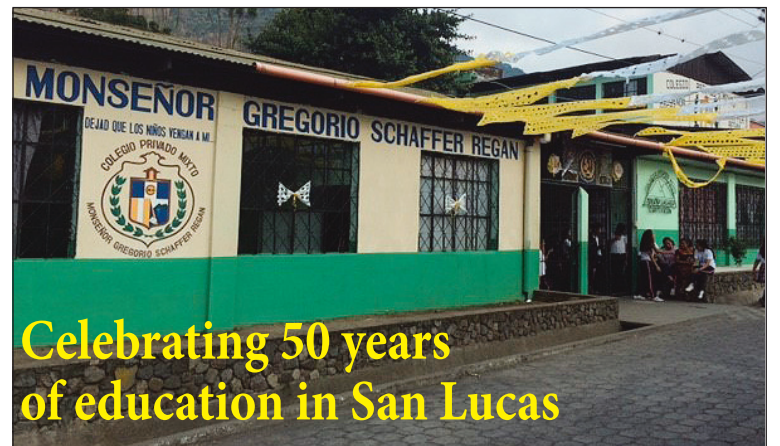


THE PRAIRIE CATHOLIC

Pastoral news from across the Diocese of New Ulm

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Celebrating 50 years of education in San Lucas

In May, the mission in San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala celebrated the 50th anniversary of Colegio Monseñor Gregorio Schaffer, the mission elementary school. Founded by Msgr. Greg Schaffer and a group of School Sisters of Notre Dame, it was the first school in the San Lucas area that made education a viable option for the local Maya children.

(Read more about the school's anniversary on page 8)

Humanae Vitae articulates the Church's teaching about human sexuality, conjugal love, and responsible parenthood

by Sr. Candace Fier

On July 25, 1968, Pope Paul VI shocked the world when he defied the assumption of many that he would change the Church's teaching on contraception. Instead, his encyclical re-affirmed the Church's traditional teaching regarding family planning and responsible parenthood. "[T]here is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning [of the marital act] and both are inherent in the marital act. This connection was established by God and human beings are not permitted to break it. . . ." (*Humanae Vitae*, 12)

The Church will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* (Of

Human Life) on July 25, 2018.

This papal document focuses on God's plan for married love and the transmission of human life.

"Dissent" quickly became a buzzword associated with the encyclical's teachings and the very public nature of this dissent made this a historical moment for the Church. At the same time, Pope Paul VI's invitation for assent by "all men and women of good will" contained in the encyclical awakened in many not only support, but a search for the truth that stood behind the Church's teaching.

The encyclical

Humanae Vitae prohibits artificial contraception, sterilization, and abortion as means of regulating procreation. It emphasizes that married love involves the total self-gift of the spouses. In marriage, the husband and wife are called to give themselves unconditionally to one another in a love that is free, total, faithful, exclusive, and fruitful.

Pope Paul VI's encyclical demonstrates the unbreakable connection of the unitive and procreative aspects of love. "[T]he marital act, which unites husband and wife with the closest bond, also makes them capable of bringing forth new life . . . And if both essential meanings are preserved that of union and procreation, the marital act fully maintains its capacity for [fostering] true mutual love and its ordination to the highest mission of parenthood, to which human beings are called." (*Humanae Vitae* 12)

Therefore, any act that has the potential to impair the capacity to transmit human life violates love in its unitive and procreative meaning



This year marks the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's important encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life). Written in 1968, the document provides beautiful and clear teaching about God's plan for married love and the transmission of life.

and contradicts both the natural law – the law written into the nature of man and woman – and the eternal law of God. Artificial contraception and sterilization lead to acts that by their nature call forth new life, but yet deny God the possibility to create it. To be faithful to the Church's teaching, each marital act must be open to God bestowing the gift of new life.

The Church, in her love and concern for each person, recognizes the need for couples to perfect each other and their marriage by following God's plan for their family. The prayerful decision of when to add another child to the family is central to

this responsible parenthood before God. This is accomplished by knowing the fertility and infertility of the woman's cycle through Natural Family Planning (NFP) and then using that knowledge to achieve or avoid or space a pregnancy. There is a key distinction between this approach and artificial contraception. With NFP the couple uses their natural capacity for infertility to avoid or space children, while artificial contraception impedes the natural process of conception.

A prophetic encyclical

As controversial as it was, *Humanae Vitae* was also prophetic. Pope Paul VI accurately foresaw the effects of

contraception on the Church and society: lowered moral standards in society would result in an increase in marital infidelity; loss of respect for women reducing them to a mere instrument for the satisfaction of another's desires; governments claiming the right to impose contraceptive methods/ technologies on everyone, and that human beings would claim unlimited dominion over their own bodies.

Yes, couples today face difficult decisions if they wish to live according to God's plan for marriage and family and counteract the effects of contraception in society. In his Jan. 29, 2018 address to the Roman Rota, Pope Francis calls on couples to follow God's plan. "The conscience assumes a decisive role in the demanding choices that couples must face to welcome and build the conjugal union and hence the family according to God's plan. . . that conjugal union open to the gift of children is great joy for God, for the Church, for humanity."

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our consciences, to understand the things we struggle to comprehend, and make us fully loving human beings that faithfully follow his plan for our lives.

Editor's Note: Sr. Candace Fier, ISSM, is director of the Office of Family Life for the Diocese of New Ulm.

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Marriage and accepting gifts from God

50th anniversary of Humanae Vitae reminds us to trust

by Claudia Broman
Prairie Catholic correspondent

When a man and woman unite in physical intimacy they must realize that life could result, says Dr. Deborah Savage, a clinical faculty member in philosophy and pastoral ministry at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity. To use contraception during sex, she continued, “is to deny God his rightful place,” and reduces marital sex to using a spouse.

“Sex is ordered toward both the procreative dimension and the unitive. The man and woman become one through the marital act,” she said. It is not just about babies, it is not just about intimacy, it is about marital sex being both things every time.

Since the birth control pill was introduced in 1963 and legalized in 1965, the use of contraception has been controversial. Pope Paul VI formed a commission to discuss the issue, which led to the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. This summer marks the 50th anniversary of the document, which was released by Pope Paul VI on July 25, 1968.

People in the late 1960s expected that the commission would affirm the use of birth control, Savage said. At the time the commission was meeting, then-Bishop Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul

II) advised Pope Paul VI that allowing contraception would be a huge mistake.

When Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* the faithful were surprised by the document, as were many priests, Savage said. “I am absolutely convinced that *Humanae Vitae* is a prophetic document,” she said. “*Humanae Vitae* is fundamentally a pro-life document because it recognizes that life is always a gift.”

Humanae Vitae condemns sterilization, abortion and birth control; it says every time a married man and woman have sex they should give their entire selves to one another – to perfect each other and to create life in cooperation with God.

Love within marriage should emulate God’s love, which is creative and all-giving, *Humanae Vitae* explains, for only being like God’s love does the marriage itself retain true love. Loving as God loves is not easy, as it requires mastery of self and emotion, the encyclical says.

Although the Catholic Church forbids artificial birth control, it does allow for Natural Family Planning, a method of timing sex within marriage to coincide with – or avoid – periods of fertility.

“We can vouch for its working,”



“In a word, the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families, and human society.” – Pope Paul VI (*Humanae Vitae*, 10)

said Brenda and Dan Voracek, a couple from North Mankato. They have been teaching other couples how to use NFP since 2001 and have been using the method themselves since 1998.

“It is green. There are no side effects. You’re not taking a drug or anything like that,” Dan said. “It’s simple to learn and there’s no ongoing cost to keep using it.”

When sex is not on the table all the time it allows for more courtship within the marriage, Brenda added. Because the Voraceks are not actively trying to have children, they reserve sex for the times of Brenda’s cycle when she is not fertile.

“We leave ourselves open to God’s intention,” Dan said. If God decides they should be pregnant, then they trust in Him.

Angela and Alex Wanningman of Sleepy Eye have been married two years and have been using NFP for about a year.

“It’s been working well for us,” said Angela. The Wanningmans say they want to live in a way that is giving to each other, loving of each other, and accepting of each other and of God’s plan. Since they began using NFP they said

they have noticed a difference in their marriage, their relationship with one another, and their relationship with God. “We’ve been learning to surrender to God,” Angela said.

“It’s given us more freedom to love one another and deepen our commitment to each other,” Alex said. It’s made the moments of intimacy the couple has more meaningful, they say.

Unlike some couples who use NFP to avoid pregnancy, Alex and Angela used the method to better time the possibility of conception, as they had been struggling with infertility issues.

“After five months of using the method we were able to conceive,” Angela said.

Being open to life and “accepting children as a gift from the Lord,” is essential to marriage, said Fr. Mark Steffl, pastor of St. Catherine’s in Redwood Falls and the judicial vicar for the Diocese of New Ulm.

Grace is provided through the marriage sacrament, and that grace helps a married couple to accept children as God wants. Excluding children from marriage through contraception is “excluding

something that God wants to give,” Fr. Steffl said.

Plus, this openness gives marriage more joy, he said. “The sacrament is to help us be open to the graces and to what God wants,” Fr. Steffl said. “So much of what love truly is, is sacrifice. But you have to be open to that.”

Sometimes married Catholic couples will say they are following their conscience by using artificial birth control. “But there is such a thing as a mis-formed conscience,” Fr. Steffl said. “We need to have a well-formed conscience.” He encourages couples who question *Humanae Vitae* to come to a fuller understanding, to pray, and to consider “at what point is this me being willful or prideful versus what the Lord really wants?” It comes down to giving up control, Fr. Steffl said.

“The anniversary of this document, *Humanae Vitae*, this teaching, is an opportunity to be able to think about it in a concrete way,” Fr. Steffl said. “It draws our attention to the good of life and the good of children. They are truly a gift, but the pressure of the outside world says the opposite today.”

Knowing and sharing God’s perfect ‘Covenant of Love’

by Claudia Broman
Prairie Catholic correspondent

At center of Bishop John LeVoi’s book “Covenant of Love” is a struggle that “goes on in the human heart.” The struggle, described in detail by Pope John Paul II in his writings about the Theology of the Body, is being true to oneself as an image of God – loving as He does – in total self-surrender for the well-being of others. It is a struggle between the mind, the will, and the body: in the bedroom, at home with family, at work, and in society.

Fr. Richard Hogan and now-Bishop LeVoi were seminarians at the St. Paul Seminary when Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978; they entered in the fall of 1977 before their ordination in May 1981. Prior to their entrance, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

In the 1960s and early 1970s there was a lot of controversy about marriage, sexuality and family life, Bishop LeVoi said. Priests in seminary, including Hogan and LeVoi, were considering: How would we present these topics in pastoral settings? Especially to those preparing for marriage?

Bishop LeVoi said that Pope John Paul II “had a solid theological background,” as well as a technical philosophical background in phenomenology (the study of lived human experience and consciousness). Strengthened by his knowledge of theology and philosophy, and partnered with faith, Pope John Paul II prepared and delivered numerous papal audiences in the late 1970s and early 1980s focused on the Theology of the Body. “It was kind of like a serial,” Bishop LeVoi explained, where people were eagerly anticipating the next chapter. “He had great insight for the modern age.”

Fr. Hogan (now deceased) wrote a commentary about the audiences in the December 1981 issue of *Fidelity* magazine. It inspired the two priests to consider the material in book form, and so they decided to present the pope’s ideas in a “way that we thought would be appealing to people,” Bishop LeVoi said.

“It had some years to germinate,” he said. “We started writing probably in 1983, somewhere in there.”

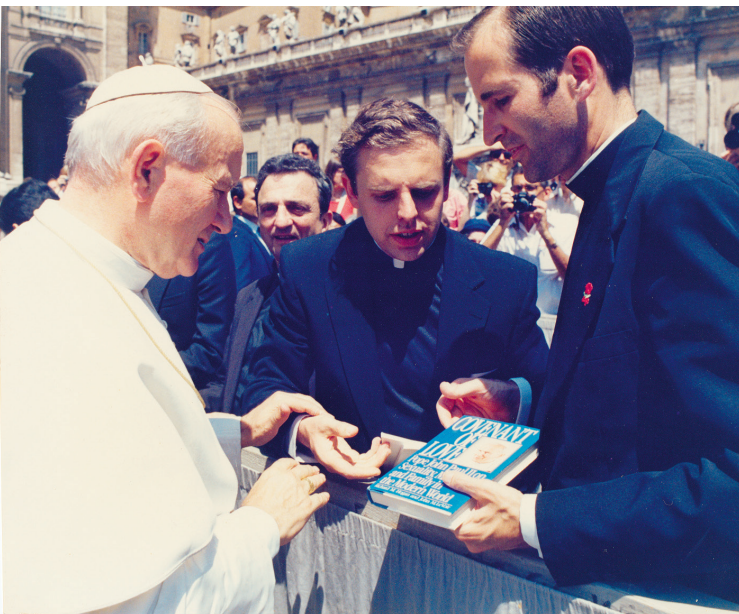
They each purchased a computer and called each other on the phone, transmitting their writing in a way that the computers would then translate and type out line by line. By today’s standards of communication it was a gruelingly slow pace, but despite the time-consuming nature of the writing it was a project that both priests saw as essential to their work in parishes.

“It was so important to be able to talk to couples preparing for marriage,” Bishop LeVoi said, and to couples who were already married. The topics contained in the book were also relevant to hearing confessions and providing advice to people having difficulties making decisions about contraception. The ideas of sexuality and family pertained to youth, as well, in the midst of forming their identities as human persons.

In 1985 “Covenant of Love” was first published by Doubleday, later to be re-issued by Ignatius Press in 1992.

Key to understanding St. John Paul II’s writing is that “we are living images of God; we are representations of God,” Bishop LeVoi said, adding that people as persons are created in the image and likeness of God, body and soul. “To know ourselves, we need to know God. We come to know God through Christ.” This knowledge of how to know God and self was key in answering the question raised in the late 1960s and early 1970s: what is life all about? By following Jesus – which is not an egotistical come and follow me, but an invitation to be like God, the bishop explained – we can see how an image of God chooses and acts. By choosing as Christ chooses and acting how Christ acts, we can be, and are, as we were created to be.

“Covenant of Love” also works to explain how all things were created through Christ. “He created man and woman, he created marriage. Through him all things were created and came to be,” Bishop



In 1985, then Fr. John LeVoi (right) and Fr. Richard Hogan obtained front row tickets to one of the General Audiences outside St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City where they presented their newly published book “Covenant of Love” to Pope John Paul. The Holy Father was under the impression that the two young priests were students and asked where they were studying. When he heard they were parish priests his eyes lit up as he smiled, saying “Ahhh, parish priests!” and he thanked them for writing the book.

LeVoi said. And in this creation, marriage, too, is a representation of God’s love.

“We don’t have different words for different kinds of love,” the bishop said, “It’s a weakness in our language. Sometimes it’s difficult for people to know what love is.” Love is a choice to do what is good for the other, he says.

Married love differs from the love people have for things, or friends, or even family. Married love is unique from these other kinds of love because it is permanent, faithful, and open to life, just as God’s love is concurrently permanent, faithful, and open to life, Bishop LeVoi explained. Marriage itself is a sacrament that brings about what it signifies. “By living out their marital love, married couples are a sign, or sacrament of God’s love,” he said. Love lived out well in marriage affects families, societies, and friends, Bishop LeVoi said. Loving the way God loves is contagious. “It is diffusive of itself,” he explained. “And we need more of that today.”

Love in marriage involves the whole person, body and soul. “To touch the body is to touch

themselves for the good of the other, love is present, whether that be in marriage, in the home, in the workplace, or in society. In perfecting this love people become integrated: “there is wholeness, there is no conflict between the mind, the will, and the body,” Bishop LeVoi said.

Love is only perfected with the assistance of God’s grace, as each person faces struggles between what the mind wants and what the body wants. God’s grace gives us the strength to act in an integrated way, whether that be with having the self-possession to not eat cake while on a diet, or to truly give of oneself in marriage, he explained. “The only way we can live our faith is with God’s help and with his grace,” he said.

It is not always easy to follow Church teachings with regard to marriage and sexuality, especially when seen in light of alternatives available in our society. But through prayer, receiving the sacraments, and obtaining support from the Catholic community, “we have the strength to say the Church’s teaching is ‘different’ but it can be done,” Bishop LeVoi said. “It isn’t easy to live this,” he said, encouraging families living the Catholic faith to gather for prayer and recreation “so we can support one another.”



Celebrate God’s gift of married love!
Natural Family Planning Awareness Week
July 22-28, 2018
www.usccb.org/nfp/awareness-week/index.cfm