



Credidimus caritati
we have put our faith in love

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Editor's Note: This edition of the Bulletin concludes our series of papers from the WOOMB International Conference held in Croatia in May 2016. Our regular columns <i>From the Archives</i> and <i>News Around the World</i> will resume in the next edition.		On 8th October 2013, Pope Francis announced that in October 2014 there would be an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on topics related to the family and evangelization. The purpose of this first part of the Synod

process was to “define the ‘status quaestionis’, the current situation, and to collect the bishops’ experiences and proposals in proclaiming and living the Gospel of the Family in a credible manner. It was to thoroughly examine and analyse the information, testimonies and recommendations received from the particular Churches in order to respond to the new challenges of the family.” [In this context “particular Churches” refers to the Church in each place, which is why the head of the Bishops’ Conferences in each country was the person chosen to participate in the Extraordinary Synod.]



The *Preparatory Document* was released in November 2013, outlining the purpose of both the Extraordinary and Ordinary General Assemblies (that is, the first and second Synod gatherings). It provided a basic catechesis on the Gospel of the Family, and requested input from the world’s bishops on the current state of pastoral care for marriages and families.

A letter was sent from the Synod Secretariat to Bishops’ Conferences around the world with a series of questions to which they were asked to respond. They were also asked to canvass widely the opinions of their people on these topics. In many countries this resulted in the process being opened up to the faithful to offer comments, though the time-frame allowed was necessarily short, and somewhat difficult, coinciding as it did with Christmas of 2013! However the bishops were generally overwhelmed by the volume of responses they received – this was clearly a topic of great importance to people within and outside the Church. In addition, the Synod Secretariat wrote to other groups involved in an apostolate to the family inviting them to respond. WOOMB International was one of the associations of the faithful to receive this invitation and we responded at length, as will be described later.

In June 2014 the *Instrumentum Laboris*, or working document, was published containing the results of the consultation. This document provided a substantive reflection on the major challenges facing the family today and outlined the topics to be discussed at the Extraordinary General Assembly in October 2014.

Constant Teaching of the Church on the Family

Revelation, in Holy Scripture, and the Tradition of the Church sets out an unchanging vision of marriage and family.

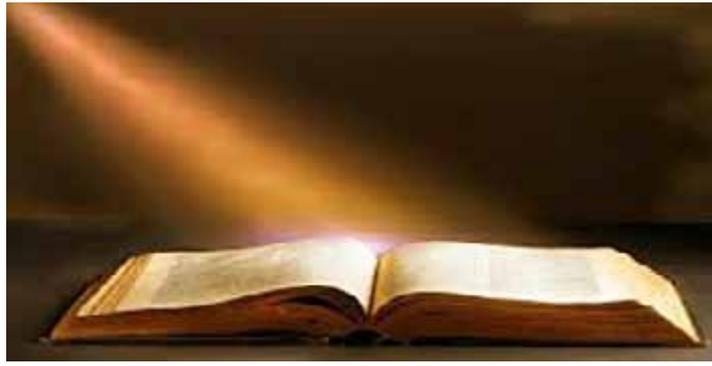
From the Book of Genesis:

God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it.” [Gen1:27-28]

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body. [Gen 2:24]

The teaching of Our Saviour Jesus Christ:

They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide. [Matt 19:6]



The writings of St Paul:

Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her, to make her holy. [Eph 5:25]

From the Desert Fathers:

United in the flesh, one in spirit, they urge each other on by the goad of their mutual love. For marriage does not remove God, but brings all closer to Him, for it is God Himself who draws us to it. [Gregory of Nazianzus]

St Thomas Aquinas:

Since by marriage certain persons are directed to one begetting and upbringing of children, and again to one family life, it is clear that in matrimony there is a joining in respect of which we speak of husband and wife; and this joining, through being directed to some one thing, is matrimony; while the joining together of bodies and minds is a result of matrimony. [*Summa Theologica* II-II, 154, 44, 1]

Vatican II:

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, devotes an entire chapter to promoting the dignity of marriage and the family (GS 47-52). This document defined marriage as a "community of life and love", stating that the true love between husband and wife implies a "mutual gift of self" and includes and integrates the sexual and affective aspects, according to the divine plan."

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents co-operate in a unique way with the Creator's work. [CCC372]

Pope St Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*

Pope St John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*

Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* and in *Caritas in Veritate*

Pope Francis in *Lumen Fidei* and in *Amoris Laetitia*

Though expressed differently in different centuries, there can be no doubt that the Catholic Church has always upheld the sanctity of marriage and the goodness, truth and beauty of the family.

In response to the 1980 Synod on the Family, the Holy See presented a Charter of Rights of the Family on 22nd October 1983, the first four points of which are:

1. The rights of the person, even though they are expressed as rights of the individual, have a fundamental social dimension which finds an innate and vital expression in the family;
2. the family is based on marriage, that intimate union of life in complementarity between a man and

a woman which is constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony and is open to the transmission of life;

3. marriage is the natural institution to which the mission of transmitting life is exclusively entrusted;
4. the family, a natural society, exists prior to the State or any other community, and possesses inherent rights which are inalienable;

Thus the 2014 Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization was based on a long-held and unbroken vision of marriage and the family.

Pastoral Challenges of the Family in Today's World



Coming from this standpoint, the Synod reflected on the particular challenges to the family faced in different societies and communities. There was general agreement that the institution of marriage and the family is under threat in many parts of the world particularly in developed nations. This was less apparent in Asia and Africa, but sadly even these communities are quickly catching up with the excesses and aberrations that are faced in the west. In addition African bishops spoke of the difficulty of integrating ancient traditions of polygamy with the Christian view of marriage being between one man and one woman, exclusively, for life.

It was acknowledged that the truth and beauty of the Church's teaching on marriage and family is not widely understood, even by the faithful. There is a perception that Church teaching is more about what must not be done, than about the goodness and joy that flows from a love lived in all its fullness and fruitfulness. It was understood that the underlying reasons for the difficulty in accepting Church teaching stemmed from the pervasive and invasive new technologies, the influence of the mass media, the hedonistic culture, relativism, materialism, individualism, the growing secularism, the prevalence of ideas that lead to an excessive, selfish liberalization of morals, the fragility of interpersonal relationships, a culture which rejects making permanent choices because it is conditioned by uncertainty and transiency – a veritable “liquid society” and one with a “throw away mentality” which seeks instant gratification – values reinforced by the so-called “culture of waste” and “culture of the moment” as frequently noted by Pope Francis.

It was noted that the concept of natural law today is highly problematic if not completely incomprehensible – very few responses and observations demonstrated an adequate, popular understanding of natural law. The adjective “natural” often is understood by people as meaning “spontaneous” or “what comes naturally”. People tend to place a high value on personal feelings and emotions and the idea of autonomy in human freedom. There is not the understanding of anthropological concepts being tied to an objective order in the nature of things and every human being's aspiration to happiness, which is simply understood as the realization of personal desires. The traditional view of natural law is perceived as an outdated legacy to which scientific research, evolution, biology and neuroscience pose a serious challenge – it is just not “scientific”.

Particular difficulties enumerated included:

- human rights – being understood only as the rights of the individual, with no attendant concept of responsibility;
- extensive practice of divorce, cohabitation, contraception, procedures of artificial procreation, “blended” families with children from different partners, and same-sex unions;
- relationship difficulties and lack of communication – intergenerational conflict, lack of an experience of love, lack of a father-figure;
- violence and abuse;
- dependence, the media and social networks – addictions to alcohol, drugs, gambling, video games and pornography;
- impact of work and poverty on the family, migration and the struggle for subsistence;
- consumerism and individualism – careerism and a competitive spirit;
- family life, faith and ethics are relegated to the private sphere – governments and corporations increasingly ignore the needs of families and the importance of marriage;
- the weight of societal expectations;
- the impact of war;
- problems of isolation and loneliness;
- the transmission of the faith to children by parents who are too busy and preoccupied and lacking in understanding themselves, and schools which see it as a very low priority in the face of the plethora of other subjects to be covered.

Submission of WOOMB International to the Extraordinary Synod



WOOMB International’s submission to the Extraordinary Synod was in two parts – the letter which we sent directly to the Synod Secretariat in response to the questionnaire sent out in late 2013 and my intervention on the floor of the Synod when, along with other participants, I was given four minutes to address the Holy Father, Cardinals, Bishops and others present.

In our letter we addressed the particular issues raised and explained that in our belief and experience the Billings Ovulation Method® offers solutions to many of the difficulties faced. We stated that though few married couples have more than a hazy idea of the beauty and truth of the Church’s teaching on the family, those who are faithful to the Magisterium are very pleased to learn the Billings Ovulation Method® and find

that there is a simple, practical, inexpensive and universally applicable way of living their conjugal relationship according to Church teaching, whilst also enjoying the confidence of the reliability and scientific veracity of the Method and the wonderful benefits that it brings to their relationship of enhanced communication and loving cooperation in the divine plan.

We went on to explain that, perhaps more importantly “in the context of evangelisation” is the change we see wrought in the relationships of couples who do not come to the Billings Ovulation Method® out of obedience to Church teaching. Couples who may even have no interest in what the Catholic Church has to say about marriage and family, but who find that the greater knowledge and understanding of how their bodies work, together with the gentle discipline of the Method, required for it to work effectively, also leads them to respect a faith that advocates such practices. These people also learn to cherish and protect the wonderful gift of their fertility. A man sees his wife in a new light when he understands the intricate workings of her reproductive system. He wants only the best for the woman he loves and is anxious that she not do anything that would harm her health. A woman who sees that her husband can accept the need for abstinence from genital intercourse out of respect for her and consideration for their family situation, feels cherished and protected in a way she has not experienced previously.

Our letter stated that perhaps the greatest challenge that teachers of the Billings Ovulation Method® face is the number of couples who come to us with damaged fertility who find they cannot conceive a child. For whatever reason, often due to poor choices in the past, these couples find that when they are ready to have a child it does not happen. Society and the medical profession suggest that the answer lies with IVF or other assisted reproduction techniques and yet the statistics show that less than one third of couples who resort to such procedures will take home a living child. In the process many embryos are destroyed, the couple faces enormous financial costs and the woman endures painful and emotionally draining medical procedures. The Billings Ovulation Method® can help. It has been shown to be of great benefit to couples facing infertility issues, assisting many couples to achieve their desired pregnancy, even some who have previously failed on IVF.

We stated that many of the societal problems, enumerated by the Synod documents, have been faced by teachers of the Billings Ovulation Method® in our clinics – we have practical experience “at the coal face” of dealing with people in these situations. By offering women knowledge about their bodies and reproductive systems that respects the “whole woman”, physical, emotional and spiritual, we help them to understand the truth and beauty of Church teachings on love and life. This is not something learned in a day or a week, but the support and practical advice of a teacher of the Billings Ovulation Method® over time can gently lead couples to grace.

In the intervention that I made on the floor of the Synod I said that “when we open couples to living their marriage as God intended, even if they do not acknowledge Him, we enable the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. What better way to explain to them the meaning of the Natural Law? My husband wishes taxation laws were as easily explained!

I said: “If couples tell you that they have tried but the Method does not work for them, tell them to go back to their teacher, or if they did not learn from a teacher, they should do so now. In more than 30 years of teaching the Billings Ovulation Method® I have never found anyone for whom it did not work if they applied themselves to learning and following the guidelines diligently. And do not imagine that married couples cannot make the necessary sacrifices. Marriage and parenthood involves much sacrifice – which we do willingly and lovingly. The very wise priest who prepared my husband and me for marriage said to us, “Marriage is not a 50:50 relationship, it is 100% total giving.” He also said, “Love is not a feeling, it is a decision.”

I told the Synod fathers that “in dioceses where the Bishops actively support the promulgation of natural family planning, good things happen in marriages. Too often in developed nations we get the response from priests that they do not want to upset people and so their people are denied this knowledge. WOOMB International stands ready to assist in meeting the challenge of evangelization of families by empowering women and couples with the knowledge of the great gift of their fertility. As Dr Evelyn Billings said: “This is knowledge of her body that every woman ought to have.”

Discussion/conclusions of the Extraordinary Synod

Notwithstanding the furore in the popular press in October 2014, there was no “earthquake in the Catholic Church”. The Synod Fathers came out strongly in favour of maintaining the centuries-old tradition of the Church’s understanding of marriage as being between a man and a woman for the mutual benefit of husband and wife, and the bearing and raising of children – a relationship that is free, faithful, fruitful and forever.

The first and perhaps most encouraging conclusion to be drawn from the *Relatio Synodi*, the final report, was that there are many wonderful families in the world who are living and loving, struggling and praying to be faithful to the Church’s teaching on marriage and life. These families need to be recognised and supported. They are the mentors for other couples and families of the future. They are the shining lights that reveal the truth of the Gospel of the Family – not some weak and watered-down version of the Natural Law, but the living reality that what Jesus revealed to us by His life, death and resurrection is the only ‘narrow way’ to real joy and sanctification. He invites everyone to “come as you are”, but not to “stay as you are”. It is a radical call to conversion. A welcome that invites us all to come on a journey not just to worldly happiness, but to sanctity and the opportunity to be welcomed at the throne of grace for all eternity.



The *Relatio Synodi* lamented that children are often a “source of contention between parents” and too many are growing up in single-parent or “blended” or even same-sex “families”, which are not families as we understand them. There is increasing domestic violence against women and sexual exploitation of children, pornography and the rise of “street children”. If these factors are not enough to make us despair the document goes on to discuss how the narcissistic and unstable affectivity of today’s young people results not in a desire to build “relationships of self-giving and creative reciprocity” but instead leads to a lack of maturity, commercialization of the body, misuse of the internet and forced prostitution. Couples do not grow and mature, never getting beyond the “me” phase of their relationship leading to disillusionment, instability, relationship breakdown, separation and divorce, with serious consequences for the adults, their children and society as a whole, “weakening its individual and social bonds”.

There has developed an attitude of viewing children not as a gift and the crowning glory of the couple’s love, but as a possession to which they have a right, at any cost, or, conversely, as an inconvenience to be avoided lest they interfere with career aspirations and material wealth. In almost all developed nations the birth rate has fallen below replacement level, but there was more attention at the Synod to speeding up annulments and making concessions to the divorced and remarried of those countries, than to the imperative of reminding couples of the need for generosity in welcoming life and for founding the Christian families of the future.

However, it would be a tragedy if the attention of the Church, like the attention of the secular media, remained focussed on the problems, to the detriment of the many positive and hopeful suggestions contained in the

final report for coming to grips with some of the other issues which were discussed. Suggestions such as:

- Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family and evangelizing by means of the joyous testimony of married people and families
- Highlighting the primacy of Grace, which the Spirit provides in the Sacrament of Marriage
- Confronting the crisis of faith which has resulted in parents failing to transmit the faith to their children
- Finding effective, meaningful language to proclaim the Gospel of the Family, not by proclaiming a set of rules, but by espousing values of each individual's dignity, and the fulfilment of reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness
- Forming families as the Domestic Church sustained by prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture
- A re-stating of Christian marriage as a vocation which is undertaken with due preparation and proper discernment
- Renewal of training of priests and pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families
- The need for evangelization to clearly denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors which prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion and violence
- A greater effort in preparing those to be married, including the importance of the virtues, of which chastity is invaluable in the genuine growth of love between persons – requiring the witness of faithful families not just in marriage preparation but in preparation for Christian Initiation emphasizing the connection between marriage and the other sacraments
- Accompanying couples in the initial years of marriage – again requiring the involvement of older couples as well as priests who would remind the newly married of the importance of family spirituality and prayer
- Pastoral care of couples civilly married or living together, by seeking to identify the goodness of their relationships – commitment, fidelity, children – and helping them to come to an understanding that these would be enriched and brought to fulfilment through the sacrament of marriage
- Caring for broken families – treating them with love and respect as we accompany them on the journey out of their brokenness to reconciliation and forgiveness, with particular emphasis on the needs of children who are the innocent victims of such breakdowns
- Pastoral attention towards persons who are same-sex attracted – reminding them of the call to chastity while avoiding any unjust discrimination
- Proclaiming anew that openness to life is an intrinsic requirement of married love while supporting young families in the struggles of rearing a young family in today's social and economic climate
- Educating couples in the methods of responsible procreation and supporting those organisations which seek to spread this teaching
- Reminding couples of the fruitfulness of adoption and foster parenting, especially of children with special needs
- Education in affectivity as a path to maturity and ever-deepening acceptance of the other, and an ever fuller gift of self, by programs to nourish married life and the witness of the lay faithful
- Meeting the challenge of raising children by support and accompaniment for families, and the witness of older couples to the family as a place of growth in the concrete and essential transmission of the virtues which give form to our existence
- Programs for children and young people which are faith-based and age appropriate – research shows that young people who are involved in parish youth groups are less likely to become involved with risk behaviours such as drug taking and sexual experimentation

- A return to Marian devotion – Mary as our model of tenderness, mercy and maternal sensitivity – we need to seek her intercession for our families and Church

The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world

This was the title chosen for the second part of the Synod process – the 14th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which was held in October of last year – 2015, which addressed the issues that had been raised the year before and also considered other aspects of marriage and family life. It was an extraordinarily wide-ranging brief and one can only wonder at the stamina of the Synod Fathers who kept at it for three weeks. For many, if not most of the bishops present this was a new discussion as the majority had not been present at the previous year's Extraordinary Assembly. This was also true, to a lesser extent, of the Cardinals who participated.



WOOMB International again made a submission to the Synod Secretariat in which we urged the Synod Fathers to reflect on the role that Natural Family Planning, specifically the Billings Ovulation Method® can play in evangelizing families to fulfil their vocation and mission in the Church and in contemporary society. We stated that, "We at WOOMB International believe that by teaching married couples to live their lives as God intended – by instruction in natural family planning (the Billings Ovulation Method®) – we equip them to become strong families. We point them to the Creator, source of the great gift of their fertility. We lead them to an attitude of openness to life and generosity in accepting children in their marriage. They are evangelized by the example and witness of other couples who have found that true happiness springs from fidelity in their relationship and a love which is ever new. In time they grow to understand the grace of the marriage sacrament and often those who are living in de facto relationships come to the Church for marriage. The gentle discipline of the Billings Ovulation Method® teaches them the virtue of chastity and leads them to deeper communication and cooperation in their relationship. Anecdotally there are far fewer marriage breakdowns amongst couples who practice natural family planning, and they are equipped with knowledge to pass on to their children to help protect them from the insidious effects of the culture of death. There are no "down sides" to natural family planning and we seek the support of our bishops and priests in continuing to propose this way of life which reflects the continuing tradition and teaching of the Catholic Church."

Final Report of the XIVth Ordinary General Assembly



As we were not represented at the 2015 Synod, we can only look to the *Final Report* which was published on the Vatican website some time after the conclusion of the Synod. If you have not had a chance to read this report I urge you to do so. It makes wonderful reading. It is instructive that there was so little reaction in the secular media perhaps because, contrary to the expectations of some, it did not overturn the centuries old traditions and teaching of the Church. There was no change in the Church's vision of marriage as being an exclusive and indissoluble union between one man and one woman. There was no change to the ban on contraception and reproductive technologies which bypass the conjugal act.

There was recognition of the enormous pressures on families and affirmation for "the great number of Christian families who generously and faithfully respond to their vocation and mission, despite the many obstacles, misunderstandings and trials." There was acknowledgement that "the goal of conjugal life is not simply to live together for life, but to love one another for life!" "Only in the light of the folly of the gratuitousness of Jesus' paschal love will the folly of the gratuitousness of an exclusive and life-long conjugal love make sense." In the free act of a man and woman saying "yes" to each other for their entire life, God's love is made present and is experienced.

Even amidst joys and trials, the family is the primary and fundamental "school of humanity" and there remains a "vibrant desire" amongst the younger generations to "form a family". "The couple and conjugal life are not abstract realities – they remain imperfect and vulnerable - an act of will is always necessary in changing oneself, forgiving and starting over. We want to give them strength and help them grasp their mission today. We wish to accompany them lovingly, even in their concerns, giving them courage and hope which come from the mercy of God." This is what we do in teaching the Billings Ovulation Method®. We accompany couples lovingly, even in their concerns. We give them courage and hope.

The report goes on to say: "We are aware of the major anthropological and cultural changes today which have an impact on all aspects of life. We remain firmly convinced that the family is a gift of God, the place where He reveals the power of His saving grace."

The anthropological cultural changes referred to include:

- The Religious context – some regions of the world are witnessing a significant drop in religion in society, which, consequently, has its effect on family life. This approach tends to make religion a private matter and to relegate it to family life only, thus running the risk of reducing the witness and mission of the Christian family in the modern world.
- Anthropological change – many young people demonstrate a resistance in making definitive commitments in relationships, and often choose to live together or simply to engage in casual relationships. The declining birth rate is a result of various factors, including industrialization, the sexual revolution, the fear of overpopulation, economic problems, the growth of a contraceptive mentality and abortion.
- Cultural contradictions – a certain feminism which looks on motherhood as exploiting women and as an obstacle to her full realization. Or, conversely, an every-increasing tendency among people of conceiving a child simply as a means of self-affirmation and, at times, by any means possible.

A very important cultural challenge is posed by "gender" ideology which denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without gender differences, thereby removing the anthropological foundation of the family. This ideology leads to education programmes and legislative guidelines which promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, which can also change over time.

According to our faith, the difference between the sexes bears in itself the image and likeness of God. This tells us that it is not man alone who is the image of God or woman alone who is the image of God, but man and woman as a couple who are the image of God. Without the mutual enrichment of this relationship – in thought and in action, in affection and in work, as well as in faith – the two cannot even understand the depth of what it means to be man and woman.

The family merits special attention on the part of those responsible for the common good, since it is the basic cell of society. Families foster the solid bonds of unity on which human coexistence is based, and, through the bearing and education of children, they ensure the future and the renewal of society. The family which is part of a significant human ecology, should be adequately protected. Through our family, we belong to the whole of creation – we contribute in a specific manner to promoting ecology, we learn the meaning of the body and the language of love from the difference between a man and a woman and we collaborate in the divine plan of God, the Creator. In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life, we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity.

The report goes on to mention specific members of the family:

- Children – who are a blessing from God and ought to be of primary concern in the family and society and a priority in the Church’s pastoral activity.
- Women – who have a crucial role in the life of the individual, family and society. “Every human person owes his or her life to a mother, and almost always owes much of what follows in life, both human and spiritual formation, to her.” In many places, discrimination results simply because one is a woman – the gift of motherhood is penalized rather than valued. Conversely, in some cultures, sterility in a woman is the cause of social discrimination. The dignity of women needs to be defended and promoted – this is what the Billings Ovulation Method® does!
- Men – a man plays an equally decisive role in family life, particularly in reference to the protection and support of his wife and children. The absence of a father gravely affects family life and the upbringing of children and their integration into society. This absence – which may be physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual – deprives children of an appropriate model of paternal behaviour. Men must be aware of the importance of their role in the family and live according to their masculine role – the Billings Ovulation Method® contributes to this.
- Young people – many continue to see marriage as the great desire of their life and the idea of forming their own family as a fulfilment of their aspirations. Nevertheless, young people, in practice, have varying attitudes with regard to marriage. Often they are led to postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic.

The Synod Fathers noted the importance of the affective life and formation in self-giving: “The Church’s challenge is to assist couples in the maturation of the emotional aspect of their relationship and in their affective development through fostering dialogue, the life of virtue and trust in the merciful love of God.” “This formation is also to highlight the admirable character of the virtue of chastity, since the virtue of chastity is understood to mean the integration of affections, which fosters self-giving.” All these are fostered by practice of the Billings Ovulation Method®!

Section 33 of the report is entitled: **Technologies in Human Procreation.** The technological revolution in the field of human procreation has introduced the ability to manipulate the reproductive act, making it independent of the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. In this way, human life and parenthood have become a modular and separable reality, subject mainly to the wishes of individuals or couples, who are not necessarily heterosexual and properly married. This phenomenon has occurred recently as an absolute novelty on the stage of humanity and is increasingly becoming more common. This situation has profound implications in the dynamics of relationships, in the structuring of social life and in legal systems which intervene to attempt to regulate practices already in place and various situations. In this regard, the Church feels required to speak a word of truth and hope, necessarily beginning with the belief that each human being comes from God and lives constantly in his presence: “Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves ‘the creative action of God’ and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is

its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end." The Billings Ovulation Method® is faithful to this belief.

Under the heading **The Icon of the Trinity in the Family** we read: The covenant of love and fidelity, lived by the Holy Family of Nazareth, illuminates the principle which gives form to every household, and enables it better to face the vicissitudes of life and history. On this basis, every family, despite its weaknesses, can become a light in the darkness of the world. "Here each of us understands the meaning of family life, its harmony of love, its simplicity and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character; may it teach us how sweet and irreplaceable is its training, how fundamental and incomparable its role in the social order." Through the fruitfulness of their love, man and woman continue the work of creation and collaborate with the Creator in salvation history. The indissolubility of marriage is not meant to be a burden but a gift to those who are united in marriage." This is what the Billings Ovulation Method® teaches without us having to say so explicitly – it is how we instruct people in the Natural Law, as referred to earlier!

Just as God keeps his promise even when we fail, so love and conjugal fidelity maintain their value "in good times and in bad". Marriage is a gift and a promise of God, who hears the prayers of those who ask for his help. The witness of couples who faithfully live their marriage highlights the value of this indissoluble union – indissolubility corresponds to the profound desire of mutual and enduring love which the Creator has placed in the human heart, a gift which He himself gives to each couple.

The unitive end of marriage is a constant reminder that this love grows and deepens. Through their union in love, the couple experiences the beauty of fatherhood and motherhood and shares their plans, trials, expectations and concerns. They learn care for each other and mutual forgiveness. In this love they celebrate their happy moments and support each other in the difficult passages of their life together. The fruitfulness of the couple, in a full sense, is spiritual. They are living signs of the Sacrament of Matrimony and a source of life for the Christian community and the world.

The final section of the Report from the Synod deals with the **Mission of the Family** and considers how this can be realized. Here again we see very clearly how the Billings Ovulation Method® can help and the role of WOOMB International.

The family, while remaining the primary place for formation, cannot be the only place for formation in matters of sexuality. In this regard, true and proper pastoral programs of support need to be devised, targeting both individuals and couples, with particular attention given to young people at the age of puberty and adolescence, so as to help them discover the beauty of sexuality in love. This we do with our instruction of couples, in pre-marriage education programs and programs for school students such as TeenSTAR which recently celebrated 20 years in Croatia!

There is reference to formation of priests and other pastoral workers – "seminars and programmes of human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation ought to prepare future priests to become apostles of the family." We take every opportunity to speak in our seminaries and instruct seminarians.

Section 63 of the Report deals with **Generative Responsibility** and refers specifically to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* and *Familiaris Consortio*. Here we find the mandate for our work! "The use of methods based on the laws of nature and the incidence of fertility are to be encouraged, because these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them and favour the education of an authentic freedom. Emphasis needs to be placed more and more on the fact that children are a wonderful gift from God and a joy for parents and the Church." We would say also that fertility is a wonderful gift from God to be understood, appreciated and protected.

In bringing up children, protection needs to be afforded to the right of parents to freely choose the type of education to be given to their children, according to their convictions, its accessibility and the calibre of education. People need assistance in living affectivity as a process of maturation — even in the marital relationship — in an ever-deepening acceptance of the other and an ever-fuller giving of self. This requires offering formation programmes that nourish conjugal life (instruction in the Billings Ovulation Method®) and the importance of the laity who provide guidance through a life of witness (teachers of the Billings Ovulation Method®). In this regard, great assistance comes from the example of a couple's profound and faithful love

which is based on tenderness, respect and the ability to grow over time. In a practical way, opening oneself to the generation of life makes a person experience a mystery which transcends us.

***Amoris Laetitia* – on Love in the Family**



On Friday 8th April this year, the Holy Father's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) – on Love in the Family was released. The Directors of WOOMB International wrote expressing our gratitude to His Holiness, Pope Francis, for his thoughtful and affirming document on the Joy of Love. In restating the age-old teaching of the Church and quoting Sacred Scripture, documents of the Magisterium and former Popes, he locates his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* squarely at the heart of our traditional understanding of marriage and family.

In acknowledging in detail the many challenges and difficulties that confront families in different cultures in the modern world, he demonstrates a clear and compassionate understanding of what we all face on a daily basis.

Amoris Laetitia acknowledges and affirms the many families who are working, praying, striving and loving to build a better world by, every day, living their family life as Christ taught us. The document also acknowledges and affirms the work of family apostolates and all involved in the mission to the family.

We take great heart from *Amoris Laetitia* – on Love in the Family as we continue the work of taking the Good News of the Billings Ovulation Method® on natural regulation of fertility to couples throughout the world – “This is knowledge of her body that every woman ought to have.” [Evelyn L Billings]

If you have not had the chance to read *Amoris Laetitia* we would urge you to do so. In reading it we hear the voice of Pope Francis very clearly, even as we heard the voice of Blessed Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* and St John Paul the Great in *Familiaris Consortio*. We thank God for sending us a Pope for our age who understands us and extends his blessing of love to us in this Extraordinary Year of Mercy.

How the Billings Ovulation Method® has, does and can help



By teaching the Billings Ovulation Method® to ALL who seek this knowledge and by promoting it by all means available to us, we have in the past, we continue to and we will always assist in advancing the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the modern world.

I have appointed you as prophet to the nations.

I conclude with a Reading from the prophet Jeremiah which could have been written expressly for us:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
before you came to birth I consecrated you;
I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations.
So now brace yourself for action.
Stand up and tell them all I command you.
Do not be dismayed at their presence,
or in their presence I will make you dismayed.
I, for my part, today will make you into a fortified city,
a pillar of iron, and a wall of bronze
to confront all this land:
the kings of Judah, its princes,
its priests and the country people.
They will fight against you
but shall not overcome you,
for I am with you to deliver you -
it is the Lord who speaks.”

[Jer 1:4-5, 17-19]



We must look before us, do what we do well and refuse to undertake too much.

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, 15 August 1900

Billings Ovulation Method® to Achieve Pregnancy

Dr Margaret Knops, Fertility Care Scotland



WOOMB International Conference, Croatia, May 2016

"The husband and wife obtain in marriage the privilege of the closest act of human co-operation with God and His creative power. After our creation and redemption, this share in the creation of new human life is our most precious gift." [Dr John J Billings, "Gift of Life and Love"]

I am starting my talk with the words of Dr John Billings because it is a profound expression of truth. It is a truth which is not always recognised but it is a truth which is felt very deeply particularly when a couple become aware that they may possibly not possess this privilege. Strong emotions are then aroused and they may feel bereft. It is very important to keep this in mind when teaching couples in this situation.



I am therefore putting first the need to listen. It is important to provide a relaxed atmosphere and an unhurried attitude. Part of this is to assess the emotional state of the couple and their relationship to each other. There may be resentment and blame present as well as a lot of sadness and regret. So allowing time for the couple to tell their story in their own words is essential before any teaching takes place or this will distract the couple. I remember a client who, as soon as she started talking, was very upset and tearful and she revealed that this was the first day of her period which meant that once more she knew she was not pregnant. She needed some time to talk about these feelings before she could be taught the method. This gives some idea of the level of stress which may be affecting the woman's cycle. This preliminary time allows the teacher to gauge whether both husband and wife are eager to have a child or if the desire is mainly with one or the other.



In all of this the teacher can encourage clear communication between the couple. It is important to recognise that stress may also be affecting the husband. He may see his manhood being in question or have felt pressure to “perform” as required. A colleague described how one husband entered the room with his head lowered and sat with his eyes downcast, especially when explaining that he had been told he had a low sperm count.

However, as he listened to her explanation of the method and how supportive fertile mucus was to sperm, he started to look up and take part in the conversation, walking out of the room with his head held high. This couple subsequently conceived.

We are not counsellors but allowing time for the couple is an essential part of ‘teaching with love’.



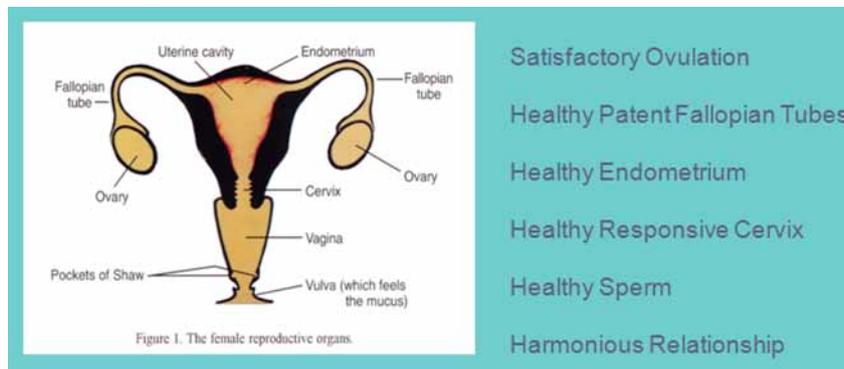
After hearing the couple’s story, it will be necessary to take a routine history, especially noting past illnesses, pelvic infections or abdominal operations. If one of the latter two is present it is sensible to suggest to her to see her doctor for investigation of tubal patency. Has hormonal contraception been used, and if so, which, for how long and when was it discontinued? Other forms of contraception? Has conception ever occurred? The answer to this may not be accurate, especially if a couple come together and there has been an unacknowledged abortion. Have there been previous pregnancies and have they all gone to term? What, if any, investigations have been done.

We all know that couples can come at any stage of investigation of their sub-fertility or even after a course of IVF. We also know that it is best if the Billings Ovulation Method® is taught before any other investigations are undertaken. Charting may obviate the need for the investigations as conception may occur after a few cycles. The charting can also reveal the need for investigation and point to which may be necessary. It can also assist with the timing of certain investigations.

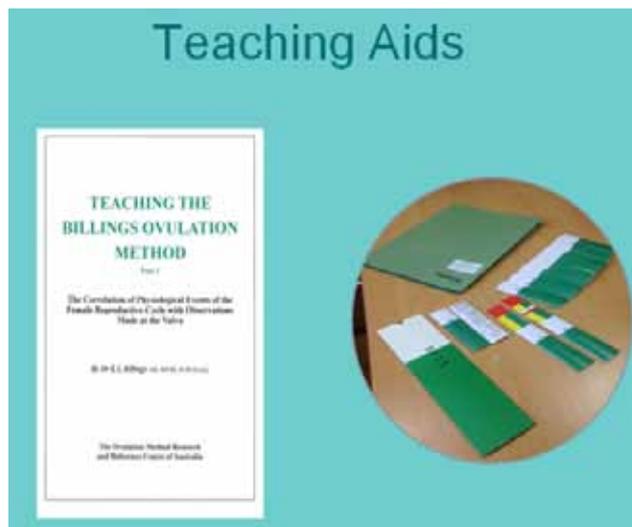
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This is particularly important for the ‘21-day progesterone assay’ which may require to be done on anything but ‘day 21’; rather it should be done 7 days after the Peak.

As a teacher, you will then explain the six requirements for fertility. It can be helpful to use the diagram of the female reproductive system in Book 1 to do this. Explain the need for ovulation with good hormone levels; healthy patent fallopian tubes which allow the passage of sperm cells to meet the ovum and then nourish and assist the embryo to proceed to the cavity of the uterus for implantation; a healthy endometrium for implantation; an adequate cervical function to produce mucus (so well-described by Professor Erik Odeblad),



which will enable healthy sperm to navigate the genital tract; healthy motile sperm and emotional harmony between husband and wife to facilitate conception.



You will then teach the Billings Ovulation Method® guidelines for conceiving. How this is taught depends to some extent on the couple. If they are very anxious it is often better to start simply with the slide rule, explaining the times of fertility and infertility, which may be present, emphasizing that you do not know what will be found on their chart. Make sure that observations and awareness of vulval sensation will be made throughout the day and only charted at the end of the day.

Guidelines for Achieving Pregnancy

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	
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- Apply the Early Day Rules.
- Postpone intercourse until the slippery sensation occurs.
- Intercourse should occur over the time of the slippery sensation and for one or two days after.

For those who are curious about what is behind the teaching then Book 1 is used. This knowledge can be what is needed to empower the couple to take control, which can be in stark contrast to their feeling of being on a conveyer belt of investigations.

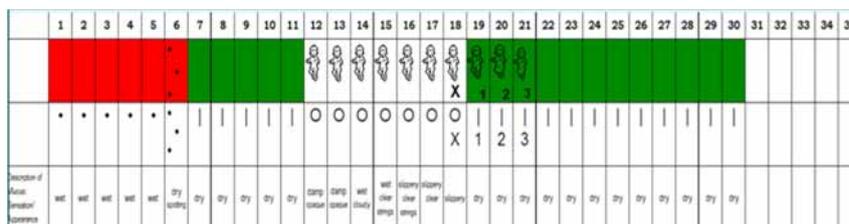
As you teach the guidelines for achieving explain the reasons for these. That EDR 1 not to have intercourse

during heavy bleeding ensures that as bleeding tails off any sign of mucus can be detected. EDR 2 allows intercourse on alternate evenings which enables the woman to notice any change from her BIP. It is also important as it means that the total focus of intercourse is not centred solely around the time of ovulation and this encourages the couple to promote their love for each other. If the ovulation time alone is concentrated on, then one or other of the couple can feel used as a means of producing a child. That reminds me of an expression of Pope St John Paul II that, the opposite of the verb 'to love' is not 'to hate' but 'to use'. The EDR 3 is necessary as not all bleeding may be menstrual and a false idea of the frequency of ovulation may have developed.

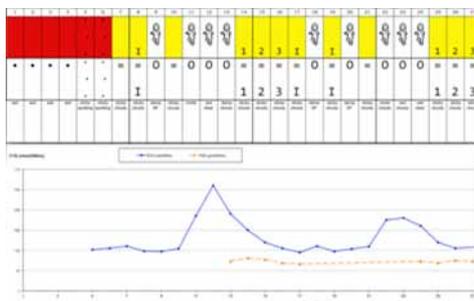
It is important to explain the reason for abstaining until slippery mucus is experienced, allowing optimum sperm production, and the need to have intercourse at that time and for one or two days afterwards. Mention should be made of observation of vulval swelling as an additional sign of ovulation. Confirm the couple's understanding of what has been taught. I always then recommend the couple look at the chart together and make a joint decision as to when to have intercourse.

After this teach the rules for postponing pregnancy explaining that there may be a change of intention due to unforeseen circumstances and this gives them the means to do this. It is good to finish with a recapping of the rules to achieve. Find out if the couple are willing to abstain from sexual intercourse and genital contact for two weeks so that a clear chart can be obtained. Should they recognise a clear pattern of fertility and a slippery sensation they can be advised to use those days as ovulation may not be a regular occurrence for that particular woman. It is advisable to see them after two weeks to check how the charting is going and if there are any questions or difficulties. There is a lot of information given at the first meeting and questions frequently arise later.

Once the first chart is seen then a preliminary assessment can be made as to the level of fertility present. There may be:

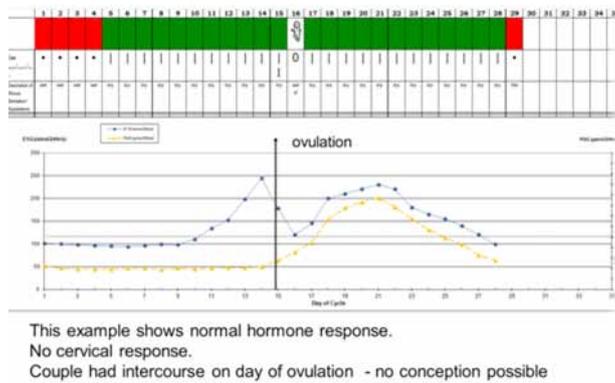


- Clear evidence of ovulation and an adequate luteal phase of 11 – 16 days. The woman is congratulated on her charting and the Rules for achieving pregnancy are gone over again, making sure that they are understood. Depending on her age, referral would be made for further investigation after three to four months if conception has not taken place having used the fertile time (some may not have used it).



When ovulation is delayed there can be some follicular development which does not result in ovulation.

Evidence of mucus without a clear peak. Depending on the history, go over the rules again and emphasise EDR3, noting that ovulation has not occurred yet. Again circumstances of life, post-pill, approaching menopause and stress are considered. It may take longer to conceive in these conditions. This is a good time go over the additional signs of ovulation; the swelling of the vulva in particular but also the lymph node sign.



- Very little or no evidence of fertile mucus. This can be very alarming for the couple and they need to be reassured. If there is a history of recent and/or prolonged use of hormonal contraceptives, this can have affected the mechanism of ovulation and/or the cervical response. It can be explained that fertility may take some time to return. It is always advisable that this should return naturally and it can be very empowering for the couple to see their return of fertility. This does need good support from the teacher.
- The history given previously should be kept in mind, particularly the part of the continuum, described by Prof James Brown, and where the woman is located on this. The interpretation will be different when coming off the pill, nearing the menopause or someone in their early thirties. The effect of stress must always be kept in mind.
- On the other hand, if there is a constant discharge then the possibility of infection should be considered and referral to their Doctor for treatment of both partners suggested.

As Billings Ovulation Method® Teachers, we do not diagnose but we do need to be aware of what is not normal and refer.

How to proceed depends on the age of the woman and how long the couple have been trying to become pregnant. In most cases it is advisable for the couple to continue charting for at least three cycles before further investigations are recommended as these are likely to increase stress. The average length of use of the method before pregnancy is 4.5 months.

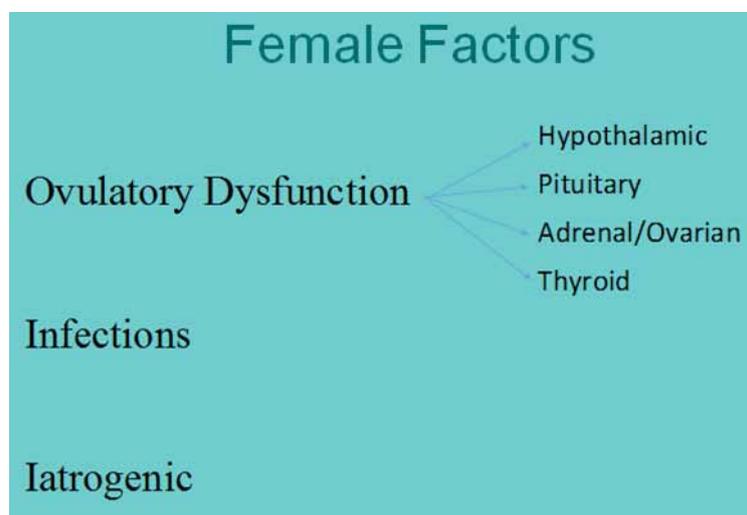
'Fertility is one of the most variable phenomena in human activity and must be remembered to be the sum total of both partner's fertility. The most fertile have a pregnancy rate of about 70% per act of intercourse during the fertile phase, producing a pregnancy after two cycles for 90% of these couples. The least fertile have about a 10% per cycle probability of pregnancy requiring 24 cycles for 90% to achieve. Apart from a few conditions such as blocked fallopian tubes, absent sperm and continued anovulation most couples will eventually conceive.'
 Professor James B Brown, "Studies on Human Reproduction"

For the teacher it is important to remember Prof James Brown's observation: 'Fertility is one of the most variable phenomena in human activity and must be remembered to be the sum total of both partner's fertility. The most fertile have a pregnancy rate of about 70% per act of intercourse during the fertile phase, producing a pregnancy after two cycles for 90% of these couples.

The least fertile have about a 10% per cycle probability of pregnancy requiring 24 cycles for 90% to achieve. Apart from a few conditions such as blocked fallopian tubes, absent sperm and continued anovulation most couples will eventually conceive.'



As regards male factors, it is worth noting that there has been a marked reduction of about 50% in the sperm count over the past 50 years.



In talking about the female factors, just over one third are due to ovulatory dysfunction.

Of these, some are Hypothalamic, which are largely due to Anorexia Nervosa or excessive exercise. (The chart would tend to show dry days and amenorrhoea.)

Pituitary Dysfunction producing Hyper-Prolactinaemia. (Tends to produce a chart showing short cycles and an abnormal luteal phase and pre menstrual spotting.)

Adrenal/Ovarian Dysfunction associated with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, with hyper-androgenaemia and/or possible hyper-insulinaemia. (One would expect to find a continuous pattern with fertile characteristics or mucus patches.)

Thyroid Dysfunction. (There may be no obvious signs in the chart apart from heavy bleeding associated with hypothyroidism.)

Infections:- these are the major cause of tubal damage when they have entered the pelvis. They tend to cause a change in the viscosity of the mucus although times of fertility and infertility can still be detected. Chlamydia infection may have no symptoms but may produce continuous dampness.

Iatrogenic:- after taking hormonal contraception or therapy. (Charts tend to show a short luteal phase, absence of developing mucus pattern, poor mucus response and/or poor menstrual flow. These all being most prominent in the first three months and lasting up to ten months on average.)

This information has been gleaned from the paper "*Fertility Disorders and The Billings Ovulation Method*" by Dr Pilar Vigil.

Available Treatments

- * Clomiphene – synthetic anti-oestrogen
- * Gonadotrophins – substitute for FSH and LH reinforcing ovulation
- * Cabergoline or Bromocriptine – counteract the excessive production of prolactin
- * Metformin – effective for both diabetes and PCOS

Clomiphene – synthetic anti-oestrogen which boosts ovulation

Gonadotrophins – substitute for FSH and LH reinforcing ovulation

Cabergoline or Bromocriptine – counteract the excessive production of prolactin

Metformin – effective for both Diabetes and PCOS to help normalise the fertile cycle

It is important to know of these as background knowledge, especially if someone is already using one of them.



'Of primary importance in the management of the couple wishing to achieve a pregnancy is the high level of optimism and encouragement the Billings Ovulation Method can offer. It is not only reasonable but essential we should reassure these couples that a high percentage – up to 85%, can be helped to achieve pregnancy.' [Dr E L Billings, *Billings Ovulation Method and "Infertility"*]

I think it is important after the last two slides, which were rather complicated, to remind ourselves of this quote from Dr Evelyn Billings which encapsulates the simple positive reassurance which we as Teachers of the Method can bring.



Application of the Billings Ovulation Method® to Avoid/Postpone Pregnancy

Dra. Gemma Muñiz Nicolás, WOOMB España



WOOMB International Conference, Croatia, May 2016

Introduction

When I thought about preparing this talk, I asked myself the question: What can I tell you that you don't already know? Most of us at this Conference know the Method and the technique, we have taught it and applied it, even lived it in our own lives. However, there are some among us, who are participating in this congress, who want to know more about the Billings Ovulation Method®, who have come here to learn. I don't pretend to teach, but to summarize and review what it is and how it serves us to avoid pregnancy. Those of you who are experts in the Method will already know, but you will not mind listening again to this Method that we love.

We will review what it consists of and how it serves us to postpone or avoid pregnancy. We will also consider the effect of those fundamental and transcendent aspects of the Billings Ovulation Method® which influence the ultimate meaning of the application of a natural method.

Finally, I also want to share with you my personal experience.

Premises

The Billings Ovulation Method® is a method of fertility awareness, it is the woman, the couple, who decides when and how to apply the Method in their marriage. This is not a method of contraception. Three aspects are fundamental:

-REMEMBER what moves us who teach this Method, what inspires us, what is our motivation?

-HIGHLIGHT the intrinsic goodness of the Method, reflecting the goodness of marriage.

-TEACH and interpret the indicators of fertility, which nature shows us in every menstrual cycle, and in the light of scientific knowledge.

Drs. Billings: *"We aren't inventors, it is God who made the Method, creating the woman in a way that also includes the Method."*

My experience

At first I was as a student-user, afterwards I liked it so much that I decided to train to be an instructor and to work to spread the method. For many years I have been actively involved in the Association of my country – WOOMB España.

The Billings Method and couple communication

Natural methods **encourage communication**, by requiring husband and wife to talk, to decide, to seek the best time for conception, according to their specific circumstances and in the **light of the Spirit** and according to **responsible parenthood**.

When a couple begins their life together, they must start to grow together as a couple. They will have their doubts and fears, some conditioned by circumstances:

-**Just married:** there may be stress of financial or job insecurity, they may have to endure temporary separations for professional reasons.

-Over the years they **mature in love**, their circumstances change, they have to cope with parenting, and perhaps caring for elderly parents.

-Occasionally there are **other conditions** such as medical or economic or social situations, such as war.

-Dealing with these situations, in the light of **responsible parenthood**, all couples at some time will have to embrace periodic continence without transgressing the natural rhythms.

The purpose of human sexuality

Human sexuality is a gift from God in which the unitive and procreative elements are inseparable.

Marriage is a donation of each to the other. This giving of the spouses, while respecting life and guarding the treasure of fertility placed in each is the truest sign of the sacrament.

John Paul II: ... *when one speaks of "natural" regulation, respect for biological rhythm alone is not what is meant. In a much more complete way, it entails upholding the truth of the person's profound unity of spirit, psyche and body, a unity that can never be reduced to a simple set of biological mechanisms.*

It is only in the context of complete and limitless reciprocal love by the married couple that the act of procreation, on which the future of humanity itself depends, can be carried out in all of its dignity.

Message of John Paul II on the occasion of the International Convention on
"Natural Regulation of Fertility and Culture of Life" 28 January 2004

Documents

The teaching of the Catholic Church gives us valuable documents in this matter, which it is helpful if we have read: *Humanae Vitae, Donum Vitae, Familiaris Consortio.*

These documents are interesting and educational and I try to remember them, in order to not forget the essentials of this important work that we do.

The history of human life

Each life begins in two cells that can generate life, the ovum and the sperm.

The activity of male genital and female genital tracts is regulated by the hormones and the central nervous system. The human species have combined fertility – that is, in order to generate life we need the male and the female.

Male fertility is determined by the life of the sperm.

Female fertility is determined by follicles, which produce the ova – woman's fertility is finished with menopause.

The fertility of the couple involves the joining, at conception, of the sperm and the ovum.

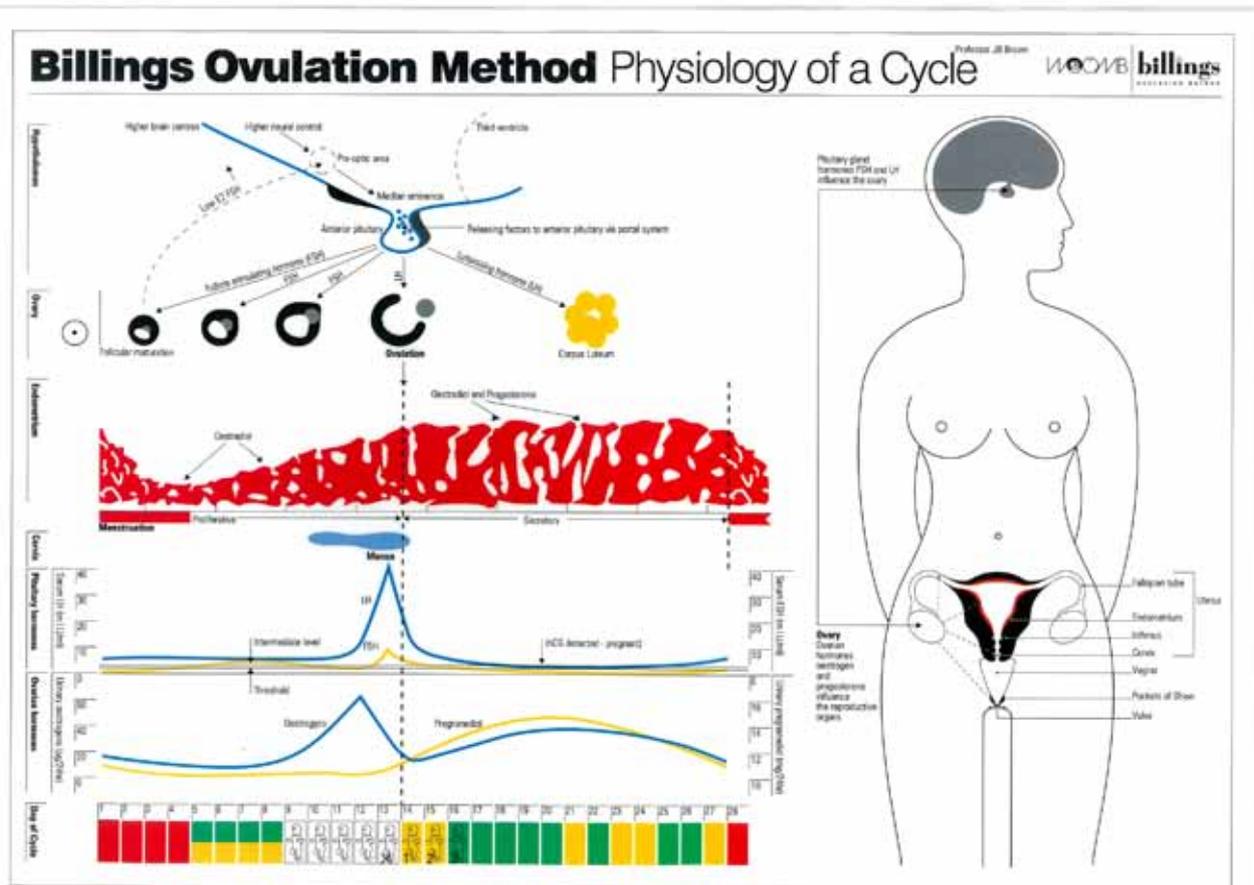
The Billings Ovulation Method®

BASIC CONCEPT: Observing changes in sensation, produced by cervical mucus as it arrives at the vulva throughout the ovulatory cycle. It allows the woman to determine the infertile and potentially fertile periods.

SCIENTIFIC BASIS: Hormonal changes, throughout the cycle act at the level of the cervical cells, modifying the characteristics of the cervical mucus.

It is very important to distinguish the following:

- Basic infertile pattern.
- First point of change - Fertile phase.
- Peak symptom.
- Declining fertility during 3 days past Peak.
- The days of infertility following ovulation.



MENSTRUATION: Sensation / appearance of bleeding- red sticker or symbol (•).

BIP OF DRY: - green sticker or symbol (|).

BIP OF UNCHANGING PATTERN OF DISCHARGE: -Initially recorded with a white sticker with baby or with the symbol (O). After identifying the UNCHANGING nature of the pattern over 2 weeks or three cycles - registered with a yellow sticker or symbol (=)

START OF THE FERTILE PHASE: The mucus plug is removed from the neck of the uterus that is open to the passage of sperm.

Change in sensation at the vulva – the woman no longer feels dry. The potentially fertile phase has begun -recorded with a white sticker with baby or symbol (O).

If the woman has a BIP of unchanging discharge, the start of the fertile phase is determined by a change in sensation or appearance of the mucus.

CHANGING PATTERN: The ovaries are producing increasing amounts of oestrogen. The mucus gradually changes causing a feeling of slipperiness. The amount of mucus may diminish but the slippery sensation may continue for one or two days.

PEAK DAY: The last day of the slippery sensation. The most fertile day of the cycle. The vulva feels slippery, soft and swollen. The mucus plug starts to form.

DAYS 1, 2, 3 AFTER PEAK: during the three days after the Peak fertility is declining. These days are recorded

with green or yellow stickers with baby and the numbers 1, 2, 3 or with symbols (l) or (=) and the numbers 1, 2, 3.

MENSTRUATION: occurs 11-16 days after Peak Day. The mucus plug is removed from the neck of the uterus to give way to the menstrual flow. The vulva feels wet and bleeding is observed. It is the start of a new cycle and is recorded on a new line of the woman's chart.

The Rules of the Billings Ovulation Method® for the Avoidance of Pregnancy

Apply the Early Day Rules and the Peak Rule.

Early Day Rule 1: *Avoid intercourse during heavy menstrual bleeding.*

Reason: Ovulation can occur quite early in the cycle, and in that case the cycle will prove to be short. The mucus preceding ovulation would be likely to be concealed by the bleeding of menstruation making it difficult to detect the start of the fertile phase.

Early Day Rule 2: *On days recognized as infertile - intercourse is available on alternate evenings during the Basic Infertile Pattern.*

Reason 1: If the woman is lying down, fluid mucus leaving the cervix, at the beginning of the fertile phase, accumulates in the upper part of the vagina. The woman needs to be in a vertical position for a few hours to feel the presence of the cervical mucus at the vulva.

Reason 2: On the day after intercourse, the presence of seminal fluid can hide the beginning of the mucus. It is important to allow time for the seminal fluid to disappear and to confirm that BIP is still present, thus avoiding intercourse on consecutive evenings during the BIP.

Early Day Rule 2 applies whether the woman has a BIP of dryness or a BIP of unchanging discharge.

Early Day Rule 3: *Avoid intercourse on any day of discharge or bleeding which interrupts the BIP.*

Reason: Waiting allows the woman to recognize the Peak Day, in which case she will apply the Peak Rule or, if ovulation is not confirmed, allow 3 days of the return of the BIP before intercourse is resumed on alternate evenings.

Peak Rule: *From the beginning 4th day past Peak until the end of the cycle, intercourse is available every day at any time.*

Reason: Waiting for three days after the Peak allows time for ovulation to occur and for the life of the ovum. From the beginning of the fourth day after the Peak day, the woman is infertile.

My conclusions

- If pregnancy isn't desired rules must be known and correctly applied.
- Properly informed women are perfectly capable of distinguishing when they are fertile and when not.
- Using this method ensures that husband and wife are aware of their fertility.
- Understanding their combined fertility enhances their respect for this wonderful gift.
- The Billings Ovulation Method® involves both husband and wife in decision make thus improving communication.
- It also benefits their psychological relationship.

Most importantly: **TEACH WITH LOVE.**



Vale Alice Wong



Memories of Alice

There was a dream, far too ambitious, to bring the beauty of the Billings Ovulation Method® to China. It was a dream which did become real, bore much fruit and became a Story of God's Providence as John Billings wrote later. Many contributed to this Story, including all those who prayed for this Mission, but there are some who were so significant: their friend and wise counsellor, Fr Joseph Hattie, OMI; his friend, Joyce Chan, a Department Head of Caritas in Hong Kong and Alice Wong, a young Caritas social worker who was fluent not only in Mandarin but also in English.

Alice was one of the first to hear this message, as she travelled with Lyn and John Billings to interpret those important early lectures in 1992 and 1995 in Nanjing, Huang Shan City, Kunming and Wuhu. The first Teacher Training Program took place in 1995, with Alice Wong and Grace Chan acting as our interpreters. Alice became the catalyst for the recruitment of Mandarin speaking interpreters for the many years of the China Project. It became her dream too. As her good friend Grace wrote "We believe that what she has done, with her dedication on promoting the strengthening of marriage and family and the good news of BOM will definitely be remembered and rewarded by the Lord! Her life has been a good witness of the Lord and has set a good example for me and many others who worked/ befriended her!"

Alice was one of the most remarkable women I have ever known and I thank God that I had the opportunity to know and love her and share the BOM journey with her in China. The crooked ways were made straight and our paths made smooth by this gracious and loving young woman. We saw how Alice reached out to all she met and we wished we could be like her. We all learned so much from her warmth and generosity of spirit, and our many visits to this vast and very different land would not have been the same without her guidance and leadership, not only for us Australians, but for all the others who became part of her team over those many years. I know how deeply she was loved by John and Lyn and of the gratitude of their family for her care of their ageing parents during many visits.

I have so many memories of Alice, from the young woman, wife to Anthony and mother to Wai, just a toddler, to the present day and the handsome and grown up son he is now. Anthony has been constant in his support for the work so dear to the heart of Alice. We extend our deepest sympathy to her family and her dear friends who accompanied her on this last and very difficult journey.



Wai, Alice and Anthony

All the Australian teachers have been enriched by knowing this beautiful woman but her influence has gone beyond our two shores. During her suffering, the BOM family around the world had prayed for a miracle. The journey has now ended for Alice and she is at peace, enjoying the blessings of her remarkable life. We all wanted her to stay, and prayed for a recovery but God could not wait any longer before calling her to Him. We mourn her passing but feel gladdened that many of us had the privilege to know and love her.

Marie Marshall

Dear Alice,

We have been teammates in work and sisters in the Billings Family for more than 20 years. I am so blessed to be your teammate and involved in the meaningful work of the Billings Ovulation Method® (BOM). In the past 20 or more years working with you, your enthusiasm at work, love for family, care for colleagues as well as your dedication on promoting the strengthening of marriage and family and the good news of BOM was highly appreciated. Your fervor to recruit interpreters for Drs John & Lyn Billings & the Australian teachers as well as training more BOM teachers was also greatly appreciated.



Alice, Angie, Grace and Vanessa from Caritas Family Service - February 2016

Lots of fond memories emerge when thinking of you---your smile, our praying together before Dr John gave presentation in the Conference held at Huang Shan City, China, your great support to me in my first teaching in partnership with you the BOM Teachers Training Program in Hong Kong, our teamwork in interpretation for Drs Billings, our teaching BOM in Shanxi, Hebei, Hong Kong, Macau.....Really miss you!

I also miss our singing together: "God has not promised", "His sheep am I", "BOM China song"I treasure so much our friendship and teamwork in BOM. You never hesitated to share your life & teach us with your life example. This time when you are resting in peace in the Lord, may I extend again my heart-felt thanks to you. What you have done will definitely be remembered and rewarded by the Lord! Your life has been such a good witness of the Lord and has set a good example for me and many others who worked with/ befriended you. Thanks the Lord for granting me, and our BOM teammates as well, the privilege to have you be our precious teammate & good friend. Love you !

In fond memory, with love

Grace Chan



Memories of Kath Smyth

30 April 1929 -16 December 2016



Kath Smyth was one of the first women trained by Dr Lyn Billings to teach the Ovulation Method, later called the Billings Ovulation Method®. A trained nurse, Kath set up the first Hospital Clinic in the Department of Community Medicine at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, Australia.

She taught at St Vincent's then later at the Mercy Hospital, at the Billings Family Life Centre and from home. She collaborated very closely with Professor James Brown on his ovarian hormone monitoring, undertaking a great many of the thousands of assays on which he based his findings about the behaviour of oestrogen and progesterone throughout the continuum of a woman's reproductive life.

Kath and her husband Kevin travelled by car throughout the length and breadth of Australia teaching and training teachers of the Billings Ovulation Method® wherever they went.

They also travelled to Europe, including Italy and Sweden, being honoured with two papal audiences - with Paul VI and John Paul II, and the opportunity to stay with Professor Erik Odeblad and his wife.

In recent years Kath has been a model of stoic good humour in the face of a great deal of suffering. She has been bed ridden for some years and last year had to say goodbye (for a time) to the love of her life, her husband Kevin.

On Friday 16th December Kath went to join Kevin and to enjoy her eternal reward. Thank you, good and faithful servant, for your example of love and perseverance. You will be much missed.

It is with a sad heart that we inform you of the death of one of the pioneers of the teaching team in Melbourne, Kath Smyth. Some of you would know that Kath was the Supervisor of the clinic at St Vincent's Hospital here in Melbourne and for many years did monitoring work for Professor Brown.

It was Kath who collected our blood in those early days for the scientific work. She and her husband Kevin (who was involved with St Michael's NFP services) set up an office in their home and for many years women would drop off urine and Kath would monitor the hormones.

She has been bedridden for some years and has been in a nursing home over the last few years. We believe she will make a speedy journey home, having done her share of physical suffering over many years. She will be joyfully welcomed by John and Lyn and Jim Brown as well as her husband, Kevin.

Please keep her family in your prayers.

*Gillian Barker, Kerry Bourke, Marian Corkill, Marie Marshall
Directors, WOOMB International*

May she rest in peace! Kath taught me how to do a "follow-up" during my first visit to Melbourne in 1973. I watched her follow-up consultations with clients during the morning. In the afternoon, I told her I thought I could do this, she laughed and told me to go ahead... we met at several WOOMB meetings over the years... her enthusiasm and devotion to "the Method" never dimmed. A true pioneer indeed.

With prayer, Sr. Hanna Klause

Dear Marian and all Billings family,

The "trip" to the Father's House of Kath Smyth is very sad news for the Italian Billings team.

Our Centre in Rome had the grace to know her very well and to cooperate with her, sharing with Kath and Kevin some beautiful times, both in Melbourne and in Rome, when our dear first Director Anna Cappella was still alive and John and Lyn Billings frequently came to Italy. During one International NFP Congress, dear Kath also had the joy to meet Saint John Paul II, in a Private Audience!

We remember her big mind, her amazing intuition, her organizational abilities and, above all, her bright smile, sign of a large, friendly heart, in which everyone felt loved. These wonderful qualities allowed Kath to be a significant person for the Billings Method: a competent and tireless collaborator of John and Lyn and especially of Professor Brown; an accurate and careful BOM teacher for many couples, always available to listen and accompany them; a "reference point" and a great friend to many of us.

Our consolation is to be sure that Kath has reached Kevin in Heaven, and with the other beloved BOM pioneers who preceded her, they now form together a loving group of special Guardian Angels who watch over us and the Method.

We thank God for this, as we entrust Kath to the tenderness of the Infant Jesus: in the Mystery of Christmas now very close, He will bring into the world the peace and the love, which she has witnessed.

Love to you all, Paola Pellicanò, Elena Giacchi, Aurora Saporosi, Paola Faraone



Rest in Peace Fr Sean Ryle SSC

1926-2012

FR SEAN Ryle of the Columban Fathers, of Japan, Dalgan Park, Navan, Co Meath and late of Listowel, , whose death occurred on Friday, October 26, made a major contribution to the mission in Japan.

Fr Sean hailed from Islandganniv, Listowel and was born on May 9, 1926. He was educated at Killorglin NS, CBS Milltown, Castlemaine NS and St Joseph's College, Ballinasloe.

His vocation to the priesthood brought him to the Columban Fathers, Dalgan, Navan, Co Meath in 1945 and he was ordained priest on December 21, 1951.

Assigned to Japan, he arrived there in 1952 and after language studies served as assistant in Odowara and Katase, then, later as prior in Hondo and Minoshima.

In the late 70s and 80s he served in the Diocese of Yokohama. Shortly after Vatican II, Fr Sean took time to study pastoral counselling in Canada and the United States.

He specialised in the Family Life Apostolate and this became his life's work and his distinctive contribution to missionary outreach in Japan including helping to introduce Worldwide Marriage Encounter in Japan.

After meeting with the Drs Billings he became a great supporter and generous benefactor of their work. We remain grateful for his wonderful contribution to our work.

Fr Ryle died on Friday, October 26. May he rest in peace.



WOOMB International Ltd

Aims to promote the authentic Billings Ovulation Method® in support of couples, the family and society, and to undertake and pursue all such other similar, related or compatible objects as may from time to time be considered appropriate by the Company.

To this end, and in furtherance of the vision and the Aims and Objects of the original WOOMB International Inc, and of the founders of the Billings Ovulation Method®, Drs John and Evelyn Billings:

1. WOOMB International Ltd, will actively seek to enrich the union between husband and wife for their mutual benefit by giving them knowledge of the Billings Ovulation Method® that they can use to develop love and fidelity within the marriage.
2. Through teaching the Billings Ovulation Method® to men, women and young persons WOOMB International Ltd will encourage parents and future parents to meet their mutual responsibilities to each other and their children by giving them insights which can be used to develop unselfish love.
3. Knowledge about fertility regulation, using the Billings Ovulation Method®, will be directed at:
 - i) helping couples who wish to have children;
 - ii) helping couples who wish to avoid pregnancy.
 - iii) helping women to understand their fertility and to monitor their reproductive health.
4. WOOMB International Ltd, through the Billings Ovulation Method®, aims to teach all who seek the information, how to make the observations and interpretations necessary for the identification of fertility, infertility and reproductive health.
5. WOOMB International Ltd aims to impart to men the knowledge necessary to exercise a supportive and collaborative role in the application of the Billings Ovulation Method®.
6. WOOMB International Ltd, through information and encouragement, will promote an acceptance of a pregnancy not deliberately planned, so that the child will be welcomed and loved.
7. WOOMB International Ltd believes that husband and wife have the sole right to determine in conscience the number of children of their marriage.
8. WOOMB International Ltd aims to encourage ongoing research into the Billings Ovulation Method®, human fertility and reproductive health.

The ***Bulletin of WOOMB International Ltd*** is produced 3 times each year. It is a medium for the publication of medical and scientific articles about natural fertility and related topics. It also publishes theological and philosophical articles pertaining to sexual morality and marriage which are in accord with traditional morality and with the teachings of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

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