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Brothers and Sisters,

I write this to call to your attention the significant anniversary of a papal encyclical you should be familiar with: *Humanae Vitae*. Fifty years ago today July 25, 1968 Blessed Pope Paul VI issued this document in Rome to articulate the Church's teaching on the use of artificial contraception. Across the centuries papal documents have had varying degrees of impact on the life of the Church and the world. Few have proved to be as prophetic and necessary as this one. On this anniversary, I'd like to offer a few thoughts on this important and significant teaching.

First, *Humanae Vitae* calls us to reflect on the profound dignity of marriage and sexuality. Pope Paul VI tells us that the sexual act between spouses bears two great blessings: union and procreation. God designed the sexual embrace to deepen a couple's love for one another and bring precious children into the world. Through these two ends, spousal union and procreation, God touches our everyday lives with His divine love. What a gift!

Second, we need to recognize that these tremendous blessings are intended by God to be kept together. When couples use artificial contraception, it represents an attempt to separate marital love from openness to new life. Such an attempt wounds the dignity of the spousal relationship. This is not God's intention for the sexual act. In *Humanae Vitae* (paragraph 14) Paul VI wrote, "excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means."

Lastly, *Humanae Vitae* affirms that couples can space the births of their children through observing the natural cycles of fertility in women. Throughout the course of a marriage there may be serious physical, economic, social, or psychological reasons to avoid pregnancy. Pope Paul VI challenged medical professionals and scientists to perfect and promote methods of Natural Family Planning so that couples could easily learn them and avoid the temptation to resort to artificial contraception. Thankfully, 50 years later we have multiple methods of natural family planning which are easy to learn and are highly effective. Our diocese is blessed with numerous NFP teachers who you can find out about at ptdiocese.org/nfp.

I encourage you to make time to study these teachings within your families and parish communities. While many individuals may not fully understand or agree with the Church's teaching on this issue, there are plenty of living witnesses across our diocese who have seen God's grace pour into their lives by living out the Church's call to faithfulness and love. Be bold and share such stories with those close to you! The Lord works through our witness to bring people closer to Him.

May the Lord abundantly bless each of you.

Yours in Christ,

Most Rev. William A. Wack, CSC