

# **Humanae Vitae – Reaffirmed by Canadian Bishops**

Reprint 27 – [www.hli.org](http://www.hli.org)

On April 3, 1989 the six Bishops of Manitoba issued a Pastoral Letter entitled, “Responsible Parenthood”. It is an affirmation of their unqualified support for the teachings of the Church on human sexuality as stated in the encyclical of Pope Paul VI- “*Humanae Vitae*.” The Pastoral Letter describes the discord which has occurred in the Church since the prophetic encyclical was issued, it explains some of the causes of the discord and it presents a list of serious societal problems which have occurred because the natural order, written into human nature by God himself has been violated.

*Humanae Vitae* is presented as an expression of God’s love for His People, a way of avoiding all the terrible consequences which result from transgressing the natural law. Husbands and wives are encouraged to cooperate with God by being responsible parents. “Married people should realize that in their behavior they may not simply follow their own fancy but must be ruled by conscience – and conscience ought to be conformed to the law of God in the light of the teaching authority of the Church, which is the authentic interpreter of divine law.” ( Vatican II, Constitution of the Church in the Modern World.

The advances in Natural Family Planning Methods are presented, an overview of the rewards which NFP couples enjoy and a short explanation of each of the three NFP methods is included. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of NFP resource agencies located in Manitoba are listed. Because of its length we are unable to reprint the complete text of the Pastoral Letter, .....

## **Responsible Parenthood – A Pastoral Letter From the Catholic Bishops of Manitoba**

We, the undersigned Catholic Bishops of Manitoba, recognizing our duty to teach the teaching of the Church and recognizing more specifically our duty to promote healthy marriages and family life as well as health human behavior in general, hereby ant to make some observations and exhortations.

1. We urge married couples to be generous and responsible in living their lives in such a way that they are love-giving and life-giving according to the mission entrusted to them by God.
2. We urge couples to pray daily and to rely on the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage for the strength needed to live out their vocation with generosity, peace and joy.

3. We urge our faithful to familiarize themselves with natural family planning, to use the method when indicated and to avail themselves of the benefits that natural family planning provides for marriages and family life.
4. We urge those who have experienced natural family planning to share their experiences with others.
5. We urge every parish to work towards having at least one natural family planning instructor couple.
6. We urge our clergy to promote natural family planning, especially in the context of pre-marriage preparation and to teach the integral teaching of the Church on the matters in question. In this regard, we can take strength from the words of the Holy Father: “I.... urge you in the face of all trends which threaten the stability of marriage, the dignity of human life, as well as the transmission, never to lose confidence and courage. Through the grace given us as pastors we must endeavor to “present as effectively as possible the whole teaching of the prophetic message contained in *Humanae Vitae*” ( Address to U.S. Bishops, Los Angeles, Sept. 1, 1987)
7. We urge all to get a copy of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, to read it and to reflect carefully and prayerfully on its message.
8. Since so much controversy has surrounded the teaching of the Church on responsible parenthood, perhaps all of us need to examine our attitude towards the teaching of the Church. Do we take the attitude that we accept the teaching of the Church when the arguments and reasons presented convince us, while choosing to dissent when the arguments and reasons do not convince us? The attitude described is adequate and may be used when we consider the theological opinions of this or that theologian, but the attitude in question cannot be taken when when faced with the official teaching of the Church. When faced with the teaching of the Church, not only intellectual conviction, but also faith in the Church must come into play. For this reason, Pope Paul VI wrote: “ That obedience (to the teaching of the Church), as you know well, obliges not only because of the reasons addressed, but rather because of the light of the Holy Spirit, which is given in a particular way to the Pastors of the Church in order that they may illustrate the truth.” ( *Humanae Vitae*, n.27; cf. also Vatican II, Constitution on the Church, n. 25). Do we have faith in the Church and in its teachings?
9. Perhaps we have an even deeper problem. Henri Nouwen, a noted spiritual writer, describes his experience with the clergy of Germany during a visit to that country and asks some basic and soul-searching questions. He writes:  
“(...) my fellow priests disagreed with each other on most issues they discussed. I was often the surprised witness of fierce debates involving both body and mind. Still there is agreement about one thing. Questions

concerning birth control, abortion and euthanasia, as well as questions about the Pope, bishops' appointments, clerical dress, liturgical styles and so on, are all symptoms of a much deeper question which is, "do we truly believe in God?" The Germans, no less than the French and Dutch have moved into a new age. The existence of God, the divinity of Christ, the spiritual authority of the Church are no longer foundational elements of Western European society. (...) Progressives and conservatives fight each other within the Church, but both are in constant danger of becoming completely irrelevant to what molds our contemporary society.

Is there a God who cares? Are there signs that history is guided by a merciful hand? Are there relationships which reach beyond the limits of the interpersonal intercommunal or international? Is life more than psychologists, sociologists, biologists and chemists can define? Is there anything to hope for after we have returned to dust? These questions are far from speculative. They touch the core of our civilization. Is the Church prepared to deal with these questions not just on an intellectual level, but on the level of daily life?" (Nouwen, Henri, *The Road to Daybreak*, Doubleday, 1988, p.124-125)

Is this where we are at? Food for thought!

10. Indeed, in the post-conciliar years, we have and are experiencing lights and shadows. Are the lights dispelling the shadows? Are the shadow overpowering the lights? What attitudes can we take as we look to the future? An attitude of fear and gloom? On several occasions and in equivalent terms our Holy Father, John Paul II, has prepared an appropriate faith attitude for the present and for the future: "In the world and in the Church of today we have very serious problems; perhaps as never before, however, the reasons for confidence, courage, hope and optimism are stronger and more convincing." Is our Pope 'whistling in the dark' to dispel fear and gain courage or does he have a valid reasons for his attitude and conviction? He believes in God and in His guiding presence in the Church. If I believe in God and in His guiding presence in the Church, then I, too, can afford to be confident, courageous, hopeful and optimistic. Once again, the really decisive question is: Do I believe in God and in His Church?

We the undersigned Catholic Bishops of Manitoba hereby and without hesitation, concur with our Holy Father, John Paul II, in expressing and reaffirming our belief in God and in His animating and guiding presence in the Church. We invite all to join us in renewing and reaffirming this same faith.

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