

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace,
00120 Vatican City

15th October, 2014

Your Holiness,

I am writing to you on behalf of Population Matters, the United Kingdom's largest charity working on population and environmental sustainability issues. This letter recognizes the Roman Catholic Church's concern for poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability and addresses how these issues affect population growth. It also links population growth to a lack of modern contraception and calls on the Church to permit the use of modern contraception.

The Catholic Church, Poverty and Sustainability

I would like to commend you for your tireless advocacy regarding poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. I appreciate your desire to create a Church for the poor and agree that "poverty is a scandal".¹ As you stated in 2013 "in a world where there is so much wealth... it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry" and, "a way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth"². Population Matters agrees with the Joint Workshop of the Pontifical Academy of Science's remarks in May 2014 that; "there is no single environmental problem, there is a large collection of interrelated problems."³ Population growth is one of these.

The Issue of Population Growth

Population Matters strongly believes that poverty alleviation cannot be effective nor life on earth sustainable without taking into consideration the growing global population. The world's population is now 7 billion; it will be approaching 10 billion by 2050 and 11 billion by 2100. Already we are over reaching our planet's resources.

With population growth there is a greater strain on resources, compounded by our culture of waste and the increased emission of greenhouse gases effecting climate change. These together cause the mass migration of refugees, exacerbate conflicts, threaten biodiversity and life on Earth. Thus, this collection of interrelated problems can be linked to population growth.

What Population Matters Advocates

Population Matters works to promote sustainable lifestyles, including choosing to have a smaller family. As each child consumes more resources, their impact will continue through the generations. Smaller family size is not only linked to environmental protection but also enables a better quality of parenting and life for the children. Effective contraception is a necessary element of this family planning. In a world where the population of relatively underdeveloped countries is set to grow, access to contraception and related education is vital.

¹ Catholic Culture, "Pope Francis Address to Students of Jesuit Schools of Italy and Albania 2013", 7 June, 2013.

² Libreria Editrice Vaticana, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations", 20 June, 2013.

³ The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, "Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility", 2-6 May, 2014.

Population Growth in the Philippines

Take, for example, the Philippines, a country where 80% of the 107.6 million population is Roman Catholic, 3.4 million pregnancies each year are unintended and the population could swell to 200 million by 2080⁴. The country's slums are already overcrowded and more than a quarter of the population live on less than 62 cents a day. Hunger is leading to overfishing with a devastating effect on the reefs and thus the livelihoods of many fishing communities. The country's growing population also causes an increase in waste, so is a further scourge on the environment and its inhabitants⁵. In such a situation, improved education regarding the benefits of contraception might facilitate a better quality of life through effective family planning. It might also help minimise the broader environmental and planetary consequences.

Catholic Teaching on Contraception

We appreciate the Church's stance, as expressed in Pope Paul VI's *Humane Vitae* of 1968, that contraception is intrinsically evil as it undermines the sanctity of human life and disrupts the natural process of conception⁶. We are also aware that in 1997 the Vatican Pontifical Council for the Family stated that this teaching is "definitive" and cannot be reformed as contraception is against "the transmission of life"⁷. However, with recent issues relating to; changing world views on relationships, the spread of HIV/AIDs and concerns over the consequences of a growing population it seems that there is also a danger to life through the non use of contraceptives.

Pope Benedict XVI addressed this in 2010, stating that, while not a moral solution, contraceptives might reduce the spread of AIDs⁸. Yet this, while welcome, does not reference the further issues of the life of the mother, the quality of life of the children being born and the responsibility of guardianship we have over the planet.

The Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops provides a rare opportunity to assess the attitude of the Church's response to a changing contemporary environment. It is important that the reality of contemporary society be taken into account. Any failure to integrate the feelings of normal Catholic families will be a missed opportunity to represent the lived beliefs of Catholics around the world.

Population Matters hopes that doctrinal changes to allow the use of contraceptives will be considered where possible. We would welcome an emphasis on the fact that that whilst the Church offers moral guidance, it is ultimately the conscience of the individual that determines their actions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

Simon Ross
Chief Executive

⁴ The CIA World Factbook, "Philippines", June 20 2014.

⁵ Manson, J., Contraception, "The Philippines and Pope Francis' Passion for the Poor", 11 July, 2013.

⁶ Pope Paul VI, "Encyclical Letter, *Humane Vitae*", 1968.

⁷ Pontifical Council for the Family, "Vademecum for Confessors Concerning Some Aspects of the Morality of the Conjugal Life", 1997.

⁸ Donadio, R., "After Condom Remarks, Vatican Confirms Shift", New York Times, 23rd November 2010.