**The Issue of Contraception**

During the wedding ceremony, the couple will be asked “Will you accept children lovingly from God?” The openness to children is a fundamental purpose of marriage and stems from the free, total, faithful giving of one spouse to another. If, indeed, the couple approaches marriage with confidence and trust in their spouse, the fruitfulness of children will be the natural result of the marital union.

**The World's view of sex and fertility**

Modern society has relegated the marital act to, primarily, gratification. It has also downgraded the life-giving component marital love to a secondary status. Current thought equates children as a burden, as something that will interfere with the couple achieving their goals in life. News items are often quoted about the time and cost burdens associated with raising a family, denigrating child bearing below financial and career success. The implication is that the time needed for children will interfere with one’s job and lead to fewer promotions and less self-satisfaction in employment; and money would be better spent on a bigger house, new cars, or more exotic vacations, than on one or more children. The overall message is that the burden of children will, somehow, limit one's potential to have a full and productive life.

**Contraception (artificial birth control)** Because secular society views children as something to be avoided or limited, modern science has developed methods to prevent pregnancy during sex. Most of the impetus is on the female; allowing her to be available to the male without the familial obligations.

**Effectiveness of artificial birth control.** None of the birth control methods are 100% effective. The table in the appendix summarizes the failure rate of common birth control methods, which should be alarming. Commonly, the failure rate for contraceptives is 8% to 30%. Continued use over time increases the chance of an unwanted pregnancy to 60% to 90%.

**Health risks of artificial birth control.** Several artificial birth control methods carry significant health risks. They are touted as a means to free the couple from unwanted pregnancy; ignoring the medical dangers. Many oral contraceptives have been classified as "Group 1 carcinogens", leading to a risk of cancer in the breast, liver, and cervix1; as well as heart disease, stroke, venous thromboembolism, blood clots and heart attack.

**The Church’s view of sex and fertility**

“God created man in his own image… male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27).The Church views human sexuality as something natural, wholesome, and in keeping with God’s plan for humanity. Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In contrast to the self-centeredness promoted by secular society, the Church views physical intimacy as a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. “In the marital act, the spouses’ achieve the twofold end of marriage, the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These meanings cannot be separated without altering the couple’s spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family” (CCC2363).

**Contraception (artificial birth control).** The primary objection of the Church to these methods is that, with artificial birth control, the couple separates sexuality from fertility. This interferes with the natural process that links the marital act with the procreation of children. In addition, some methods do not just prevent conception, but also act to make it impossible for a fertilized egg to implant or continue to develop (abortion.)

Couples using contraception are withholding from each other their own fertility, contradicting the "total self-giving" of marriage.

**Natural Family Planning (NFP).** The Church teaches that, for just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. One of the steps for preparing a couple for marriage is instruction on morally acceptable methods for family planning. The Church teaches that artificial methods of birth control are morally unacceptable because they interfere with the natural process of human reproduction. NFP is morally acceptable and has little to no increased risks of health concerns.

**Effectiveness of NFP**. The failure rate of NFP is 1.8%4. The risk of unintended pregnancy with NFP is about 25% over 10 years with perfect use4.. There are distinct times of fertility and infertility that occur in a regular cycle, which are readily observable once trained in the method, and can be used to abstain from sex when the woman is fertile.

**Health risks of NFP.** As Natural Family Planning is completely natural, introducing no chemicals, hormones, or devices into either partner's body, there are no health risks associated with its use. In fact, the knowledge of the fertility cycles of the woman provided with NFP helps couples struggling with infertility to become pregnant by identifying the most fertile times for intercourse.

**Summary.** Secular society views sex as something for the pleasure of the individual, separated from the life-giving aspects of sexual union. Towards that end, methods have been developed to prevent any pregnancy that would naturally occur with the completion of the sexual act. In contrast, the Church views sex as a communion between husband and wife for their mutual benefit. Openness to children is assumed within a Christian marriage, and a pregnancy that occurs within the confines of marriage should be accepted with great joy. One of the greatest differences between the secular world’s acceptance of artificial birth control methods and the Church’s acceptance of NFP is the attitude of the couple toward children. For couples using artificial birth control, pregnancy is often considered a burden, and may lead to abortion of the fetus. For couples using NFP, pregnancy is usually considered a blessing, a gift from God, consistent with their marriage vows.

Information on Natural Family Planning is available at the Archdiocese website:

<http://archden.org/eflm/nfp/>