



CBCP Pastoral Exhortation on the 50th Anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* (25 July 1968)

“Every child is a blessing”

*Happy are all who fear the LORD, who walk in the ways of God.
What your hands provide you will enjoy; you will be happy and prosper:
Like a fruitful vine your wife within your home,
like olive plants your children around your table.
Just so will they be blessed who fear the LORD.
May the LORD bless you from Zion, all the days of your life
that you may share Jerusalem's joy
and live to see your children's children.
Peace upon Israel! (Psalm 128)*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we mark the 50th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, Blessed Paul VI's encyclical on parents' decision regarding the number of children, we offer these reflections based on our consultations with married couples and parents:

1. For the Filipino, every child is a gift from God.

It is natural for married Filipino couples to wholeheartedly embrace each child, who is a fruit of their love for each other. Despite the fear and criticism that arise from having big families, we still rejoice at the coming of a child. The Psalmist sings: *Children too are a gift from the LORD, the fruit of the womb, a reward* (Psalm 127:3).

When a Filipino mother is told that she should only have two children instead of five, she would automatically ask: Who among my children should have not been born? What will you do with my “excess” children?

2. For the Filipino, the parents are anointed by God to educate their children.

This, indeed, is “Responsible Parenthood.” It is not only reduced to the limiting of children. It is natural for parents to be responsible for their children.

Moreover, family planning is not only about “method.”¹ Every family plans for their future: when they are ready to have children or when to add more, how they will be raised, where they will be sent to school, how to teach them to pray, where they could go for vacations, how will they manage their finances, etc.

If family planning is simply reduced to the avoidance of pregnancy, should we be puzzled when some children feel that they are fruits of “unwanted pregnancies”? Won't they feel that their parents love them simply because they have no choice? This is the effect of what we call the “contraceptive mentality.”² Pope Francis says, “when speaking of children who come into the world, no sacrifice made by adults will be considered too costly or too great, if it means the child never has to feel that he or she is a mistake, or worthless or abandoned to the four winds and the arrogance of man.”³ The gift of a new child, entrusted by the Lord to a father and a mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong protection and has as its final goal the joy of eternal life.”⁴

3. For the Filipino, it is natural for couples to dream of staying together for a lifetime and to desire to beget children.

Blessed Paul VI describes married love as fully human, total, faithful and exclusive of all other until death, and fruitful.⁵ Isn't this the essence of marriage? For Pope Francis, “Love always gives life. Conjugal love ‘does not end with the couple... The couple, in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother’^{6,7}.”

For couples who find it difficult to conceive a child, Pope Francis advises, “I encourage those who cannot have children to expand their marital love to embrace those who lack a proper family situation. They will never regret having been generous. Adopting a child is an act of love, offering the gift of a family to someone who has none.”⁸



A Special Challenge to Protect God's Blessings

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Blessed Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, we also mark the 20th anniversary of the CBCP's Pastoral Letter on the Exploitation of Children: "*Welcoming Them for My Sake*" (Mt. 18:5): "Clearly the exploitation of children is a morally deplorable and criminal act because of the immense damage, oftentimes irreparable, it brings to children. Exploitation robs children the dignity of life, the enjoyment of life that is their inherent right. It deprives them of education that could secure for them a stable future. Children who have been sexually abused suffer the pain and trauma of their experience throughout their lives and are vulnerable to more abusive behavior and relationships later on in life." We are, therefore, challenged to intensify our efforts – in partnership with people of good will and institutions at the service of the common good – to foster a culture which protects children and not their abusers. We commend dioceses and parishes that "include issues of child abuse as a current social concern in the existing Family Apostolate Programs, in Pre-Cana and Post-Cana conferences and Marriage Encounter Programs" and have already set up child protection desks or offices that "extend legal, financial and expert psychological assistance to victims of child exploitation."⁹

Lastly, may we take to heart the call of Pope Francis for each one of us: "I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. They may not always encounter in them a confirmation of their own ideas or desires, but they will surely receive some light to help them better understand their situation and discover a path to personal growth. I also encourage the Church's pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church."¹⁰

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, 25 July 2018.

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¹ Based on experience, any "family planning method" that is "natural" is good and effective, compared to "artificial" or "chemical" – even if it is termed as "modern". Why? What is good about natural methods is that no chemical or apparatus that causes adverse side effects is introduced into a woman's body. The couple also learns how to listen and to be sensitive to each other. The marital relationship deepens in such a way that they get to know, respect and love each other more (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2370). Moreover, the natural method is used not only to postpone the possibility of begetting a child but also to time it when the couple decides that they are ready for it. The sexual act and pregnancy can also be scheduled in such a way that the married couple can increase the possibility of having a male or a female child. Among the "natural" methods are the following: Billings ovulation, Lactational amenorrhea, Basal body temperature, Sympto-thermal, Porsuelo, Standard days – if contraceptives are not used on fertile days. Why? Because by using condoms as a sort of "backup" contraceptive, the couple would fall once more into the "contraceptive mentality" that has poisoned the relationship between countless couples and destroyed many families (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1756). Why are there many methods? Because everyone is unique. Couples choose the method that works for them.

² The contraceptive mentality ultimately leads to abortion. How? When contraceptives fail.

³ *Catechesis*, 8 April 2015.

⁴ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 166.

⁵ *Humanae vitae*, n. 9.

⁶ Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, n. 96.

⁷ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 165.

⁸ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 179.

⁹ Pastoral Letter on the Exploitation of Children "*Welcoming Them for My Sake*" (Mt. 18:5), 31 January 1998.

¹⁰ *Amoris laetitia*, n. 312.