

The Evangelization Station
Hudson, Florida, USA
E-mail: evangelization@earthlink.net
www.evangelizationstation.com

Pamphlet 540

Catholicism and Family Planning

In the past, some people have associated the Catholic religion with very prudent views on sex. Some believed that the Roman Catholic Church frowned upon all acts of sexual activity except for the purpose of procreation. Yet, this belief is somewhat inaccurate. While it is true that the Catholic Church encourages sex for procreation purposes, it also views sex as the ultimate beautiful expression of love between married spouses.

Sex Before Marriage

Followers of the Roman Catholic Church are strongly advised against having sexual relations before getting married. Referred to as fornication, having sex before marriage is considered to be a mortal sin, requiring one to go to confession before they are allowed to take part in Holy Communion again. However, it is not just strictly the act of having sexual intercourse that the Roman Catholic Church advises its followers against; it is any form of sexual activity.

Because engaging in sexual activity may lead to temptation and therefore sex, couples that are not married should not take part in any type of sexual relation. While couples are encouraged to get to know each other intimately, this intimacy refers to a mental and spiritual intimacy. In some instances, physical affection may be displayed through hugging, holding hands, cuddling and

perhaps kissing. However, not all church leaders will agree with this type of physical relationship before marriage and promote complete abstinence. Furthermore, living together before marriage is also viewed as morally wrong.

Sex Within Marriage

For Catholics, sex within marriage is a wonderful thing. It not only helps to unite the couple, but also presents the possibility of creating a new life. In the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, a marriage is the ideal, stable environment in which to raise children. Couples that abide by the Catholic Church belief system are encouraged to have as many children as their circumstances allow. However, the Church also recognizes the need to space children out – they certainly don't expect a woman to constantly be pregnant! For this reason, certain forms of birth control are considered to be acceptable.

Birth Control

Since sex is meant for procreation purposes, married Catholic couples should always be open to the possibility of a pregnancy. While family planning is allowed, the use of contraceptives, both hormonal and barrier, are not. Likewise, tubal ligations and vasectomies for purposes of contraception and sterilization are not acceptable, although they may be done out of medical necessity.

Barrier methods of birth control, such as the condom and the cervical cap, along with

hormonal contraceptives, like the birth control pill and Depo-Provera, interfere with the act of conception. Specifically, they prevent the egg from being fertilized by a sperm and in some cases may inhibit a pregnancy further by preventing the implantation of an egg. To Catholics, purposely stopping the joining of an egg and sperm is thought to be a sin; therefore these forms of birth control are not accepted.

So what can Catholic couples do if they want to space out their children? Natural Family Planning methods are encouraged and supported by the Roman Catholic Church. Natural Family Planning (NFP) is an umbrella term for various forms of birth control that do not involve any hormones or physical barriers to prevent pregnancy, but instead rely on periods of abstinence during a woman's menstrual cycle. Popular forms of NFP include the rhythm method, basal body temperature charting and the Standard Days Method.

Because NFP is a very involved form of birth control, often requiring regular charting and monitoring of various bodily functions, it is necessary that both partners be dedicated to practicing NFP. It is precisely for this reason that NFP is generally recommended for those in stable, committed relationships. Additionally, those who use NFP often say that this method of contraception helps bring them closer to their partner, as it improves their communication about their bodies and their sexuality.

Abortion

The Roman Catholic Church considers life to begin at conception, when an egg is fertilized by a sperm. Therefore, abortion is seen as a form of murder, making it a sin. Any Catholic that obtains or takes part in an abortion is considered to be excommunicated from the Church, although they may be allowed back if they ask for forgiveness for their sin. In addition to an actual abortion procedure, the Church views other actions, including the use of an IUD, the Morning After Pill, RU-486; embryonic stem cell research, and IVF, as acts of abortion because they have the potential to destroy an embryo. Yet, the Church also distinguishes between what they consider to be a direct abortion and an indirect abortion.

A direct abortion is an act that purposely ends the life of an embryo or fetus. These forms of abortion are always thought to be morally wrong, thus making them a sin. An indirect abortion refers to an act that is used to save a woman's life but that indirectly causes an unborn child to die. For example, a woman dealing with an ectopic pregnancy would need to have part of her fallopian tube removed in order to save her life. Although the fetus is not destroyed by this act, it will die because it is taken out of the body. However, this type of situation very rarely arises thereby making the majority of abortion procedures a grave sin in the eyes of the Church.