

Fifty years later, Pope's birth control predictions still controversial – and true

It's been 50 years since Pope Paul VI released [*Humanae Vitae*](#), his controversial encyclical.

A reaffirmation of the Church's opposition to artificial contraception, experts say the Pope's predictions on the consequences of artificial contraception on society have turned out to be correct.

"I think [Blessed Pope Paul VI](#) was very accurate in terms of the general lowering of morality, (with) the mainstreaming of contraception from governments. I think the predictions have come true," said Monsignor Brian Bransfield, general secretary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"So I think it's exceedingly relevant to say that procreation and unity are at the centre of married love."

Bransfield, an author and professor of moral theology, was the featured speaker at the [2018 Catholic Family Life Conference](#) in Lac Ste. Anne June 29-July 2.



Pope Paul VI

Humanae Vitae – meaning “Of Human Life” – was published in 1968 in response to a Vatican study, which argued that the Church should allow couples to use artificial contraception.

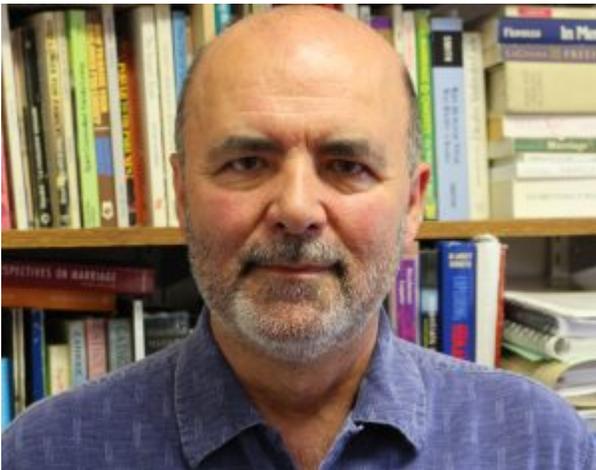
The Church and *Humanae Vitae* taught that artificial contraception violates God's intended purpose for sex, which strengthens the family by uniting the husband and wife and allowing them to have the gift of children. Pope Paul VI notably predicted that the using contraceptives would lead to increased marital infidelity, lower moral standards in society and even lead to dehumanizing women.

In response to contraception and its consequences, Bransfield said the Church offers an alternative and more attractive perspective to human sexuality.

“With human sexuality, we always teach that with the dignity and worth of the person, a person can never be treated as an object,” said Bransfield. “People are a gift and must be treated with reverence and dignity.”

Humanae Vitae was immediately met with controversy by Catholics upon release, as most Christian denominations already allowed the use of artificial contraception by 1968.

Many rejected the Church's teaching in 1968, and continue to do so today. In Canada, an estimated three-quarters of women have used an oral contraceptive – also known as ‘the pill’ – at least once during their life, according to [Statistics Canada](#).



Prof. Paul Flaman

Paul Flaman, a professor of human sexuality and bioethics at St. Joseph's College, says *Humanae Vitae* does allow a way to regulate births – through natural family planning.

There are [several versions](#) of natural family planning, but all involve becoming familiar with the woman's fertility cycle, so that the couple can regulate births and understand each other's bodies.

“Some people consider the Church’s moral teaching archaic,” said Flaman. (But) there are no health risks added with the use of natural family planning.”

Not only does this help regulate births, Flaman said, it also encourages communication between spouses.

Flaman noted that many of his students in his human sexuality classes tell him they have tried contraception and premarital sex, but the experience didn’t lead to happiness.

“They’re open minded. They want to look and ask ‘What does the Church have to offer?’”

Monsignor Bransfield said it’s essential that Catholics learn about *Humanae Vitae*, since its teachings are grounded in respect for the human person, created by God “with dignity and worth.

“A person can’t be used as an object, so the teaching of the Church is very clear on the dignity and high-calling of the human person, and I think that’s relevant for every age.”