

This was in response to a question that came through our “Ask” button on the front page of our website...

### **What is the diocese standing on married birth control?**

Thank you for your question! I will answer your question with the following:

#### **I. The Catholic Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.**

1. First, the question should be asked as: *What is the teaching of the Catholic Church on the use of birth control (contraceptive) in the sacrament of marriage?*
2. Why? Because any and all Catholic dioceses from around the world *belong* to and are in *union* with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, which is the Catholic Church; her head is the Bishop of Rome (that is Pope Francis at this time).
3. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) writes this about the Church as *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*:

To believe that the Church is "holy" and "catholic," and that she is "one" and "apostolic" (as the Nicene Creed adds), is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the Apostles' Creed we profess "one Holy Church" (Credo . . . Ecclesiam), and not to believe in the Church, so as not to confuse God with his works and to attribute clearly to God's goodness all the gifts he has bestowed on his Church. (n. 750)

4. So the teaching of the Catholic Church is universal, which means worldwide. So all the Catholic dioceses throughout the world will follow one teaching in all matters pertaining to *faith and morals*.
5. **So the first answer to your question is that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama (there is the Archdiocese of Birmingham in England), in which I assume you reside, follows and teaches the same teaching as the Catholic Church on the question of birth control and marriage.**

#### **II. The Dignity of Marriage**

1. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) writes this about the dignity (meaning) of marriage:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward (1) *the good of the spouses* and (2) *the procreation* and (3) *education of offspring*; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." (n. 1601; emphasis added)

2. Thus the marriage between a man and woman in the design of God has three full purposes:
- a. First, *for the total good of the spouses* (body, spirit, mind, and soul). In other words, the good of the husband is the good of the wife, and vice versa; two now become one flesh, one family. These goods can never be negotiated. For example, a man can never say to his fiancée, “Hey honey, I love you! Let us get married. After we get married, I would like to be intimate with you, say, one time per week.” This kind of thought or plan is contrary to the plan of God. From the moment of the wedding day—what is of the husband now belongs to the wife, and vice versa—all of the goods, health, body, money, everything.
  - b. Second, *to be open to the gift of life*, this is to be open to the gift of children that God might give to the couple. All married couples are called to be open to the gift of children. Now, to be open to the gift of children does not mean that they need to have a hundred of them! What it does mean is that each time a couple comes together to share their marital love with one another, they will not use any contraceptive (condom, birth-control pill, incomplete act, foreplay only, withdrawal from the body of the wife).
  - c. And third, they must prayerful discern how they can raise their family and provide education, especially the handing on of the faith, to their offspring.

The *Catechism* writes:

"By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."

Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. God himself said: "It is not good that man should be alone," and "from the beginning (he) made them male and female"; wishing to associate them in a special way in his own creative work, God blessed man and woman with the words: "Be fruitful and multiply." Hence, true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it, without diminishment of the other ends of marriage, are directed to disposing the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Savior, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day. (n. 1652)

### III. Contraception (an attempt to regulate or control birth)

The *Catechism* writes on the two-fold purposes of marriage:

The spouses' union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family.

The conjugal love of man and woman thus stands under the twofold obligation of fidelity and fecundity. (n. 2363)

So to use anything (condom, contraceptive pill...) in between this sacred and beautiful act of conjugal love between a husband and a wife is *contrary* to these two noble purposes—for the total good of the spouses (body, spirit, and soul) and to be opened to the *gift* of children.

That is why it is immoral to use contraception in marriage.

Could it be also immoral to use contraception in other sexual relationships, such as sexual relationships between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman? What about homosexual relationships?

The *Catechism* writes about these areas as well:

#### **Sexual sin before marriage:**

2353 Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children. Moreover, it is a grave scandal when there is corruption of the young.

#### **Chastity and homosexuality:**

2357 Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity,<sup>140</sup> tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered."<sup>141</sup> They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

2358 The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

2359 Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

#### **IV. Natural Family Planning (spacing children naturally)**

Information on natural child spacing and healthy, effective alternatives to birth control is available at [ccli.org](http://ccli.org). This method of family planning is acceptable and encouraged by the Catholic Church.

Note this, from the website of the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops):

Natural Family Planning is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy.

NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of the child. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife. (*Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry*, p. 23)

### **Summary:**

First, the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama is part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Second, the Catholic Church teaches the same thing worldwide when it comes to matters of faith and morals.

Third, marriage has three goods to it: total good for the spouses, openness to the gift of children, and the raising and education of children, especially in the handing on of the faith.

Fourth, to use anything that interferes with the sacred and beautiful marital act of love between a husband and a wife is immoral, because it closes the act in itself and is not open to the gift of life.

Finally, the Church allows for family planning through natural, healthy methods. This is referred to as Natural Family Planning. More information can be obtained at [ccli.org](http://ccli.org).

Please let me know if I can assist you in your faith journey.

God bless you!

Sincerely in Christ,

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