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Progress Report: The Human Life Foundation

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There is a general impression that family planning in today's world without the use of chemical or physical barriers is on its way out or practised only for religious reasons by those of an extraordinary scrupulous nature. However, that is not the case as the efforts of the Human Life Foundation clearly show.

This Foundation came into being in 1968 as American Catholic Bishops responded to Pope Paul VI's appeal to world science for the initiation of research to improve methods of child spacing in keeping with the tenets of *Humanae Vitae*. At that time, the bishops made available an initial grant of \$800,000 in seed money to launch a foundation for research in human reproduction, thereby instituting the Human Life Foundation. Today, the Foundation is a totally tax exempt, independent

corporation governed by a board of laymen and scientists. The purpose of the organization is three fold: 1. To sponsor, through funding pursuant to contracts entered into with qualified persons, scientific research, experimentation, investigation and analysis pertaining to the following areas:

- a) *the generation of human life and reproductive physiology (all the factors which enable scientists to find out what constitutes the beginning of human life),*
- b) *physiological and psychological ramifications of the human sexual act,*
- c) *medical implications of human fertility control,*
- d) *implications of human fertility control in relation to social and economic pressures upon family life,*

e) *what constitutes abortion, end of human life, euthanasia, biological significance of the term human, transplants.*

2. To make available to the public scientific knowledge derived from that research, experimentation, investigation and analysis, and to sponsor or carry out educational programs related to the foregoing areas.

3. To cooperate with other organizations and persons performing research and education in those areas.

Present limitations of time and finances make it imperative that initial studies by the Foundation focus almost exclusively on the several variations of child spacing by means of periodic abstinence. The main trust of this research is to reveal those mechanisms of human reproductive physiology which will make it possible to more accurately predict the onset of ovulation and the fertilization life of the ovum and sperm. Studies will include the development of methods to control or induce ovulation by design. Having selected the prediction and detection of ovulation or the fertile period as primary requisites to the improvement of natural or "rhythm" methods of fertility control, the Foundation has sponsored work in six countries. Early in June, 1973, representatives of 16 nations met with the Foundation in Washington, D.C., to discuss programs which have given an upswing to the scientific use of natural methods over the five years since the publication of *Humanae Vitae*. These programs run under the title "Natural Family Planning."

Reports from the Washington meeting indicate that family planning methods based on natural rhythms could be learned and used effectively in any culture of the world. In fact, cultures that have adopted Natural Family Planning, where the husband and wife must cooperate in observing natural fertility cycles, reported a distinct new status for women. It has been reported to the Foundation that even societies where men and women do not dine together have altered customs of this type after adopting methods requiring cooperation, understanding and mutual education between marriage partners.

A major stumbling block to the spread of up-to-date natural methods in the United States has been lack of trained leaders and the millions of dollars in advertising or publicity designed to convert the nation to artificial methods. Recent news stories documenting medical problems with the pill and the IUD have caused a flood of inquiries to Natural Family Planning centers, including the small number sponsored by the U.S. government.

The Human Life Foundation, aware that less than one-tenth of one percent of the U. S. family planning dollar is being spent on natural methods, has put before the Federal government a plan to improve services, expand centers, train needed personnel and develop a certification program to guarantee that teaching is done only by trained personnel. Most Americans who want Natural Family Planning today cannot get the training because it is not available. While working

to improve the methods, the Foundation will continue to press for expanded teaching of the current methods which science has endorsed as highly effective. Foundation director Lawrence Kane states that even if the Federal government provided unlimited funds for these programs within its present "hundred million dollar plus" contraceptive program, there would be a considerable time lag as new personnel were trained to teach. In most American cities, the demand for Natural Family Planning outstrips the ability to deliver services. Kane

adds that the Foundation will seek public, private and foundation funds to expand services, train personnel, improve program quality and certify teachers.

As new methods in family planning are developed, the Human Life Foundation will make even greater efforts to bring these ideas to the attention of the medical profession and to married couples. The Foundation believes that world science is close enough to new answers to appreciably increase the effectiveness of Natural Family Planning in the near future.

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