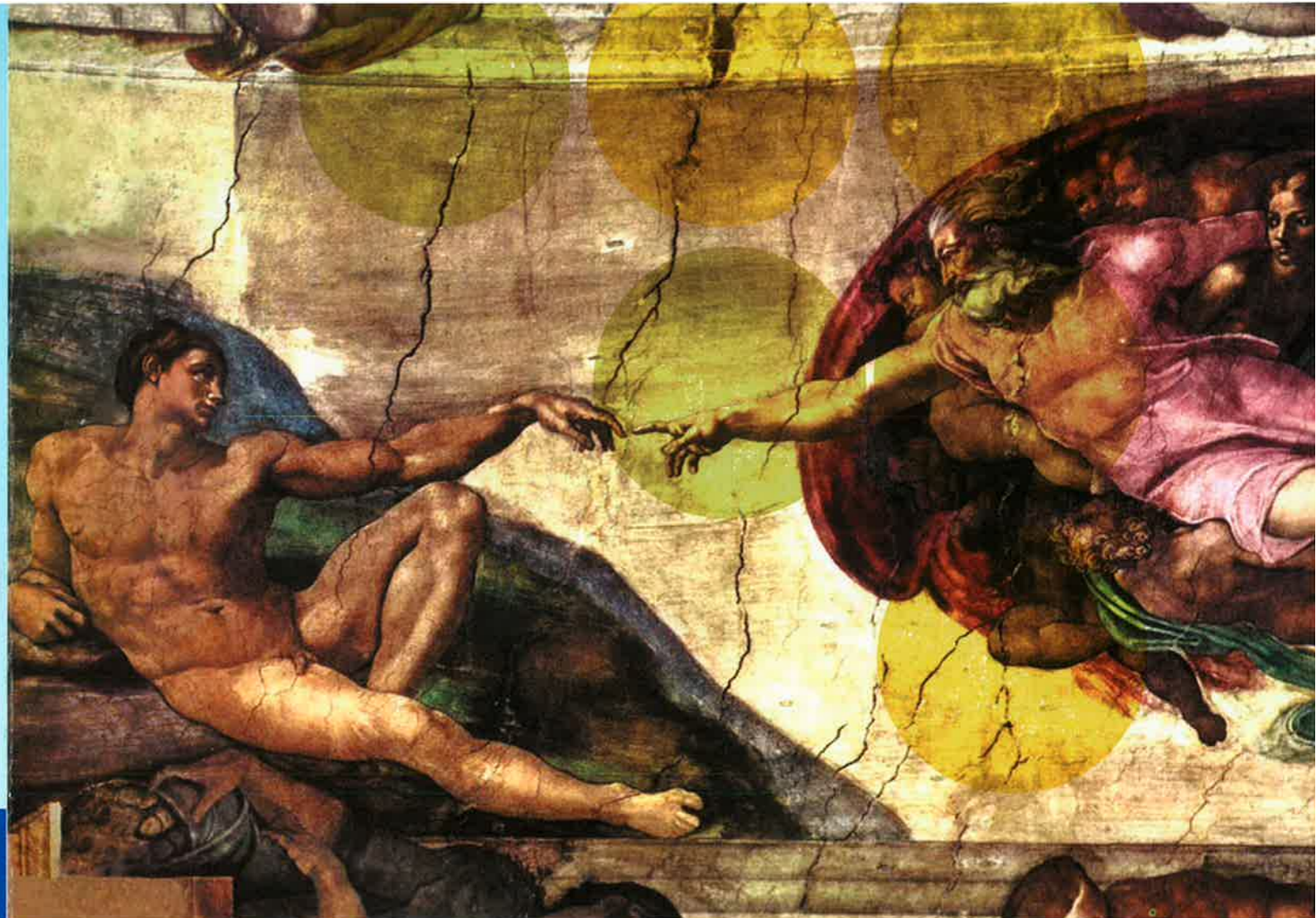
“When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man’s true good. If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of a new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away. The acceptance of life strengthens moral fibre and makes people capable of mutual help. (Charity in Truth, 28)

Being ‘pro-life’ is never an optional extra for Christians. It is at the heart of the Christian life.

“We all have the “inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life.” (Gospel of Life 28)

Polding Centre
133 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000

lifemarriagefamily.org.au



Life — a gift always worth living

TO BE ‘SACRED’ is to be worthy of veneration and respect. Catholics regard the Scriptures and the Sacraments as ‘sacred.’ Our belief in the ‘sanctity of human life’ means that we also regard human beings as sacred. C.S. Lewis, the author of the Narnia books, wrote that next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, another human being is the holiest thing on earth. (The Weight of Glory, 1949)

For human beings, sacredness is not something we acquire by passing certain developmental milestones or earn by achieving certain goals: it is not a graduation prize. Neither is it something that can ever be lost. The life of an unborn child or a newborn baby, a person with an intellectual disability or a brilliant scientist, a premier athlete or a bedridden elderly person, is equally sacred. Human life is sacred not because of how we look or what we can do, but because of what we are. We are sacred – every human being is sacred - because we have all been created in the image of God. (Gen: 1:26)

Belief in the sanctity of human life is not peculiar to Christians. Many people of different faiths or of no faith believe in the sanctity or the inherent dignity of the human person. John Paul II’s encyclical *The Gospel of Life* affirms that “even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognise the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end.” (Gospel of Life 22)

However, belief in the sanctity of human life becomes fragile if we reject or forget about God and his hand in our creation. Too frequently modern man “no longer considers life as a splendid gift of God, something sacred entrusted to his responsibility and thus also to his loving care and veneration. Life itself becomes a mere thing, which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation.” (Gospel of Life 22)

