

# *A Child's Hope, A Parent's Mission*

Theresa Notare

Eleven-year-old Andrew is an only child. He comes from a loving family and lives in a nice middle-class neighborhood. He goes to Catholic school, serves at Mass, plays baseball and videogames, and has neighborhood friends. What could be missing from this happy childhood? Andrew will tell you—a brother or sister!

Andrew has been hounding his parents lately for a sibling. He recently discussed his problems with me because I'm his aunt who happens to work for the Church. He explained that he needs a sibling not just to play with now, but to be with "when we're old." He reasoned: "What would my parents do if I become a priest and they don't have any grandchildren? They need back-up!" I remarked that having children wasn't only for the parents and kids—"it's also for the world." His eyes lit up as he exclaimed: "T, that's right, that's the circle of life! Don't they know that?"

Andrew's hopes for a sibling are worth reflecting on. They reveal what we all want in our families—to love and be loved—and also point to a central aspect of the mission of married couples—to have and care for children. Society places economic and psychological burdens on husbands and wives. So it is critical to remind married couples that their generosity to life is key to the future happiness of all.

The family is the best environment for nurturing children. It's the building block of society, where children can learn how to love and give. And the family is the "little church"—the place where children learn about God and salvation. A healthy, holy family contributes to the well-being of its members and the nation.

Today many married couples are convinced they should limit the size of their families to one or two children at most. People who study population have begun to raise alarms about disastrous consequences from married couples choosing not to have any children. Humanity's future is endangered when the numbers of retired elderly people greatly exceeds those in the work force.

The fortieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae* (*Of Human Life*) will be celebrated on July 25, 2008. That encyclical addresses the Church's teaching on married love and the gift of life, illuminating God's plan for spouses, especially with regard to procreation.

Catholics, especially the engaged and married, should prayerfully reflect on *Humanae vitae*. This prophetic document beautifully and insightfully presents Christian teachings on married love and its unitive and procreative nature. It describes the "total vision" of men and women that is not man-made, but "Divinely designed." "Children," the encyclical states, "are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents." As my nephew Andrew says: "They provide back-up!"

In the fortieth-anniversary year of *Humanae vitae*, do yourself and your family a favor—read *Humanae vitae* and pray. Pray that the Holy Spirit helps you understand and embrace God’s design for life and love. Pray that more couples will realize that God is calling them to open their homes to another child. Children, after all, are our hope for the future!

---

*Theresa Notare, MA, is the Assistant Director of the Natural Family Planning Program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. This article was first written for Life Issues Forum, a national column, Pro-Life Secretariat, USCCB. The official English translation of Humanae vitae can be found at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html).*