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The Facts

Tell

the Story:

Catholics

and

Contraception



The Facts Tell the Story:

The Catholic hierarchy effectively shut the door on modern contraception. This controversial document declared that any form of modern contraception would result in a "number of children." However, when the encyclical was announced, Vatican church officials have called for a revision of the document or admission that the church is wrong.

Today, the overwhelming majority of Catholics in the United States disagree with the hierarchy's ban and use contraception.

- Sexually active Catholic women above the age of 18 are just as likely (97%) to have used some form of contraception banned by the Catholic church as women in the general population (97%).
- 85% of sexually active Catholic women report that they have had their partners use condoms during intercourse.
- 78% of sexually active Catholic women report having used birth control pills.
- Married sexually active Catholic women who attend church once a week or more are as likely (88%) to use a form of contraception that is prohibited as those who attend services less frequently (88%).

National Survey of Family Growth, 2002

Catholics have rejected church-approved family planning methods (the cervical mucus and symptothermal methods) in favor of reliable, modern methods of contraception.

- Less than 3% of sexually active Catholic women use church-approved methods as their primary form of family planning.
- Even among married Catholic women who attend church every week, only 5% rely primarily on church-approved methods for preventing pregnancy.

National Survey of Family Growth, 2002

Hispanic Catholic women use birth control.

- 94% of sexually active Hispanic Catholic women in the US have used a contraceptive method banned by the church.
- The percentage of married Hispanic Catholic women who use a modern contraceptive method is comparable to that of non-Hispanic married Catholic women—90% vs. 87%.

National Survey of Family Growth, 2002

Catholics support funding for international family planning and STI prevention programs.

- 66% of Catholics support the funding of international birth control programs.
- 86% of Catholics support US funding of international HIV prevention and treatment programs.

Harris, 2005

Catholic women are as likely to use modern contraceptive methods as are women of other religions

(% of sexually active women using modern contraceptive methods)

Catholic	Protestant	Other
96.2%	97.3%	97.3%

National Survey of Family Growth, 2002

Catholics and Contraception

When Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, contraception is “absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children.” Vatican officials made it clear that it was not infallible. Since then, many divorced couples to follow their consciences regarding the encyclical.

■ Catholics support providing teenagers with contraception and information about contraception.

- 88% of Catholics are in favor of public schools providing sex education.
- The vast majority of Catholics (83%) believe that family planning information should be available to teenagers. This is consistent with the opinions of Protestants (83%) and the general population (84%).
- Catholics are just as likely as the general population (58%) to believe that 14 to 16-year-olds should be able to access contraception, even if their parents do not approve.

General Social Survey, 1972-2004

More likely to use contraception than other religions

Young adults aged 15-44 who have ever used birth control (by religious affiliation)

Other	No Religion	Total
5.8%	98.1%	97%

Family Growth, 2002

■ Catholic women and their doctors believe that health care providers should make a variety of contraceptive methods available and accessible to their patients.

- 90% of Catholic women want their community hospitals to offer birth control, 77% want them to offer voluntary sterilization and 76% want them to offer emergency contraception (EC) to women who have been raped.

Belden Russonello and Stewart, 2000

- 88% of Catholic physicians say they would prescribe birth control to any adult patient that requested it.

RNS/Charlotte Observer, 2005

■ Catholics disagree with the Vatican’s stance on birth control and tend to trust their conscience more than the church hierarchy when making decisions about family planning.

- 78% of adults surveyed believe that the pope should allow Catholics to use birth control.

CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll, 2005

- 75% percent of Catholics believe that you can be a good Catholic without obeying the church hierarchy’s teaching on birth control and only 13% believe that the church hierarchy should have the final say on contraception.

Life Cycle Institute/National Catholic Reporter poll, 2005