# *Family Planning By HG Bishop Serapion*

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Family Planning

Â  Family Planning means that the family plans to have children according to its economic and social conditions, as well as according to its ability to care for the children spiritually, economically, and socially. The family's role is not limited only to having children, but more essentially to raising the children well. The family's awareness of her responsibility towards raising her children is essential. For the Chur ffb ch, the core of family planning is centralized in the family's awareness of her responsibility towards raising the children, and that this role is carried out as well as can be. For economic, social, or spiritual reasons the family may find that she can't carry out her responsibility. Thus, contraception is considered. This is an important factor to consider when accepting the principle of family planning: the inability of the family to provide comprehensive care for the children. The Church acknowledges the need for family planning in order to face the worldwide problem of population growth, which threatens the economy of many nations. H.H. Pope Shenouda III said, "The rise in population growth poses a danger to the countries, and birth control has become an economic and social necessity, which will greatly affect the future of our country. Therefore, we have to restrain the problem of the explosive population growth, which drains all our projects and national economy." The presence of a common necessity allows us to accept the principle of family planning. However, the circumstances of each family are different. Therefore, the decision of family planning is a personal one, left up to every family to decide in accordance with her situation, so long as she is aware of her responsibilities towards raising her children, as well as towards the society in which we live. We will discuss some points, which will raise the family's awareness in regards to family planning: 1. One of the goals of marriage is procreation. However, it is not the only reason for marriage. A Christian marriage will continue even if it is not blessed by children. Therefore, in Christianity infertility is not a reason for divorce. 2. Children are a blessing from God. God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." (Gen. 9:1) God also blessed Abraham and told him, "And I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great." (Gen. 12:2) He promised him that his descendants will be like the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16), and as the stars of the heaven in number (Gen. 15:5). God also told Abraham, "No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations." (Gen. 17:5) Also, in Psalms it is written, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord." (Ps. 127:3) But not all offspring is a blessing from God. God, Who promised Abraham to bless him by having many descendants, also placed a condition for that. He said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations." (Gen. 17:9) God gave him circumcision as a sign of His covenant. Also God's covenant was not with all of Abraham's descendants. He said, "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac." (Gen. 17:21) and from Isaac's offspring He chose Jacob. The true blessing the family receives from the Lord is the good, God-fearing children. The family of Eli the priest was not blessed, because of his evil sons. (1Sam. 2:27-35) Thus it is neither the gender nor the number of children that is important. The family should not be happy with how many children she has, but with the good children she offers to the Lord, the Church, and society. 3. Family Planning does not contradict nature. God ffb  placed a

natural means of birth control in humanity since a woman is unable to conceive after a certain age. Also, during her childbearing years, she is fertile during certain times of her monthly cycle. During the rest of the time, she is not fertile. All natural family planning is based on determining this period and abstaining from all marital physical relations during this period. 4. Family Planning does not oppose God's will. As previously mentioned, God placed the principle of family planning naturally. When man realized this scientific fact, he was able to utilize it as a means for natural contraception. Also, better understanding of the reproductive system and how it functions made it possible to find different means of contraception. God allows man to use these discoveries for the goodness and happiness of humanity. This principle also applies to man's understanding of medicine, in which there is prevention of diseases, using herbal or chemical pharmaceuticals, performing surgical operations, etc. All the above help to prevent illnesses or heal diseases, especially the ones that are deadly. Again, all of these medical developments do not oppose God's will. 5. Christianity teaches monogamy, and divorce is not allowed due to infertility. In a Christian marriage, the couple abstains from intimate physical relations during periods of fasting and before Holy Communion in order to dedicate oneself to worship. Although the goal of these matters is not family planning, yet they help. 6. Some use the story of Onan, son of Judah, (Gen. 38:6-10) as the basis for rejecting the principle of family planning. However, it is clear in this story that Onan refused because the offspring would carry his brother's name, "But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother." (Gen. 38:9) God caused Onan to die, because he refused to give an heir to his brother as the Mosaic Law dictated at that time. Onan would certainly not have done the same thing if the offspring was going to carry his name, not his brother's name. 7. As long as there is a necessity, the Church agrees on the principle of family planning. However, the method used for contraception must have two elements: a. It should not endanger the mother's health. This does not apply to the side effects that occur due to the intake of any medication. Also, it has to be determined which method best suits the mother's health and well being. This is left up to her gynecologist, and may vary from one woman to another. b. That the method will not cause the abortion of the fetus. The life of the fetus begins from the moment the sperm fertilizes the ovum, and abortion is rejected as a means of contraception. A question was raised regarding the usage of an intra-uterine device (IUD), and if it causes early abortion. The Bishopric of Social Welfare gave special attention to this matter and formed a scientific committee to research how the IUD works. A scientific summary was presented, supported by scientific research. The most important points are the following: 1. There is a lot of development in the different kinds of IUD's used. The kind that was used in the seventies prevented the implantation of the fertilized ovum. This is considered abortion. 2. Nowadays, the IUD's used cause a chemical reaction in the uterus, which prevents the motility of the sperms; thus 52d the ovum is not fertilized. In the USA, only two IUD's are marketed, and they are progesterone-releasing, which effectively prevents fertilization. We recommend that women consult with their physicians before the insertion of an IUD to make sure how it functions. It is preferable to use a different method of contraception if there is doubt on how the IUD works or if it may result in early abortion.