

A pastoral letter
to the people of God
of northern Colorado
on the truth and meaning
of married love

*Of
Human
Life*

+ *Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap
Archbishop of Denver
July 22, 1998*



Dear Friend,

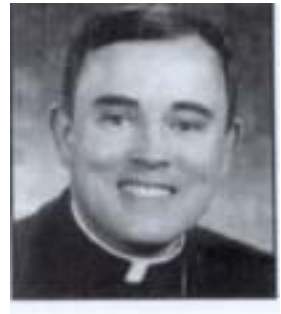
The legacy of some men diminishes with time. With others, it grows. In a century of Popes who were good men, good teachers and good fathers in the faith, Paul VI stands out for his steadfast and humble service to the truth. Many of his writings are now classics of Catholic doctrine. None drew more controversy and criticism than *Humanae Vitae*, his 1968 encyclical which reaffirmed what the Church believes about the conception of new life. Looking back after 30 years, however, we can better understand the wisdom and foresight of this extraordinary man of God. In a time when the word “prophetic” has almost lost its force from misuse and overuse, today we can truly say that Paul VI was *prophetic* in his teachings on married love and sexuality.

My own thoughts on Paul VI’s encyclical, which follow here, are just one example of a much wider re-appreciation of *Humanae Vitae* now going on in faithful hearts around the world. I want to offer my thanks and friendship to everyone involved with One More Soul for kindly reprinting the pastoral letter *Of Human Life* and, more importantly, for the tremendous work they do, day in and day out. To all who read this booklet, may God bless you richly and fill your life with His peace.

Your brother in the Lord,

+ Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap

Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, OFM Cap
Archbishop of Denver



OF HUMAN LIFE

A pastoral letter to the people of God of northern Colorado
on the truth and meaning of married love

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Archbishop of Denver
July 22, 1998

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

I. Thirty years ago this week, Pope Paul VI issued his encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (*Of Human Life*), which reaffirmed the Church's constant teaching on the regulation of births. It is certainly the most misunderstood papal intervention of this century. It was the spark which led to three decades of doubt and dissent among many Catholics, especially in the developed countries. With the passage of time, however, it has also proven prophetic. It teaches the truth. My purpose in this pastoral letter, therefore, is simple. I believe the message of *Humanae Vitae* is not a burden but a joy. I believe this encyclical offers a key to deeper, richer marriages. And so what I seek from the family of our local Church is not just a respectful nod toward a document which critics dismiss as irrelevant, but *an active and sustained effort* to study *Humanae Vitae*; to teach it faithfully in our parishes; and to encourage our married couples to live it.

I. The World Since 1968

2. Sooner or later, every pastor counsels someone struggling with an addiction. Usually the problem is alcohol or drugs. And usually the scenario is the same. The addict will acknowledge the problem but claim to be powerless against it. Or, alternately, the addict will deny having any problem at all, even if the addiction is destroying his or her health and wrecking job and family. No matter how much sense the pastor makes; no matter how true and persuasive his arguments; and no matter how life-threatening the situation, the addict simply cannot understand — or cannot act on — the counsel. The addiction, like a thick pane of glass, divides the addict from anything or anyone that might help.

3. One way to understand the history of *Humanae Vitae* is to examine the past three decades through this metaphor of addiction. I believe people in the developed world find this encyclical so hard to accept not because of any defect in Paul VI's reasoning, but because of the addictions and contradictions they have inflicted upon themselves, exactly as the Holy Father warned.

4. In presenting his encyclical, Paul VI cautioned against four main problems (*HV* 17) that would arise if Church teaching on the regulation of births was ignored. First, he warned that the widespread use of contraception would lead to “conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality.” Exactly this has happened. Few would deny that the rates of abortion, divorce, family breakdown, wife and child abuse, venereal disease, and out of wedlock births have all massively increased since the mid-1960s. Obviously, the birth control pill has not been the only factor in this unraveling. But it has played a major role. In fact, the cultural revolution since 1968, driven at least in part by transformed attitudes toward sex, would not have been possible or sustainable without easy access to reliable contraception. In this, Paul VI was right.

5. Second, he also warned that man would lose respect for woman and “no longer [care] for her physical and psychological equilibrium,” to the point that he would consider her “as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.” In other words, according to the Pope, contraception might be marketed as liberating for women, but the real “beneficiaries” of birth control pills and devices would be men. Three decades later, exactly as Paul VI suggested, contraception has released males — to a historically unprecedented degree — from responsibility for their sexual aggression. In the process, one of the stranger ironies of the contraception debate of the past generation has been this: Many feminists have attacked the Catholic Church for her alleged disregard of women, but the Church in *Humanae Vitae* identified and rejected sexual exploitation of women *years before that message entered the cultural mainstream*. Again, Paul VI was right.

6. Third, the Holy Father also warned that widespread use of contraception would place a “dangerous weapon . . . in the hands of those public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies.” As we have since discovered, eugenics didn’t disappear with Nazi racial theories in 1945. Population control policies are now an accepted part of nearly every foreign aid discussion. The massive export of contraceptives, abortion and sterilization by the developed world to developing countries — frequently as a prerequisite for aid dollars and often in direct contradiction to local moral traditions — is a thinly disguised form of population warfare and cultural re-engineering. Again, Paul VI was right.

7. Fourth, Pope Paul warned that contraception would mislead human beings into thinking they had unlimited dominion over their own bodies, relentlessly turning the human person into the object of his or her own intrusive power. Herein lies another irony: In fleeing into the false freedom provided by contraception and abortion, an exaggerated feminism has actively colluded in women’s dehumanization. A man and a woman participate uniquely in the glory of God by their ability to co-create new life with Him. At the heart of contraception, however, is the assumption that fertility is an infection which must be attacked and controlled, exactly as antibiotics attack bacteria. In this attitude, one can also see the organic link between contraception and abortion. If fertility can be misrepresented as an infection to be attacked, *so too can new life*. In either case, a defining element of woman’s identity — her potential for bearing new life — is recast as a weakness requiring vigilant distrust and “treatment.” Woman becomes the object of the tools she relies on to ensure her own liberation and defense, while man takes no share of the burden. *Once again, Paul VI was right.*

8. From the Holy Father’s final point, much more has flowed: In vitro fertilization, cloning, genetic manipulation, and embryo experimentation are all descendants of contraceptive technology. In fact, we have drastically and naively underestimated the effects of technology not only on external society, but on our own interior human identity. As author Neil Postman has observed, technological change is not additive but ecological. A significant new technology does not “add” something to a society; *it changes everything* — just as a drop of red dye does not remain discrete in a glass of water, but colors and changes every single molecule of the liquid. Contraceptive technology, precisely because of its impact on sexual intimacy, has subverted our understanding of the purpose of sexuality, fertility and marriage itself. It has detached them from the natural, organic identity of the human person and disrupted the ecology of human relationships. It has scrambled our vocabulary of love, just as pride scrambled the vocabulary of Babel.

9. Now we deal daily with the consequences. I am writing these thoughts during a July week when, within days of each other, news media have informed us that nearly 14 percent of Coloradans are or have been involved in drug or alcohol dependency; a governor's commission has praised marriage while simultaneously recommending steps that would subvert it in Colorado by extending parallel rights and responsibilities to persons in "committed relationships," including same-sex relationships; and a young east coast couple have been sentenced for brutally slaying their newborn baby. According to news reports, one or both of the young unmarried parents "bashed in [the baby's] skull while he was still alive, and then left his battered body in a Dumpster to die." These are the headlines of a culture in serious distress. U.S. society is wracked with sexual identity and behavior dysfunctions, family collapse and a general coarsening of attitudes toward the sanctity of human life. It's obvious to everyone but an addict: *We have a problem*. It's killing us as a people. So what are we going to do about it? What I want to suggest is that if Paul VI was right about so many of the consequences deriving from contraception, *it is because he was right about contraception itself*. In seeking to become whole again as persons and as a people of faith, we need to begin by revisiting *Humanae Vitae* with open hearts. Jesus said the truth would make us free. *Humanae Vitae* is filled with truth. It is therefore a key to our freedom.

II. What *Humanae Vitae* Really Says

10. Perhaps one of the flaws in communicating the message of *Humanae Vitae* over the last 30 years has been the language used in teaching it. The duties and responsibilities of married life are numerous. They're also serious. They need to be considered carefully, and prayerfully, in advance. But few couples understand their love in terms of academic theology. Rather, they *fall in love*. That's the vocabulary they use. It's that simple and revealing. They surrender to each other. They give themselves to each other. They *fall into each other* in order to fully possess, and be possessed by, each other. And rightly so. In married love, God intends that spouses should find joy and delight, hope and abundant life, in and through each other — all ordered in a way which draws husband and wife, their children, and all who know them, deeper into God's embrace.

11. As a result, in presenting the nature of Christian marriage to a new generation, we need to articulate its *fulfilling satisfactions* at least as well as its duties. The Catholic attitude toward sexuality is *anything but* puritanical, repressive, or anti-carnal. God created the world and fashioned the human person in His own image. Therefore the body is good. In fact, it's often been a source of great humor for me to listen incognito as people simultaneously complain about the alleged "bottled-up sexuality" of Catholic moral doctrine, and the size of

many good Catholic families. (From where, one might ask, do they think the babies come?) Catholic marriage — exactly like Jesus Himself — is not about scarcity but abundance. It's not about sterility, but rather the fruitfulness which flows from unitive, procreative love. Catholic married love *always* implies the possibility of new life; and because it does, it drives out loneliness and affirms the future. And because it affirms the future, it becomes a furnace of hope in a world prone to despair. In effect, Catholic marriage is attractive because it is true. It's designed for the creatures we are: persons meant for communion. Spouses complete each other. When God joins a woman and man together in marriage, they create with Him a new wholeness; a "*belonging*" which is so real, so concrete, that a new life, a child, is its natural expression and seal. This is what the Church means when she teaches that Catholic married love is by its nature both unitive and procreative — not either/or.

12. But why can't a married couple simply choose the unitive aspect of marriage and temporarily block or even permanently prevent its procreative nature? The answer is as simple and radical as the Gospel itself. When spouses give themselves honestly and entirely to each other, as the nature of married love implies and even demands, that *must include their whole selves* — and the most intimate, powerful part of each person is his or her fertility. Contraception not only denies this fertility and attacks procreation; in doing so, it necessarily damages unity as well. It is the equivalent of spouses saying: "I'll give you all I am — *except* my fertility; I'll accept all you are — *except* your fertility." This withholding of self inevitably works to isolate and divide the spouses, and unravel the holy friendship between them . . . maybe not immediately and overtly, but deeply, and in the long run often fatally for the marriage.

13. This is why the Church is not against "artificial" contraception. She is against *all* contraception. *The notion of "artificial" has nothing to do with the issue.* In fact, it tends to confuse discussion by implying that the debate is about a mechanical intrusion into the body's organic system. It is not. The Church has no problem with science appropriately intervening to heal or enhance bodily health. Rather, the Church teaches that *all contraception is morally wrong*; and not only wrong, but seriously wrong. The covenant which husband and wife enter at marriage requires that *all* intercourse remain open to the transmission of new life. This is what becoming "one flesh" implies: complete self-giving, without reservation or exception, just as Christ withheld nothing of Himself from His bride, the Church, by dying for her on the cross. *Any* intentional interference with the procreative nature of intercourse necessarily involves spouses' withholding themselves from each other and from God, who is their partner in sacramental love. In effect, they steal something infinitely precious — themselves — from each other and from their Creator.

14. And this is why natural family planning (NFP) differs not merely in style but in moral substance from contraception as a means of regulating family size. *NFP is not contraception. Rather, it is a method of fertility awareness and appreciation.* It is an entirely different approach to regulating birth. NFP does nothing to attack fertility, withhold the gift of oneself from one's spouse, or block the procreative nature of intercourse. The marriage covenant requires that each act of intercourse be fully an act of self-giving, and therefore open to the possibility of new life. But when, for good reasons, a husband and wife limit their intercourse to the wife's natural periods of infertility during a month, they are simply observing a cycle which God Himself created in the woman. They are not subverting it. And so they are living within the law of God's love.

15. There are, of course, many wonderful benefits to the practice of NFP. The wife preserves herself from intrusive chemicals or devices and remains true to her natural cycle. The husband shares in the planning and responsibility for NFP. Both learn a greater degree of self-mastery and a deeper respect for each other. It's true that NFP involves sacrifices and periodic abstinence from intercourse. It can, at times, be a difficult road. But so can any serious Christian life, whether ordained, consecrated, single or married. Moreover, the experience of tens of thousands of couples has shown that, when lived prayerfully and unselfishly, NFP deepens and enriches marriage and results in greater intimacy — *and greater joy.* In the Old Testament, God told our first parents to be fruitful and multiply (Gn 1:28). He told us to *choose life* (Dt 30:19). He sent His son, Jesus, to bring us life abundantly (Jn 10:10) and to remind us that His yoke is light (Mt 11:30). I suspect, therefore, that at the heart of Catholic ambivalence toward *Humanae Vitae* is not a crisis of sexuality, Church authority or moral relevance, but rather a question of faith: *Do we really believe in God's goodness?* The Church speaks for her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and believers naturally, eagerly listen. She shows married couples the path to enduring love and a culture of life. Thirty years of history record the consequences of choosing otherwise.

III. What We Need To Do

16. I want to express my gratitude to the many couples who already live the message of *Humanae Vitae* in their married lives. Their fidelity to the truth sanctifies their own families and our entire community of faith. I thank in a special way those couples who teach NFP and counsel others in responsible parenthood inspired by Church teaching. Their work too often goes unnoticed or underappreciated — but they are powerful advocates for life in an age of confusion. I also want to offer my prayers and encouragement to those couples who bear the cross of infertility. In a society often bent on avoiding children, they carry the burden of yearning for children but having none. No prayers go

unanswered, and all suffering given over to the Lord bears fruit in some form of new life. I encourage them to consider adoption, and I appeal to them to remember that a good end can never justify a wrong means. Whether to prevent a pregnancy or achieve one, all techniques which separate the unitive and procreative dimensions of marriage are always wrong. Procreative techniques which turn embryos into objects and mechanically substitute for the loving embrace of husband and wife *violate human dignity and treat life as a product*. No matter how positive their intentions, these techniques advance the dangerous tendency to reduce human life to material which can be manipulated.

17. It's never too late to turn our hearts back toward God. We are not powerless. We can make a difference by witnessing the truth about married love and fidelity to the culture around us. In December last year, in a pastoral letter entitled *Good News of Great Joy*, I spoke of the important vocation every Catholic has as an evangelizer. We are all missionaries. America in the 1990s, with its culture of disordered sexuality, broken marriages and fragmented families, urgently needs the Gospel. As Pope John Paul II writes in his apostolic exhortation *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)*, married couples and families have a critical role in witnessing Jesus Christ to each other and to the surrounding culture (49, 50).

18. In that light, I ask married couples of the archdiocese to read, discuss and pray over *Humanae Vitae, Familiaris Consortio* and other documents of the Church which outline Catholic teaching on marriage and sexuality. Many married couples, unaware of the valuable wisdom found in these materials, have deprived themselves of a beautiful source of support for their mutual love. I especially encourage couples to examine their own consciences regarding contraception, and I ask them to remember that "conscience" is much more than a matter of personal preference. It requires us to search out and understand Church teaching, and to honestly strive to conform our hearts to it. I urge them to seek sacramental Reconciliation for the times they may have fallen into contraception. Disordered sexuality is the dominant addiction of American society in these closing years of the century. It directly or indirectly impacts us all. As a result, for many, this teaching may be a hard message to accept. *But do not lose heart*. Each of us is a sinner. Each of us is loved by God. No matter how often we fail, God will deliver us if we repent and ask for the grace to do His will.

19. I ask my brother priests to examine their own pastoral practices, to ensure that they *faithfully and persuasively* present the Church's teaching on these issues in all their parish work. Our people deserve the truth about human sexuality and the dignity of marriage. To accomplish this, I ask pastors to read and implement the *Vademecum for Confessors Concerning Some Aspects of the Morality of Conjugal Life*, and to study the Church's teaching on marriage and

family planning. I urge them to appoint parish coordinators to facilitate the presentation of Catholic teaching on married love and family planning — especially NFP. Contraception is a grave matter. Married couples need the good counsel of the Church to make right decisions. Most married Catholics welcome the guidance of their priests, and priests should never feel intimidated by their personal commitment to celibacy, or embarrassed by the teaching of the Church. To be embarrassed by Church teaching is to be embarrassed by Christ's teaching. The pastoral experience and counsel of a priest are valuable on issues like contraception *precisely because* he brings new perspective to a couple and speaks for the whole Church. Moreover, the fidelity a priest shows to his own vocation strengthens married people to live their vocation more faithfully.

20. As archbishop, I commit myself and my offices to supporting my brother priests, deacons, and their lay collaborators in presenting the whole of the Church's teaching on married love and family planning. I owe both the clergy of our local Church and their staffs — especially the many dedicated parish catechists — much gratitude for the good work they have already accomplished in this area. It is my intention to ensure that courses on married love and family planning are available on a regular basis to more and more people of the archdiocese, and that our priests and deacons receive more extensive education in the theological and pastoral aspects of these issues. I direct, in a particular way, our Offices of Evangelization and Catechetics; Marriage and Family Life; Catholic Schools; Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministries; and the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults to develop concrete ways to better present Church teaching on married love to our people, and to require adequate instruction in NFP as part of all marriage preparation programs in the archdiocese.

21. Two final points. First, *the issue of contraception is not peripheral, but central and serious in a Catholic's walk with God.* If knowingly and freely engaged in, contraception is a grave sin, because it distorts the essence of marriage: the self-giving love which, by its very nature, is life-giving. It breaks apart what God created to be whole: the person-uniting meaning of sex (love) and the life-giving meaning of sex (procreation). Quite apart from its cost to individual marriages, contraception has also inflicted massive damage on society at large: initially by driving a wedge between love and the procreation of children; and then between sex (i.e., recreational sex without permanent commitment) and love. Nonetheless — and this is my second point — *teaching the truth should always be done with patience and compassion*, as well as firmness. American society seems to swing peculiarly between Puritanism and license. The two generations — my own and my teachers' — which once led the dissent from Paul VI's encyclical in this country, are generations still reacting against the American Catholic rigorism of the 1950s. That rigorism, much of it a product of

culture and not doctrine, has long since been demolished. But the habit of skepticism remains. In reaching these people, our task is to turn their distrust to where it belongs: toward the lies the world tells about the meaning of human sexuality, and the pathologies those lies conceal.

22. In closing, we face an opportunity which comes only once in many decades. Thirty years ago this week, Paul VI told the truth about married love. In doing it, he triggered a struggle within the Church which continues to mark American Catholic life even today. Selective dissent from *Humanae Vitae* soon fueled broad dissent from Church authority and attacks on the credibility of the Church herself. The irony is that the people who dismissed Church teaching in the 1960s soon discovered that they had subverted their own ability to pass anything along to their children. The result is that the Church now must evangelize a world of their *children's* children — adolescents and young adults raised in moral confusion, often unaware of their own moral heritage, who hunger for meaning, community, and love with real substance. For all its challenges, this is a tremendous new moment of possibility for the Church, and the good news is that the Church today, as in every age, has the answers to fill the God-shaped empty places in their hearts. My prayer is therefore simple: May the Lord grant us the *wisdom* to recognize the great treasure which resides in our teaching about married love and human sexuality, the *faith, joy and perseverance* to live it in our own families — and the *courage* which Paul VI possessed to preach it anew.

+ Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap
Archbishop of Denver
July 22, 1998

IV. Addendum: Some Common Questions

In the weeks following publication of his pastoral letter, Archbishop Chaput answered some common questions about family planning and related issues in his regular Denver Catholic Register column.

1. Isn't a couple's method of family planning a matter of personal conscience?

Yes it is. Catholics, like all people, are *always* obligated to follow their consciences — on birth control and every other matter. But that's not where the problem lies. *The problem lies in the formation of one's conscience.* A conscientious person seeks to do good and avoid evil. Seeing the difference between good and evil, though, can sometimes be difficult. As Pope John Paul II has said, the basic moral law is written in the human heart because we're created in the image and likeness of God. But we bear the wounds of original sin, which garbles the message and dims our ability to judge and act according to truth.

Truth is objective. In other words, it's real; independent of us; and exists whether we like it or not. Therefore, conscience can't *invent* right and wrong. Rather, conscience is called to *discover* the truth of right and wrong, and then to *submit personal judgments to the truth* once it is found. Church teaching on the regulation of births, like all her moral teachings, is a *sure guide* for forming our consciences according to the truth. For we have the certainty of faith, as Vatican II reminds us, that the teachings of the Church on matters of faith and morals are “not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God” (*Lumen Gentium* n. 12)

Too often, we use “conscience” as a synonym for private preference; a kind of pious alibi for doing what we want or taking the easy road. We only end up hurting others and ourselves.

2. I still don't see the big difference between a couple using “artificial” birth control and a couple using “natural” family planning. Don't both couples have the same intention, and isn't this what determines morality?

It's hard to see the difference when the emphasis is placed on “artificial” versus “natural” methods. People rightly point out that many things we use are artificial but not immoral. So it's important to realize that the Church doesn't oppose artificial birth control *because* it's artificial. Rather, what the Church opposes is *any* method of birth control which is *contraceptive*, whether artificial devices, pills, etc., are used or not.

Contraception is the choice, by any means, to *sterilize a given act of intercourse*. In other words, a contracepting couple chooses to engage in intercourse and, knowing that it may result in a new life, they intentionally and

willfully suppress their fertility. Herein lies a key distinction: Natural family planning (NFP) *is in no way contraceptive*. The choice to *abstain* from a fertile act of intercourse is completely different from the willful choice to *sterilize* a fertile act of intercourse. NFP simply accepts from God's hand the natural cycle of infertility that He has built into the nature of woman.

Regarding the issue of intention: Yes, both couples may have the same *end* in mind — to avoid pregnancy. But the *means* to achieve their common goal are not at all alike. Take, for example, two students, each of whom intends to excel in school. Obviously that's a very good intention. With the same goal in mind, one studies diligently. The other cheats on every test. The point is, the end doesn't justify the means — in getting an education, in regulating births, or in anything else.

3. *I'm a priest. If I preach about what's wrong with contraception, I'll lose people.*

Let me turn that around: If priests *don't* preach the Church's message about contraception, *heaven loses people*. Don't be afraid. When Jesus preached the truth, He lost people. But, little by little, He gained even more people. Take courage in the Lord. It shouldn't surprise us that people find this teaching hard to accept. *Every* Gospel-based life has things which are hard to accept. Should we stop teaching the truth because it's difficult? Of course not. We have the joy and the responsibility before God to preach the truth lovingly in season and out of season.

The Church won't be renewed without a renewal of family life. And the family can't be renewed without a return to the truths taught in *Humanae Vitae*. Ignoring this issue can't be an option: In the long run, its cost is too high. Therefore, we should make every effort to better understand the importance of Church teaching in this regard, and witness to it boldly and with confidence.

4. *In your pastoral letter, you said that the most intimate, powerful part of each person is his or her fertility. My husband and I are unable to have children. What does this mean for us?*

Many couples bear a great cross because, despite their openness to life, they're unable to have children. But marital love is *always* life-giving when spouses give themselves honestly to each other, even if a child isn't conceived. Only when husband and wife intentionally withhold their fertility, or abuse their sexuality in some other way, can we speak of a "life-less" act of intercourse.

Spouses' self-giving in one flesh remains the most intimate, powerful and life-giving expression of their love for one another, even when nature, or some problem of nature, prevents new life from being conceived. Medical technology can sometimes correct a physical problem, allowing a child to be

conceived by the loving embrace of parents. This is a proper and wonderful use of technology. However, couples should remember that, as creatures themselves, they're not the arbiters of human life. Ultimately, no one is free to manipulate the conception of a human person. No matter how sincere a couple's intentions, many of today's new procreative techniques treat human life as a product which can be manufactured — and in doing so, they violate human dignity. Again, the end never justifies the means.

Children aren't the only way a marriage can be fruitful. If God, in His design, closes one option for a couple, He will open another. Their love can find expression in adoption, foster-parenting, or dozens of forms of apostolic work. This kind of counsel, of course, is much easier to give than to willingly accept. I would never want to understate the real pain and loss felt by infertile couples. But I know, both from faith and from my friendships with married couples over the years, that if a husband and wife choose to trust God, their love will always be rewarded with fertility and new life — if not in the form of a child, then in the way they impact the world around them.

5. Why is the Church so obsessed with sex?

You know the old saying about the pot calling the kettle black — well, here's a great example. Questions like this one may very well be honest, but they conceal where the real obsessions lie. American society is drowning in a sea of disordered sexuality. In such circumstances, it's hardly an "obsession" for the Church to speak clearly and forcefully about how to swim. It's her responsibility and mission.

God created our sexuality to be a sign in the world of His own life and love, and to reveal to us that we can only fulfill ourselves by loving as He loves. When sexuality becomes distorted, however, it's no longer able to communicate God's life and love. Empty of true love, life lacks meaning, and people soon seem disposable. Sex becomes a pursuit of selfish gratification at the expense of others. Children are no longer welcomed as the natural fruit of married love, but are seen as a burden to be avoided. We don't even shrink from killing (through abortion) thousands of innocent preborn lives a day in satisfying our convenience and appetites.

It's no exaggeration, then, to say that disordered sexuality is the beginning of what Pope John Paul II calls "the culture of death." In fact, we'll never build a culture of life and love without first restoring the true meaning of human sexuality. If the Church is so concerned about sex, it's because she seeks to defend the dignity of the human person, and to safeguard the true meaning of life and love which sexuality is meant to reveal.

6. How can I preach against contraception and praise the virtues of NFP? As a priest, I'm not married.

First, the truth is the truth, no matter who speaks it. Second, preaching isn't about the preacher; it's about the message. Third, in his promise of celibacy, a priest doesn't forget or deny his sexuality. Instead, he dedicates it to a different — but equally fertile — kind of fruitfulness. In other words, priestly celibacy is an affirmation, not a rejection; a strength, not a weakness. It's a "yes" to God which enables us to understand and serve our people better.

Remember that marriage, religious life, the single vocation, and the priesthood are all designed to fit together and complement each other in the life of the Church. Each needs the other. Each, in its own proper way, fulfills the fundamental human vocation to give ourselves away in love. I think we priests often underestimate how effective our pastoral counsel can be on issues like contraception. People want and need the truth, and over time, the human heart naturally responds to it. But our people can't respond if they don't hear the message of *Humanae Vitae* faithfully and persuasively from their pastors. That's our job, and we should embrace it joyfully.

*Please contact One More Soul (800) 307-7685 to receive their **Resource Guide 2002** offering 200 books, videos, tapes and pamphlets for helping people understand how children are a great blessing from God and how contraception is very harmful.*

Information about Natural Family Planning is available from One More Soul and other organizations.

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Family of the Americas Foundation (301) 627-3346

US Conference of Catholic Bishops (202) 541-3240

Northwest Family Services (503) 215-6377

Natural Family Planning Outreach (405) 942-4084

Pope Paul VI Institute (404) 390-9851

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