Credidimus caritati
we have put our faith in love

WOOMB International Ltd
continuing the work of Drs John and Evelyn Billings of bringing the Billings Ovulation Method® to the world.

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Tom Gourlay is the Manager of Campus Ministry at Notre Dame University, Fremantle, Australia. He holds Bachelor and Masters Degrees in Education and a Masters in Theological Studies. Tom was asked to give the opening address at a weekend for Billings Ovulation Method® teachers from Australia and New Zealand held in May 2017. Many of those present asked for a copy of his paper.

It may in fact seem to be overstating the importance of the Billings Ovulation Method® to speak of it as a ‘way of life.’ As Christians, we tend to think that the way of life we are supposed to follow is one of discipleship – of following after Jesus, who calls us, inviting us to ‘Come and see’ (cf Jn 1:39). The early Christians, we remember, were often simply called followers of ‘The Way’.

To speak of the Billings Method of natural fertility regulation as a ‘way of life’ may in fact put some people off learning it. If it is more than a method, if it is an all-encompassing ‘way of life’ then I’m not sure I have the time or the desire to alter my life around a method that was discovered or formulated in the 1960s and ratified 70s. Why then should we talk of Billings as a ‘Way of Life?’

The modern mentality tends to reduce reality, including our own bodies, to merely mechanical things. I am my thoughts, or my mind. My body is not me, but instead something that I possess. It is as if all the material things around me, including my body, is merely dumb stuff which I can technologically manipulate at will to achieve the ends which I see fit. This is played out, for example in contemporary gender theory, which sees people as free to determine their gender, regardless of their biological sex. I am biologically a man, but in my mind, I choose to be, and therefore am a woman. Not only then do I choose to act or behave in ways which I see as being feminine, but I may even begin to take drugs or undergo some kind of surgery to bring about phenotypical or physically observable changes to my body.

There are many reasons as to how we got here, as to how this way of thinking has developed. There is a long genealogy of thinkers: philosophers, theologians, scientists, etc., who have contributed to this way of conceiving of the world, or more properly of reality, as merely mechanical and technologically manipulable. Interestingly, this is not just a way of thinking and being in the world that affects our secular brothers and sisters. It affects all of us, including us Christians, such that despite our profession of faith in the goodness of God’s creation, we live in an intellectual context which has reduced all things, including people, to what they can do and what can be done with them.¹

My purpose today is not to trace this genealogy of thinking, but to highlight how the Billings Method™, along with the other methods of natural family planning, and indeed many other practices can develop habits, or habituate within us, modes of being present in the world which open us to an encounter with reality that leads to the fullness of life that was promised us. (cf. Jn 10:10) What I hope to argue is that methods of natural family planning, such as the Billings Ovulation Method® actually provide part of an adequate response to much of the ills of our contemporary culture.

Technology, Boredom, and the Culture of Death

In 1968, Pope Paul VI promulgated what became his most controversial encyclical, Humanae Vitae: On Human Life. Within this encyclical he, rather unpopularly, upheld the Church’s constant and consistent teaching on the objective immorality of contraception. The controversy surrounding the document is well
known, and public dissent from the Church's teaching by Catholics at the time and since has been seen at an unprecedented scale. In the United States for example, moral theologians took out advertisements in secular newspapers to broadcast to the lay faithful, and to others, their public dissent from papal teaching in this instance. For faithful Catholics this was a time of much confusion and many, it would seem, took the advice of dissenting theologians and priests who advised the lay faithful to follow their own conscience, without much by advice way of how one could appropriately form one's conscience.

Now, nearly 50 years after the encyclical's promulgation we are able to see with clear eyes the vindication of a great many of its warnings, should the Church's perennial teaching on contraception be ignored, and contraception become widely accepted. In paragraph 17 of the document, Paul VI wrote that with the acceptance of contraception we would see a rise in marital infidelity, general moral decline, a loss of respect for women, the abuse of power, and a striving for unlimited scientific and technological dominion over nature. In our own day we are unfortunately witness to much of what Paul VI had prophesied. We see these prophecies played out in the devastating effects of the widespread acceptance of divorce, and its coincident cultural mentality; a culture of cohabitation prior to marriage; the legalisation of abortion; the proliferation of pornography; increasing acceptance of assisted reproductive technologies; and increasing acceptance of homosexual behaviour, along with the campaign to redefine marriage to include couples of the same-sex and/or more than two consenting adults are all part of this wide ranging cultural phenomenon.

To suggest that this all has its roots in the widespread dissent from Humanae Vitae is a ridiculous and unhistorical notion, as a great many of the cultural forces that fuelled this revolution in both public and private morality have roots reaching back long before 1968 (i.e the Lambeth conference of 1930, but even further back, Ockham, Bacon, Descartes, etc.). The fact however, that Catholics contracept, cohabit, and divorce almost as much as their secular counterparts is evidence of the widespread rejection of the Church's teaching in this instance.

This is not merely a problem resulting from the rejection of the Church's teaching in this area, but instead an outcome of a more fundamental way of looking at the world, the way in which we conceive of reality as such. In essence, this is a way which understands and sees reality as fundamentally meaningless – and consequently manifests itself in the phenomenon of boredom.

American theologian and philosopher R.J. Snell argues that boredom is one of the most pernicious and widespread vices of our day. And I think that much of his work in this area can be used to illustrate in particular ways how even otherwise good Christians and Catholics can be co-opted unwittingly into becoming active participants in what Saint Pope John Paul II in his 1994 encyclical Evangelium Vitae refers to as a 'culture of death'.

For Snell, Boredom is linked to, though not identical with, what the ancient writers referred to as the vice of 'acedia,' often translated in the Latin tradition as 'sloth.' ‘Sloth,’ he writes,

was understood [by the desert fathers and early monastics] as an aversion to our proper purpose or ultimate end, a hatred of friendship with God. Often this manifested itself in an aversion to the effort and disciplines of such friendship (prayer, fasting, study, etc.), but sloth could also result in a frenzy of busyness, even a workaholic life attempting to flee the quiet voice of God.

Rather than a ‘hatred,’ modern boredom is an indifference toward God, and to reality more generally. Things cease to have any value aside from my ability to make use of them.

While this might perhaps seem far from the kind of societal ills that were prophesied by Blessed Paul VI, the link will, I hope, become obvious soon enough.

Here, in 2017 in Perth, Western Australia, the effects of boredom seem to be easily identifiable. And I would say that our penchant for technology (in smartphones, internet, YouTube, Netflix, Facebook, Pinterest, twitter, etc.) exacerbates what is already an enormous problem – that being our loss of wonder in the created world. We can see this primarily in the younger generation.

Catholic philosopher John Cuddeback describes our contemporary situation by pointing out that, it seems that many children don't know how to interact with adults, or even with one another. They don't know how,
and aren’t interested in playing old fashioned games, those traditionally associated with childhood. They have a lack of imagination. Their minds are filled with banal or even sometimes evil images. They need to be, and for the most part are, constantly entertained, and yet they remain bored. Their manners are severely lacking. They’re lonely. They’re depressed. They’re unhappy. They’re not at home in their own skin (as we can see by the recent flurry in the procurement of massive tattoos and body piercings). And often they’re not at home.  

I can testify to this as one who spent 10 years teaching high school students, and now working at the University – but I am convinced that it is not simply a problem of ‘youth today…’

This is also something of an examination of conscience for us adults.

Often we are too busy yet we waste much so much time. We feel disconnected from one another, even our closest loved ones. Our manners are slipping. We interrupt conversations because of a text or a phone call, or to fact check a point in conversation. Times which were once sacred are no longer. Meal times are characterised by fewer people and more technology. We are always on call. We’re addicted to stimulation. Social media, 24/7 news feeds, youtube videos, Netflix, Pintrest, music, etc…

It seems that it is increasingly difficult to sit and wait patiently without reaching for, and scrolling through, your phone. We fritter away our time with frivolous things rather than sit in the silence. Our attention spans are shot, as is our ability to attend to anything that isn’t on a brightly lit up and flashing screen. This is a problem that we are all increasingly drawn into. The world around us is bleached of meaning and, as such, we simply seek to occupy our time often with frivolous entertainment, and by so doing, we are increasingly bored, and consequently, less present to reality.

Now, it certainly seems something undesirable to be a personality that gets bored easy. None of us, I am supposing, would like to be known as someone who is easily bored. Chesterton once quipped that there are no boring subjects, only boring people. In fact, boredom is not just something undesirable, but according to, Snell, whom I mentioned above, boredom is a heresy.

In boredom, we declare that the world is not good. But it is good. God says so, repeatedly, in Genesis 1. Nor does sin negate the goodness, although the goodness is disordered or perverted. Further, God, in Christ, becomes one of us, a fellow member of the world, thereby definitively declaring the world good, beautiful, and true. In boredom, we say that God is wrong, that he cannot create or redeem, or that his nature is itself not good or worth loving. Boredom is a persistent rejection of what God reveals to be true, even after we’re told our error. That’s heresy.

Now perhaps calling boredom a heresy is a little strong, but he makes an interesting case for it. More than that, when we dig a little deeper, we see that boredom is not simply the result of being inundated and constantly titillated by technology. It is, in fact, the result of a fundamental change in the way we view reality, or existence, (or being), that does not acknowledge nature as creation, or as wonderful and mysterious, or enchanted with the life of God’s Spirit. The modern way of looking at reality is one which reduces things to the sum of their parts and how they function. This is what the American philosopher Michael Hanby calls a technological or mechanistic way of viewing reality – a way of seeing the world which is, in the end, inherently meaningless or nihilistic.

What I would like to do is to press into how this is the case, and the effects of this way of conceiving of reality on how we live, before looking for options to remedy this.

Boredom is, in fact, an exclusively modern phenomenon. The first recorded use of the word boredom is in the novel Bleak House by Charles Dickens, written in 1852, although the expression to ‘be a bore’ had been used in print in the sense of “to be tiresome or dull” since 1768. Modern boredom is the result of this technological and mechanistic way of viewing reality as though it is fundamentally meaningless or nihilistic. Snell writes that,

Unlike earlier struggles with nihilism found in thinkers like Camus or Nietzsche, the nihilism of our time tends less to an epic struggle to find meaning than to an endless search for the stimulation of entertainment and consumption. Our is of the debonair [bourgeois] version—nothing really matters, but have you seen the most recent [Netflix series]?
What we live with now is a technological mentality that is fundamentally bored, a mentality that is in fact unable to be interested. If we think of the word interest, it can be broken up into two Latin root words ‘inter’ meaning, ‘among’, ‘between’, or ‘inside of’, and ‘esse’ meaning, ‘to be’, or simply, ‘being’. To be interested is to be inside of some-thing. A technological mentality does not see things as having an inside, things are simply made up of smaller and smaller parts.

In a society which is fundamentally shaped by this nihilistic and technological or mechanistic mentality, which sees things as being reduced to the sum of their parts and how they function, it is increasingly difficult or even impossible to be truly interested in, or ‘inside of’ anything at all. Things cease to have an interiority that is visible to our eyes, and instead they are seen only as the conglomerate of infinitely smaller and smaller parts. In the words of the hugely influential educational theorist John Dewey, who was celebrating this development, things are merely, ‘what they can do, and what can be done with them.’

Things have no given purpose prior to our encountering and imposing our will upon them.

This shapes not only how we engage with inanimate objects, but also, and often unwittingly, how we relate to and treat our loved ones, our families, our friends, the world around us, even ourselves - in fact, this way of conceiving of being affects our capacity to relate and engage with all of reality, including God.

In this account, the separation of sexual intercourse from fertility by way of contraception is not simply a stand alone act, but part of a whole cultural dynamic which has reduced nature, including my own human nature to an artifice which I can and should control technologically.

We can begin now to see how the prophecies of Paul VI in Humanae Vitae which coincide with the acceptance of contraceptives are not simply problems in public and private morality. They are, in fact, the result of fundamental problems in how we understand and relate to reality as such. The boredom of which we have been speaking is, in fact, a kind of practical atheism. One that might acknowledge God intellectually, but in reality does not allow God to be God on His terms as the omnipotent Lord of the universe and of history, but merely as a God of the gaps. My religion then puts its faith in a mere shadow of the true God. All I have then is a God that I can invoke at times suitable to me, or to whom I render worship for one hour on a Sunday morning (or Saturday night), but who does not affect any other aspect of who I am or what I do.

As a result of this modern technological or mechanistic mindset our posture towards reality is one fundamentally of activity. Things have no meaning prior to my encounter with them. I need to determine for myself the nature of reality, and even of my own being - I create myself and the world around me through my own self-asserting activity.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical Laudato Si, refers to this as the ‘technocratic paradigm’. (please excuse the long quotation)

[H]umanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation. Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology.

Receptivity as the Fundamental Creaturely Posture
This leaves us in what might seem a pretty sad place. The technological and mechanistic mindset is, in many respects, absolute in our contemporary culture. It is hard to conceive of reality beyond this scheme. Our society praises the self-made man or woman, the person who is radically independent, not at all reliant on
anyone or on anything. The person of faith is seen in this context to be weak – faith is a crutch for those who cannot bear the cold, harsh reality that there is no meaning anywhere.

Yet our own experience tells us that this cannot really be true. We feel the constant pull, a constant attraction to the fact that there must be more to reality than just this cold, mechanistic world. What St Augustine, in the beginning of his Confessions referred to as his ‘restless heart’, which longs for an encounter with the living God, in whom he can find rest.

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his masterful little book, Love Alone is Credible, describes the fundamental human experience as an encounter with another that awakens us to the love that is preeminent or fundamental to reality as such. Not as the radical assertion of my own independence and my own will.

‘In order to gain an insight into humanity,’ he writes,

the individual must encounter an other. The human being exists only in relation to others; he truly is only in the reciprocity of an I and Thou. The otherness of the other is a fundamental fact that he must acknowledge if there is to be any possibility of forming a harmonious community in the commonality of human nature… Man sustains himself – indeed, he first comes to himself – in an encounter. When one man meets another face to face, truth comes to pass, the depths of human existence come to light spontaneously, in freedom and in grace… the two [become] joined in a truth that transcends their finitude… If God, the Wholly-Other, ever wishes to encounter man, the place he manifests himself cannot but lie in the person who remains ever “other” to me, in other words, my neighbour.15

This contrasts significantly with the modern technological mindset (or technocratic, that simply does not need the other. In the modern mindset I must construct my own reality out of the dumb stuff that surrounds me. For von Balthasar though, it is the fundamental human experience of an encounter with an other, an encounter of love, which alone can awaken us to reality. Existence itself is relational. Things exist because of a creator God who is relational, or, in the words of the Apostle John, ‘is love’ [1 Jn 4:8]. We can see now what is at stake with regards to the bored, technological mentality which we described earlier.

It is in loving encounter that we are awakened to ourselves – and that we are awakened to the nature of reality, not a cold harsh mechanistic artifice, but as the creative work of a loving God. Balthasar develops this in a powerful and beautiful analogy in the same work, where he writes:

After a mother has smiled at her child for many days and weeks, she finally receives her child's smile in response. She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge: the initially empty-sense impressions gather meaningfully around the core of the Thou. Knowledge (with its whole complex of intuition and concept) comes into play, because the play of love has already begun beforehand, initiated by the mother, the transcendent.16

Originating from within, and tending towards love, our existence – all of reality – is and must be understood as a gift. We should understand reality both as a gift, and also as given – that is, reality has an order which precedes our will.

Von Balthasar deftly utilises the analogy of the mother’s smile here to demonstrate the love of God the Father. He continues,

God interprets [or conveys] himself to man as love in the same way [as the mother]: he radiates love, which kindles the light of love in the heart of man, and it is precisely this light that allows man to perceive this, the absolute Love.17

And so, the fundamental mode or posture of our creaturely being is to first be receptive, receptive of love, like the child in relation to his or her mother, prior to being active. This is not a passive receptivity, but an active one most adequately exemplified in the person of Mary. Our Lady’s fiat, which we recalled at the beginning of this presentation in The Angelus. Her yes, her willing receptivity, despite her being terribly troubled, opened her to receive the living and physical presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ, who took flesh in her womb, and whom she was able to bear and take out into the world, when she visited her cousin Elizabeth – her yes is a model of the kind of receptive posture that we strive to emulate. She first receives, and then she goes out.
This receptive posture is built into our human nature, and our being both originates in, and ‘tends toward’ that love. (cf Col 1:16) And yet, as a result of the Original Sin, and perhaps in a way exacerbated by the technological and mechanistic logic of our own cultural milieu described above, this openness to the other seems to be increasingly difficult to attain.

How do we develop this mode of being open and receptive to God’s grace?

**Cultivating ‘Habits of Presence’ – Developing an Openness to Encounter**

The theologian David L. Schindler, speaks about the need, particularly in our cultural context, to develop what he calls ‘habits of presence’ – ways of habitually being present, or open, or receptive to reality as it is, as it is given. ‘Forming such habits,’ he writes, ‘is the responsibility of every human being, and in a significant sense of every human institution.’

To live with an openness to encountering the other as gift, to live with an awareness and an understanding that I am, in my nature, given – this is the task at hand. And it is a task of increasing difficulty in our day and age.

How, then do I develop an openness to reality? How do I habitually live as present in the world? In every context?

What I would like to suggest is that there are a wide variety of practices that have the capacity to habituate us into a mode of being present to reality that allows us to be open to such encounters.

Like all habits, these habits of presence are the product of repeated action – action that begins deliberately, and often clumsily, but eventually becomes what Aristotle referred to as a ‘second nature.’

Like a little child learning to walk. Her efforts are clumsy, and require of her what seems to be an inordinate amount of concentration on her part. An adult however, who has been walking for years now, has through repeated action over many years, thankfully mastered the art of walking.

One fundamental practice that opens us to receive the gift of reality is prayer. Perhaps we can think of the Angelus. Traditionally prayed at 6am, 12noon and 6pm.

The late Monsignor Luigi Giussani often substituted the word ‘dwells’ for the word ‘dwelt’. One of Giussani’s points of genius was to highlight that while the mystery of the Incarnation did happen at a definite time, in a definite place, it is not something that is merely historical, merely in the past. For the Christian, Christ remains for us Incarnate in his Body on Earth, the Church. Christ is Incarnate in the Sacraments, and in the love shown between people – spouses, siblings, friends, neighbours, strangers… particularly in the poor, in the sick, the suffering, the imprisoned.

When one prays the Angelus in this way, remembering that the Word continues to dwell amongst us, one is reminded of the receptivity of the Blessed Virgin, and one is also habituated into the mode of openness which she models. Mary’s *fiat*, her ‘Yes’, was not something that was a once off. She was in the habit of saying ‘Yes’ to God, to receiving the graces which he continued to bestow on her, such that, at this important moment, when confronted by the angel, she was ready – habitually present to reality, and open to receive the gift in the working of God’s Spirit.

As mentioned, prayer is the primary way in which we develop this habitual mode of presence in the world, but there are a great many others.

Like all *good* habits, they are not easy to acquire (and, once acquired, are often all too easy to lose). And very often, these habits are not what we might see as romantic or even externally desirable.

The technological mindset that we have absorbed and the technology with which we are constantly bombarded promises to make life easy. It promises the fruit of virtue, without having to go through the difficulty of acquiring it.

The practices like growing one’s own food for example, put us in touch with reality as given by God. We cannot impose our will on what is given – it can only be received. We can work with what has been given, but we cannot subject the reality of the ground, of the weather, of the plants and the animals and insects
around us to our total control.

Natural family planning methods, like the Billings Ovulation Method®, are other such practices that habituate us into this mode of being present to reality. Billings, like the other methods of NFP, requires of us virtue and discipline. Through a heightened awareness of the shared gift of fertility, through an understanding of the cycles and rhythms of the body, we are drawn ever more fully into the reality which God has created and given to us.

Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* did not simply contain the doomsday prophecies which began this presentation. Paul VI did much more than prophesy what might become of a society that adopts wholesale the practice of contraception. In encouraging doctors and medical researchers to look towards developing more rigorous methods of understanding the given nature of our bodies, and thereby aiding married couples in living out the responsibilities of parenthood, he demonstrated, with prophetic foresight, the great many positive effects that the practices of natural family planning methods, such as the Billings Ovulation Method® would have.

[T]he discipline which is proper to the purity of married couples, far from harming conjugal love, rather confers on it a higher human value. It demands continual effort yet, thanks to its beneficent influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities, being enriched with spiritual values. Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace; and facilitates the solution of other problems; it favours attention for one’s partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and deepens their sense of responsibility.19

In this sense we can talk of Billings as much more than a method – but a way of living that opens us to receive the gift of reality.

References


Meet Professor Emeritus James Boyer Brown, MSc (NZ), PhD (Edin), DSc (Edin), FRACOG, 1919-2009

The Directors of WOOMB International have suggested we start a series in which we introduce our readers to some of the key people who have been a seminal part of the development of the Billings Ovulation Method® and its spread throughout the world.

To know more about our founders, Drs John and Evelyn Billings, it is suggested you read “The Billings Enigma”, which is available at www.woombinternational.org

In this edition, Mrs Gillian Barker, one of the Directors of WOOMB International, introduces her former employer, mentor and dear friend Professor Emeritus James (Jim) Boyer Brown.

I would like to introduce you to the man whom Dr John Billings fondly called “Mr Oestrogen” and who was my mentor. Jim Brown was born in New Zealand in 1919 and grew up on a farm. He was educated at Auckland University College and at the age of twenty he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry with First Class Honours. The following year he completed his Masters Degree.

During the Second World War Jim Brown was “manpowered” to the pathology department of Auckland Hospital where he achieved many things. To name just a few: he qualified in bacteriology, haematology and histology. He rationalized sterilization procedures, increased the number of tests available in the biochemistry department, set up a blood bank, the monitoring of blood electrolytes and the production of sterile solutions for peritoneal lavage – the precursor of renal dialysis. When chemicals could not be obtained, Jim either synthesized or regenerated them out of whatever was available. All of this shows the man that Jim was – innovative and constantly searching for better ways to do things.

Jim became interested in reproduction in the 1940s when he saw the rapid progress in the understanding of animal reproduction. He developed an interest in endocrinology and reproduction and started a small animal breeding surgery.

James Boyer Brown was awarded a National Research Scholarship to work and study in Edinburgh under Professor Guy Marrian – one of the discoverers of oestrogen. Jim's aim was to develop a chemical method for measuring oestrogens in urine. Although all the problems associated with this measurement were solved within a few months, it was not until 1955 that a fully validated method of measuring oestrogens in urine was published. Urine had to be collected over 48-hours and then each test took 10 days to complete, which contributed to the delay in publication. This research paper has since been cited more than 1,000 times in other publications and was awarded a full Citation Classic by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI).

Using this method of measurement, Professor Brown confirmed the patterns of oestrogen production throughout the menstrual cycle. This led to a PhD and his work was published in The Lancet. Jim's method was the “gold standard” for measuring oestrogen for almost twenty years until it was superseded by radioimmunoassay (RIA) testing of blood.

His collaboration with Klopper developing a method for measuring urinary pregnanediol in non-pregnant women resulted in being awarded a half Citation Classic and was the beginning of the tests we now take for granted – the day-21 blood test of progesterone levels.
One of Professor Brown's greatest contributions to science and medicine was the extraction and use of human pituitary gonadotrophin for the induction of ovulation. Working with colleagues in the early days in Edinburgh, these hormones were first purified and later the team developed the International Standard Reference Preparation, facilitating the widespread usage of the hormones. Although the Swedes were the first to use human gonadotrophin they reported startlingly high numbers of multiple pregnancies and hyper-stimulation rates. Jim developed methods for the safe use of human gonadotrophin with minimal numbers of multiple pregnancies and, for a time, produced all the gonadotrophin for clinical use in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and parts of Canada.

Jim Brown's published Threshold Hypothesis explained, for the first time, how only one follicle is usually selected for ovulation in the human, but it took twenty years for the explanation to be universally accepted.

Professor Brown was a member of the Pincus “think tank” for the development of the contraceptive pill, but he was surprised that the pill was so quickly and universally adopted by women without an adequate study of its safety and possible long-term effects. He expressed many times that this was not what he wanted his wife, daughters, daughters-in-law or granddaughters to be taking. Jim turned down an offer to continue working with Dr Pincus, instead taking a position in Melbourne, Australia.

He set up the Endocrine Clinic at the Royal Women's Hospital and the Steroid Laboratory which became the World Reference Laboratory for Urinary Oestrogens and Pregnanediol.

His work and understanding of ovarian function was linked to the development of the early techniques for egg pick-up and used in the first successful IVF pregnancy in Britain. Although he is considered one of the “fathers” of IVF in Melbourne he was critical of some of the bizarre applications of IVF, some of its subsequent developments and its low pregnancy rates.

Jim was involved in research on hormone-dependent cancers, notably breast, endometrial and ovarian cancers.

Dr John Billings wrote, in his paper A Story of God's Providence, “Soon after his (Jim Brown's) arrival in Melbourne I visited him, told him what we had done and asked him to subject our conclusions to the evaluation that his laboratory techniques could provide. I remember that he looked slightly stunned when I put this information before him and he told me that he had had in the back of his mind, ever since studying the women on contraceptive medication, that one day his laboratory techniques could be useful in helping to develop and validate a natural method of regulating fertility.” A commitment was made for the measurement of oestrogen and pregnanediol in the urine of women who were using the Billings Ovulation Method®. From those results the hormonal validation of the Billings Ovulation Method® was published in The Lancet in 1972.

In total, Professor Brown authored approximately 230 published articles in refereed journals and chapters in books. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and later was awarded Life-Membership. He was awarded the Prix Antoine Lacassagne in 1986 for the most important contribution to the study of breast cancer in that year.

As blood is not suitable for long-term monitoring, Jim continued to develop a system that utilised urine, and was simple enough for women to measure their hormone production at home, while producing the high level of accuracy needed in clinics and laboratories – a goal he had set himself in 1947. He achieved this goal, making all the components of the monitor, including a robot to accurately deliver nanolitres of the constituents needed onto the assay tubes. After his death, the meticulous records which Jim had kept in his workbooks were sufficient for Professor Len Blackwell from New Zealand, working in Jim's home laboratory (known fondly by all as “Jim's shed”) to use the robot and once more make the assay tubes.

In 2003 Professor Brown was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM), “For service to clinical research into women's health and reproductive issues and the development of the Home Ovarian Monitor.”

As technology and medicine advanced and tests became more sensitive, with the introduction of ultrasound and even laparoscopy, Jim Brown's explanations were proven and others began to see and understand what he had published so many years previously.

The paper, Types of ovarian activity in women and their significance: the continuum (a reinterpretation of early findings), published posthumously in 2010 in the journal Human Reproduction, is an accumulation of all of his earlier findings. The Continuum, which he had presented at WOOMB Conferences over several years, was
now available to the wider community. It was not until I took the time to read some of his early papers that I realised that the Cycle Variants which he explains in this paper were first published 40-50 years previously.

However, there was much more to Jim Brown than just the scientist. He was a man of unshakeable faith – a Presbyterian, he was an Elder in his local church. He was a strong family man - the annual family hiking holiday continued even as his children married and had families of their own. One of the last such family hiking holidays, from base to summit of Mt Kosciusko, Australia’s tallest mountain, was undertaken after Jim had recovered from a quadruple bypass heart operation. These holidays involved carrying everything in your backpack, including food, and so before each trip, different meals could be found drying in the freeze-dryer in the laboratory at the Royal Women’s Hospital. Occupation Health and Safety would most certainly put a stop to that practice these days!

Jim Brown was a wonderful gardener, with a flourishing vegetable patch. I had the privilege of sometimes working in his home laboratory which was personally built by Jim though always referred to as “the shed”. At lunchtime I would hear his wife, Wendy, call “woohoo Jim” and he would disappear into the garden at the back of the shed and come back with a variety of vegetables or salad ingredients, and some fruit to be shared for lunch. He was also a “handyman” and there was little that he did not build or repair himself. This was evident by the size and content of the workshop adjacent to the laboratory at the hospital. Utilising everything from the lathe to the glass blowing equipment, Jim was able to fix anything in the laboratory. I remember arriving at his shed one day to find him rethreading the coil from the hot water service, rather than call a mechanic or buy a new unit, as most would do.

Jim Brown was a thinker and a doer. A quote from one of his papers (J.B. Brown Oct ’95), “I am involved in production and research (for the Ovarian Hormone Monitor), I make all the tubes and check all the meters”, and from another paper by Brown et al, “... in our experience, the main difficulty in natural family planning for motivated couples is not the periodic abstinence required but rather the uncertainty in defining the fertile phase accurately, the excessive periods of abstinence which are required for maintaining adequate safety margins and the loss in confidence resulting from unexplained pregnancies. Therefore, in this paper, I wish to stress the exciting scientific challenge involved in devising practical methods for identifying the beginning and the end of the fertile period with absolute certainty. The scientific and technological challenge in achieving this is as great as putting a man on the moon, it will cost much less and promises to be of greater benefit to mankind.”

Professor Emeritus James Boyer Brown did not put a man on the moon, but the challenge he set himself, of understanding and explaining human fertility, was just as great, if not greater, and the benefit to mankind was certainly far greater. He strived for the truth and was faithful to the cause.

Professor Emeritus Erik Odeblad, Professor Emeritus Jim Brown, Dr John Billings
In the early 1950s the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix set up a Marriage Guidance Centre and appointed Fr Maurice Catarinch to head the centre. Fr Catarinich enlisted the help of a number of doctors to assist him by giving lectures at the Pre-Cana Conferences, one of whom was a young neurologist, Dr John Billings. Fr Catarinich’s counseling work with couples who had serious reasons, usually medical, requiring a rest from pregnancy, for some, to space pregnancies, and for some to avoid pregnancy permanently. At this time John promised to devote 3 months to assist him – now known as the “longest three months in history”.

John Billings’ knowledge about natural family planning was based on the book written by an American, Dr Leo Latz in 1932 “The Rhythm of Sterility and Fertility in Women”.

This book gave instructions to avoid pregnancy naturally, based on the earlier findings of two gynaecologists, Kyusaku Ogino in Japan and Hermann Knaus in Austria. “Their quite separate lines of research led to a similar conclusion that ovulation occurred on only one day in the cycle, and in the absence of pregnancy, ovulation is followed about two weeks later by menstruation. Knaus believed that the interval is exactly 14 days, but Ogino had demonstrated an interval of 12-16 days.”

The first thing John Billings did was to carefully investigate the Rhythm Method. He stated: “That was really a very profitable exercise because it soon became quite clear that a number of pregnancies had resulted from the couple not understanding the method properly. In other words, they hadn’t been taught the rhythm method as they should have been taught.” This was an important discovery and would impact on his later work when training teachers of NFP. What also became evident was that the discovery by Ogino and Knaus was only relevant when the woman had regular cycles. There remained the problem when ovulation was delayed and breastfeeding was a classic example of how this method could not help, as it required counting of days from the beginning of menstruation.

John Billings’ research through the medical literature led him to the work of Van der Velde of Holland who in 1904 discovered that there was a basal body temperature shift from a lower to a higher level as a result of ovulation. In 1868 it had already been discovered that the body temperature dropped at the time of menstruation.

Pursuing the literature further, John Billings discovered there were references to activity of the cervix which related to fertility. However all of this research was done on samples taken from the cervix by the gynaecologist and studied in the laboratory. There was no clinical research and the only reference to women themselves noticing a discharge was in the gynaecology books where it was called leucorrhoea which simply meant white discharge. It was described as a benign phenomenon which was of no great consequence. There was no reference to it being a universal phenomenon in healthy fertile women nor any attempt to work out its cause.

His next step was to ask the women who attended the Centre. He stated: “I questioned the women about any kind of vaginal discharge during the cycle and I was absolutely amazed. They all answered very positively.”

John Billings collaborated with Fr Catarinich who agreed that “we must now pursue this more and define the whole thing accurately”. John Billings described Fr Catarinich as making a very useful contribution to the research. “He wouldn’t start with a preconceived idea. He would say: ‘If there is something there in nature then it has a purpose and we must study to find out what the purpose is, not assume from what people have suggested is the right explanation’.” And so the incredible contribution to couple relationships and family was started as John Billings began in earnest to discover the significance of mucus to fertility and how women could readily identify the signs of fertility and infertility if given the correct information.

The first years of helping couples through the Centre in Melbourne involved a combination of Rhythm, temperature taking and observations of mucus as John Billings gathered clinical information on the significance of cervical mucus and developed guidelines or Rules for what eventually became first of all the Ovulation Method and later renamed The Billings Ovulation Method® or Billings Method™.

Fr Catarinich used to draw up charts which recorded the rhythm calculations with a list of days, always the day and date as a check and there were lines drawn according to the Rhythm calculations indicating
the probable limit of the fertile time. They were very useful charts for their study of cycles and when they incorporated the use of temperature, he again designed a temperature chart for recording the temperature. As John Billings stated: “I was busy in my neurological practice and with the family and that was an enormous help that there was someone prepared to do this with such care.”3

Dr Lyn Billings recalled that Fr Catarinich would visit their home, bringing with him these charts which he and John would stretch out the length of their hallway and bend over them, studiously identifying what they were revealing.

What became clear was that there was a temperature shift but there were various rules about how to interpret it. Others had drawn a line between the two levels and given it different names but Fr Catarinich suggested that it be named the marginal line. There was a margin below which the temperature remained before ovulation and another after, however there was still the problem of an imprecise relationship to the exact time of the shift. Obvious problems became apparent as the rise in temperature may not be related to the menstrual cycle and there had already been observations of pregnancy occurring from a single act of intercourse in the cycle around day 5 or 6, making the combination of Rhythm counting and Temperature taking imprecise.

There was a steady group of women coming into the Centre seeking help and one night a week John Billings saw these people. After taking a medical history from them he would listen to the women and would say “tell me about it”. As he noted: “I wouldn’t say anything”. And the women would say “In the first place it just starts off this way”. Very quickly he observed that they were describing observations during the days the discharge was present, the number of days and the changes in pattern which were all then recorded. He discovered that some women had the discharge for more days than others, some had a lot more than others but they were all describing a similar kind of sequence, although there was an individuality about it.

What was also discovered was that what the women were describing was what had previously been studied after cervical discharge samples had been taken from the women, but in this case the women themselves were able to recognise this discharge and to relate the changes they experienced. In addition it fitted in with what Ogino and Knaus had discovered, and clarified and complemented the rhythm of the menstrual cycle.

Daily observations were then added to the instructions given to women using the Rhythm Method calculations with the advice to always avoid intercourse over those days of discharge and for a few days after it had ceased. The result was no pregnancies over a long period of time when the women followed that advice.

Instruction in the Temperature Method continued as well. The main reason for this was that many women were astonished at the information they had been given regarding the discharge which had been a familiar observation for so many years and they were doubtful as to whether pregnancy could be avoided by waiting without intercourse over this time. It seemed too simple.

The next step was to get the cooperation of couples coming to the Centre who were now wanting to conceive. “They were asked to work back in the mucus from the time it was there and when it stopped, completely stopped, and we would see then if they would move in a day more each cycle, if they didn’t get pregnant immediately”. The couples were asked to record the acts of intercourse during the time of the mucus and it was from this information that the Peak and the count of 3 days after Peak were established. As explained by Dr John Billings “This wasn’t a big group but you would find that as the couple worked back into the mucus, there was a pregnancy. When she was four days removed from it, there were no pregnancies in this series. There was one pregnancy on day 3 after what we later defined as the Peak, a few more on day 2, more on day 1 after the Peak but most of them occurred on the day of the Peak. We defined the day of maximum fertility in that way.”

By the end of the 1950s there was clear evidence that the beginning and the end of the fertile phase of the menstrual cycle are reliably defined by the cervical mucus pattern. A decision was made to write a book to document and publicise the results of this clinical research. It was decided that the book would also include accurate information on the application of the Rhythm and Temperature Methods to help those couples who may have need of some correction in the instruction they had previously received. It was clear that this discovery might be valuable for those living in the developing countries of the world who had a need for a reliable and harmless method of identifying those days when conception was impossible. The Rhythm
Method had been demonstrated to be inadequate. The distribution of thermometers and the necessary instruction in its use could not be an acceptable target for the millions needing this help.

The draft of this book *The Ovulation Method* was ready in 1962, the year that Professor James Brown came to Melbourne to take up a position in the Department of Obstetrics at the Royal Women’s Hospital. John Billings approached him, told him of his work and asked him whether he would help to validate the present developments by measuring the hormonal patterns of the women. Professor Brown was immediately interested and revealed that he had hoped that his laboratory techniques could be used to assist in the development of a natural method.

At that time it took half a day to do one test but Professor Brown initially did a small series – 22 women were in this first study which was then written up.

When told of what had transpired Fr Catarinich advised: “Don’t go ahead with your book, we’ll wait and get some scientific evidence and include it in the book”\(^3\) So the book lay dormant for a year or two although amendments were made and a number of case histories were included where the hormones had been evaluated and where there were corresponding women’s observations and the Rules that had already been formulated. This was in 1963 and it was when Lyn Billings was asked to proof read the book.

As stated by John: “We hardly discussed it before. We would come home and talk about the children. Fr Catarinich used to come over at night some time and he and I would sit down in one room and have a chat about how far we had got. Lyn knew I was puddling in this little …. well I could hardly call it a scientific project at that time. We were just calling it helping families.”\(^3\)

Lyn proofread the book and it was first published in December, 1964. It was after this that she said “I had better come in and help you with this one”. She started working at the Centre in 1965 and John remarked “I quickly realised that a woman had a major advantage over a man in teaching other women the Method.”\(^3\)

At this time there were still a number of women coming to the Centre who were deemed “difficult to teach” and when Lyn came into the Centre it was suggested she teach these difficult cases. After she had worked there for a few months she asked: “When are you going to send me the hard ones?”\(^3\) As Lyn explained: “Again and again we would have the experience of one of the men talking to the woman and she would come and see me and I just did the routine and we would go through it and she would say: ‘Oh is that what he was talking about’”\(^3\)

It was not long before it was quickly realised that this was something that was best taught by women to other women. However as stated by John Billings: “That does not mean that all women make good teachers or that all men can be predicted to be poor teachers”.\(^3\)

The continued development of the Method will be explored in a further From our Archives article.

References:

3.   Personal reflections – extracts from private correspondence J.B.Billings and E.L.Billings

Dr John Billings, Dr Evelyn Billings, Fr Maurice Catarinich
Question to Senior Teachers

What is the trigger to recommend that the Basic Infertile Pattern (BIP) be reassessed for the breastfeeding/weaning woman?

To answer this question we must first of all go back to the basics and articulate what is necessary to identify a combined BIP whenever ovulation is delayed.

When ovulation is delayed the woman is going to have a different experience from what is expected in regular fertile cycles. As Professor Brown has so clearly taught us the time taken for the total fertile process is 21 days. That time includes:

• the rapid growth phase of the follicle and its development
• ovulation
• the formation of the corpus luteum and its demise.

The FSH needs to reach the threshold level for the most receptive follicles for them to begin their rapid growth phase. In the normal cycle, the FSH rise to threshold begins at the end of the previous cycle when the suppression of FSH and LH has been lifted. It takes about 7 days for the FSH to reach threshold levels and during this time the woman may experience some days of BIP after menstruation has ceased. It is possible that the threshold level may be reached during the days of menstruation, with ovulation occurring early in the cycle, in which case a BIP will not be present.

A woman experiencing cycles of less than 35 days will only have one BIP – either dry or discharge. If she has a BIP of discharge this is established over three cycles. This discharge is the result of small pieces of the G plug breaking off and being discharged.

However, when ovulation is delayed the rise in FSH production to the threshold has been delayed and so there will be many more days of BIP. For the breastfeeding woman the production of prolactin that maintains her milk supply suppresses the FSH production for a variable time. Over time, and as the feeding patterns change, the prolactin levels reduce and the suppression of FSH and LH is lifted. As her fertility returns it is likely that the woman will experience the variants of ovarian activity of the Continuum as described by Professor James Brown.

When ovulation is delayed, the woman may experience a Combined BIP made up of days which are dry and an unchanging discharge, or, there may be days of discharge which display different but constant variations in the symptoms. This BIP of Discharge is identified when small amounts of oestradiol are produced causing the epithelial cells of the vagina to grow and shed, resulting in an unchanging pattern of discharge. In a normal cycle of less than 35 days, there is also a vaginal response caused by the rising oestradiol levels, but this response occurs at the same time as the cervix responds and heralds the beginning of fertility. It is only when ovulation is delayed that there is time for a vaginal response to be observed and identified as infertility.

The criteria for identifying the combined BIP is to have two weeks of charting where the couple refrain from intercourse and there has been no bleeding during this time. Bleeding would indicate two possibilities: that hormones had either been high enough to influence the growth of the endometrium but had fallen leaving the endometrium unsupported and causing a withdrawal bleed; or, alternatively, bleeding accompanied high oestradiol levels, as a breakthrough bleed. If there is no bleeding, the pattern can then be revealed without the confusion caused by sexual stimulation and intercourse fluids. If the woman is indeed in a time of infertility the constancy of her pattern will be revealed and the couple is able to use Early Day Rule 2 until there is an interruption to her BIP.

For the breastfeeding woman this time of infertility can be prolonged and as her baby grows, the description of the BIP of discharge may change as she experiences more vaginal discharge as the low oestradiol levels fluctuate, often as a result of the changes in the baby’s feeding pattern. She may find that the dry sensation disappears and is replaced by a different unchanging pattern of discharge.
At some time, the breastfeeding woman will experience changes that are heralding the return of fertility. She will become aware of changes that are not unchanging in pattern but are of a developing nature, changing rapidly but not necessarily leading to a Peak. The criteria for a Peak with the changing, developing pattern of variable length leading to slippery and then the definite change to no longer slippery may not be present. She may not feel slippery, or there may be extended days of unchanging slippery. Over this time she applies Early Day Rule 3 and when the BIP returns she applies the count of 3 before again applying Early Day Rule 2. Sometimes before the count of 3 is finished or very soon after, a further interruption to the BIP occurs, resulting in more abstinence than previously experienced, as these times of potential fertility reappear and Early Day Rule 3 is reapplied. In addition she may experience bleeding as a result of this increased oestradiol activity.

It is at this time that it is wise for the couple to seek the assistance of an accredited Billings Ovulation Method® teacher if they have not done so before.

The teacher is faced with a dilemma. She recognises that this confusing pattern cannot all be fertility but it may be difficult to clearly identify where infertility is obvious. She may be tempted to introduce another description into the combined BIP. If bleeding has returned, this is not the time to introduce a new BIP.

The difficulties arise when there is regular bleeding but no Peak can be identified. The teacher knows that regular bleeding is indicating ovarian activity. The bleed may in fact be menstruation. If the bleeding is regular, the possibility that the woman is ovulating without a Peak symptom must be considered. The teacher must carefully look at the chart to identify the reason for this bleeding. The right questions must be asked. Has the woman noticed changes from her BIP? Can a changing, developing pattern be identified? Are the descriptions following the change different from her established BIP but similar to what she experienced before the last bleed? Does the description after the change indicate that progesterone is present? Did she notice a swollen vulva? Was she aware of the lymph node swelling?

The answers to these questions might give a clue that she may in fact be ovulating even though a Peak cannot be identified. The pre-ovulatory infertile phase and the luteal phase have different hormonal profiles which can be reflected in the chart. Peak Rule can only be applied if Peak is identified. If no Peak, Early Day Rules continue. Once a Peak has been identified, the BIP must be re-established, however, if the chart does not reveal a Peak but does identify that fertility is returning and that the infertile variants of the Continuum are present, it is also wise to use caution and to recommend that the BIP be reassessed. A careful assessment of the charted record may enable the teacher to give the advice to continue to use the identified BIP or, if it appears to be indicating returning fertility, to recommend that the couple no longer use a combined BIP but re-establish the BIP.

Dry does not need a reassessment. If the woman experiences a dry sensation, Early Day Rule 2 can be applied. If however, there has been a BIP of discharge this should now be reassessed. The couple may choose to wait until patterns become clearer, or may choose to apply Early Day Rule 2 on days of discharge which are clearly revealing an unchanging pattern. However, when a Peak is identified, the couple should be advised to wait over the pre-ovulatory phase for three cycles to confirm the BIP of Discharge, or if cycles are longer than 35 days, two weeks of charting with abstinence will identify the BIP.

Asking the right questions will help the woman to articulate the changes she has experienced and assist her to recognise infertility and potential fertility. As described by Professor James Brown, as the LH mechanism matures she may have a luteinized unruptured follicle (LUF), or ovulation with a deficient or short luteal phase before she returns to a fully fertile cycle.

Some breastfeeding/weaning women return to fertility with a lesser symptom than expected for normal fertile cycles. These women must be alert for any changes that are indicating an interruption to their BIP and apply Early Day Rule 3, if the desire is to avoid a pregnancy. It is very important that the teacher makes it clear to the woman that any change from her BIP must not be ignored, particularly if she has already experienced bleeding.

The teacher will not recommend adding a new description to the BIP once there is evidence that fertility is returning. It is imperative that if the desire is to postpone pregnancy, the couple be advised to follow the
Rules of the Billings Ovulation Method®. This may necessitate more abstinence than usual and the teacher will offer encouragement and wise advice to wait until the patterns become clearer and to only use days for intercourse when the BIP is present or Peak has been identified.

Summary: When to re-establish BIP:

• As baby grows, an already established combined BIP may display different but unchanging descriptions indicating that a new combined BIP can be identified with two weeks of observation (no bleeding and no intercourse).

• When regular bleeding occurs, ovulation may also be occurring despite the absence of a Peak Symptom. Carefully assess record. BIP may need to be re-established. Do not introduce a new combined BIP. Early Day Rules continue until Peak is identified.

• Once Peak is identified BIP must be re-established. Cycles may now be regular and of average length so there can be only one BIP.

To celebrate 50 years since the publication of Humanae Vitae
WOOMB International and WOOMB Latin-America
proudly announce the forthcoming
Conference and Teacher Training Programs
“Innovations in Comprehensive Health through the Billings Ovulation Method®”
San José, Costa Rica
April 27 - May 2, 2018

Conference: April 27th - 28th

Location: Auditorio Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Costa Rica
(College of Lawyers of Costa Rica Auditorium)

Speakers: National and International speakers from Australia and different Latin
American countries including Dr Stephanie Cordero, Dr Francisco Stecher,
Dr Martin Tantalean and Dr Pilar Vigil

Languages: Spanish and English

Cost: $80 USD per person, Early Bird registration $60.00 per person - registrations
must be received by Jan. 2018

Fee includes, lunch, dinner, and snacks for all coffee breaks.

Conference Dinner Banquet - Saturday, April, 28th $30 USD per person

Half-day tour - Sunday April 29th - $75 USD per person (Prior to beginning of
Teacher Training Programs)

Basic/Upskilling and Extension Teacher Training
Programs April 29th - May 2nd

Location: Casa de Misioneras Clarisas del Santísimo Sacramento, San Rafael de Moravia,
San José, Costa Rica.

Cost: $80 USD per person, $60 for Early Bird registrations (received by Jan. 2018)

Lodging will be offered at retreat house of Misioneras Clarisas del Santísimo Sacramento
$40 USD per person per day. Breakfast is included.
A list of hotels in the area will also be provided.

There will be transportation provided from and to Conference Center and Teacher Training
sites.

More details to follow soon.
For more information: woomblatinoamerica@gmail.com
Conference web page: Under construction
News Around the World

United Nations

Every year in March, at its headquarters in New York, the UN holds a consultation on the status of women around the world. This year was the 61st such event. WOOMB International has been represented at these conferences for many years – initially thanks to the inspiration of the late Dr Kevin Hume (from Australia) and the tireless efforts of Mrs Sue Fryer (from Canada) over almost all of those years.

More recently a team of young women has taken over this responsibility and this year we were represented by four women – Monica Lambton and Anne Belanger from Canada, Allison Dreher from USA and Cecile Dumdum who was initially from the Philippines but is now resident in New York. They “met” by conference call prior to arrival in New York to plan their activities which proved to be very beneficial. They were joined at the UN by Jane Munro and Fiona Basile from Australia.

The goals for this year were to offer a workshop on the Billings Ovulation Method®; participate in a side event hosted by the Holy See delegation; advertise the workshop and promote the Billings Ovulation Method® to delegates attending CSW and attend other sessions to ask pertinent questions. At the conclusion of the consultation they took time to meet together and de-brief, brainstorming ways of improving their presence at the UN and plan for next year.

With the aid of some attractive handouts and posters and a paid advertisement in the CSW handbook, they strove to achieve their promotional goals. They were able to meet with delegates from various countries and gave them information about accessing the BOM in their local regions.

Prior to the conference the CSW management issued a stern requirement that all proposals for events needed to follow the theme of Women’s Economic Empowerment which proved to be a challenge and required a deal of research to tie the presentation on the BOM to this theme. There were also some administrative challenges to do with security passes, timetabling of events and increased costs of advertising and hosting events. However the Side Event hosted by the Holy See was enormously successful with the room filled to capacity.

It was pleasing that many who attended the workshop were well versed in the Billings Ovulation Method® and came with questions, seeking advice on how to implement teaching programs. Time constraints meant that not all their concerns were addressed and some left disappointed. Hopefully they will make further contact next year or via the website address which was on all the literature.

Congratulations to the team for their sterling efforts on behalf of WOOMB International at the UN.

The WOOMB International team for CSW61
back row - Anne, Cecile & Monica, front row - Jane and Allison
Australia

On the first weekend in May, Billings Ovulation Method® teachers and trainees from around Australia, plus three teachers from New Zealand, came together in Perth, Western Australia for an update weekend followed by an Extension Training Program. The weekend began with reports of the work being done throughout our two countries and a talk from Tom Gourlay, a young man who is the Manager of Campus Ministry at Notre Dame University in Fremantle whose topic was Receiving the Gift: a way of life open to reality (see pg 2).

There were sessions on administrative procedures necessary in our clinics, an initial instruction role play and the importance of taking a good history, then a follow-up interview. Gillian Barker introduced us to the man who was her employer, mentor and friend – the late Professor Emeritus Jim Brown (see pg 9). We had an update on the use of Fertility Pinpoint for teaching and trainee supervision, sessions on unexpected pregnancy and cleaning up a challenging chart, plus a very interesting presentation about diet and fertility followed by some charts on sub-fertile women.

Gillian Barker gave another extraordinary presentation entitled The Billings Ovulation Method® - the tip of the iceberg explaining more of the amazing physiology behind human fertility, and there were sessions on promoting the Billings Ovulation Method® to young people in today’s cultural and social media environment.

Of the evaluations received following the weekend, 100% of people said the weekend was entirely relevant to their teaching and also that their personal learning objectives and been entirely met. Comments about the weekend stressed how important it is to have the opportunity to come together for learning and mutual support, and everyone said they left reinvigorated to continue the work.

On the Saturday evening, Archbishop Emeritus Barry Hickey celebrated Mass for us and then joined us for a celebration dinner, at which four women were recognized for Outstanding Service to the Billings Ovulation Method® in Australia – Merilyn Kennealy (our archivist), Marie Marshell (for her leadership in China), Shirley Prato (teacher from Queensland) and Dawn Turner (teacher from Victoria).

Thanks to Mandie Bowen and the team from Perth who not only arranged all the details of a wonderful weekend, but also organized a fundraising concert a couple of months before, to assist in defraying expenses and so keep the costs to teachers to a manageable level.
On 10 June 2017 at a Love and Life Gala held in Alberta, Canada, a Papal Blessing was presented to LeeAnn Kinderwater in honour of her dedication and service to Natural Family Planning. In presenting her with the framed blessing, Kathy Greaney, President, said: “The Natural Family Planning Association of Alberta was incorporated on 3 October 1984. LeeAnn has been an integral and influential participant of the association since its inception. It is not an exaggeration to say that without LeeAnn we would not be here as she has done much to ensure the continued existence of the association by her sheer determination and conviction of the efficacy of the work started by Drs. John and Evelyn Billings in Melbourne, Australia in 1953. They pioneered the natural method of family planning which we know today as the Billings Ovulation Method™.

“She has volunteered untold hours of time and energy to lend her expertise to women and couples throughout Alberta, Western Canada and so much further afield via the internet teaching the Billings Ovulation Method™.

“She was appointed as our Director of Education and Public Relations May 11, 2007. It’s a part-time position which we suspect occupies her full-time energies. She is also the senior teacher trainer for Western Canada and she serves as the Vice-President of WOOMB Canada and is on their National Education Committee.

“LeeAnn is a funny, warm and incredibly energetic woman with whom I have been associated since 1997 when I attended a teacher training session in Calgary with her. She has managed to continue her work with the association and to teach Natural Family Planning as a busy mom of six children, all of whom she homeschooled. Now she is a busy grandmother of fourteen and is as dedicated as ever to teaching and promoting Natural Family Planning and all its benefits far and wide.

“We are so grateful for the knowledge and expertise that she is happy to share with anyone who is seeking knowledge of their fertility. Most of all I am extremely thankful for her friendship and ability to frame her life and her work in complete devotion to the service of our Lord and to constantly remind us of the necessity of our work.

“It is with distinct pleasure that we pass on this Papal blessing to you LeeAnn, for all your work for more than 32 years on behalf of Natural Family Planning throughout Alberta, Canada and abroad.”
England

News from Billings Method England, June 2017: In April, we held our second teacher training day in London. 22 teachers attended the training session with a mixture of experience from those long in the tooth to some brand new teachers. We are still in our infancy as a training provider so it was a steep learning curve for those of us presenting the training.

The feedback we received from the training was very positive and the training day was overall a success. Claudia even managed to present with her lovely six month old daughter in her arms! At the end of the training day we held our AGM and discussed our plans for training and teaching for the next six months/year.

In May, we gave a professional training day to GPs and medical practitioners. Again in London, this event was organised for us by one of our new and enthusiastic teachers Dr Raheal Gabrasadig and we had 17 attendees. We were all extremely nervous about presenting to the medical profession but with Raheal’s encouragement and conviction that GPs need to know about the Billings Ovulation Method®, we surprised ourselves by how much we knew and we gave some very professional presentations. Our thanks go to WOOMB International for providing us with the basis of the training day: “From Menarche to Menopause”. The presenters were Pauline McCarthy, Bernie Wood, Josephine Wager and Adina Zatica.

Sadly, we are all still reeling from the sudden death of our fellow teacher, Dr Raheal Gabrasadig, from an aneurism just one week after the GP training day which she had organised for us. She was such a beacon of light and a force for good and she was only 30 years old. In the short time that she was with the Billings family, she gave us confidence and belief that we can achieve things that we thought were beyond us. We miss her terribly but we shall keep her spirit alive by continuing to run professional training days for GPs on a regular basis and by remembering her infectious enthusiasm, her profound faith and her desire to bring the Billings Ovulation Method® to as many people as possible.
Ireland

At the Annual Meeting of NAOMI Billings Ireland their President, Dr Mark Whitty, congratulated all present on another year of dedicated service at an interesting time in Ireland’s history. He remarked that the WOOMB International Conference and Training Programs held in Zagreb, Croatia, were “a great boost, and showed us the treasures and the trials of promoting the Billings Ovulation Method®.”

He reported that “Billings Europe began in Paris in 2013, with meetings in Rome 2014, Paris 2015 and Zagreb 2016. We had hoped for Marseilles in 2017 but it will probably be Dublin in 2018. Work is currently focussing on compiling a list of research papers on the Method, as the WHO have omitted the BOM but included the LAM and SDM in their current update on NFP.

“2018 will see the 50th anniversary of Humanae Vitae, with a WOOMB International conference and training courses held in Costa Rica, and the International Family Congress in Dublin. Reflecting on this, it is good to remember that we work on various levels: professional but as a nongovernmental organisation, qualified teachers of the Billings Ovulation Method® working as volunteers, and knowing the most sophisticated yet simplest true method of natural family planning.”

Dr Whitty went on, “Who do we teach? Everyone who wants this information. Why? Because all women are made the same, all have in them the answer to living well and flourishing, and it is a matter of right that all couples should know, and a matter of duty that we should share this treasure. It is not for any elite, but for everyone.

“It is no exaggeration to say that the inherent morality of NFP, and especially of the BOM, is wider and bigger than the visible Church, but is also an essential element of evangelisation; because all people wishing to live in the light of the Holy Family have to deal concretely with the incarnate issue of responsible parenthood. We teach anyone who asks, but have the broader vision and the deeper context in what we do, and we are unapologetically specialists in the BOM of NFP, which we see as central to the most authentic human and Christian living.”

Pakistan

The team at WOOMB Pakistan continue their great work having recently conducted programs in Lahore - 2 programs totalling 100 couples plus doctors, nurses, nursing students and priests; in Faisalabad where 26 new teachers received certificates - they will work in parishes with people at “grass-roots” level; and at Rawalpindi Hospital for Community Midwives, a gynaecologist and a government official.
Philippines

In the past few months Raymond and Linda Ganar and the team at WOOMB Philippines have conducted an orientation session on the Billings Ovulation Method™ in the Diocese of Paranaque, a training program at Mary Queen of Apostles Parish in March, a group session teaching mothers how to chart - they are then followed-up in their own homes, an orientation session on the BOM for a large group of the poor of Tondo, Manilla, and a teacher training program in the Diocese of Bullacom. They have also completed the renovation of their centre in Manilla.

Vietnam

A team of teachers from WOOMB Vietnam conducted a teacher training program in the Billings Ovulation Method® for 350 participants from the Diocese of Bui Chu in March. There were 350 students - 70 undertook the Extension Program and two groups of 140 each did the Basic Program. The teacher trainers then went on to Bac Ninh Diocese to conduct two sessions for university students and also a 2-day Extension Program for teachers of the Diocese who had done the Basic Program six months previously.