

## Spreading the Gospel of Life

**N**early 40 years ago, as a young medical student, Thomas Hilgers had an epiphany, one that he credits, in part, to the Knights of Columbus and our Catholic Information Service (CIS). Hilgers saw an advertisement from the Knights offering copies of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (*Of Human Life*), which had been printed in booklet form by the Order in December 1968, shortly after the document's release.



TIM S. HICKEY

He sent away for the booklet immediately. "From the moment I read *Humanae Vitae*, I knew the pope was speaking to me," said Hilgers, a member of St. John Vianney Council 7740 in Omaha, Neb.

While many Catholics ignored *Humanae Vitae* and its reaffirmation of the Church's ban on artificial contraception, Hilgers embraced its life-giving message, especially an overlooked passage that challenged doctors and medical researchers to "consider as their proper professional duty the task of acquiring all the knowledge needed...so as to be able to give to those married persons who consult them wise counsel and healthy direction, such as they have a right to expect" (27).

Fast forward to 1985. Now Dr. Thomas Hilgers starts the Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction in Omaha. Under his leadership, and with support from like-minded doctors and researchers, and from his wife, Sue, the institute pioneers a unique approach to women's reproductive health called Natural Procreative Technology, or NaproTECHNOLOGY.

NaproTECHNOLOGY built on Hilgers' previous work in helping to devel-

op the natural family planning regimen known popularly as the "Creighton" model. NaproTECHNOLOGY helps a woman — and her husband — easily monitor different biological markers so they can overcome infertility problems naturally and thus become pregnant or sustain a pregnancy to term. At the institute, Hilgers and his staff are helping couples who reject in vitro fertilization, artificial contraception and other therapies he believes are the stock-in-trade of many ob-gyns who have allied themselves with the culture of death.

"In my work, I live right next door to the culture of death and it's very scary," he said. "I have a very deep sense, because I am a Catholic and because I am a doctor, that I need to care about the people I am helping."

Hilgers' years of fruitful research have been compiled in a 1,300-page medical textbook. He and his wife proudly presented a copy of it to Pope John Paul II in 2004. The next step is getting the book into more hospital libraries, and into the hands of Catholic doctors and medical students. "If every council could buy the textbook and get it distributed, that's a very practical, very Knights-oriented project," he said. (Visit [www.popepaulvi.com](http://www.popepaulvi.com) and [www.naprotechnology.com](http://www.naprotechnology.com) for more information.)

Hilgers is currently working on a less-technical book on NaproTECHNOLOGY for a nonmedical audience. A grant from the Supreme Council is helping with that project, as well as with training more doctors and couples.

Whether it's via a CIS booklet, this issue of *Columbia* with many pro-life articles or a medical textbook, the Gospel of Life needs to be proclaimed.

"There is so much good in what the Church is teaching," Hilgers said. "We're sitting on a mountaintop. We just need to do a better job of educating people." ■

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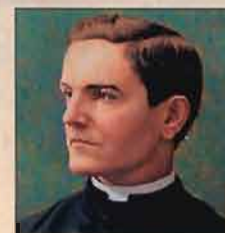
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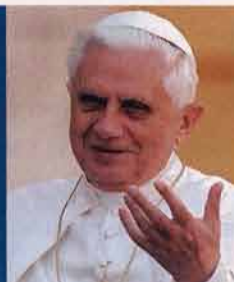
**On the Cover**



Pope Benedict XVI releases a dove Dec. 1 during a visit to the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Istanbul, Turkey, on the final day of his four-day visit to the Muslim country.

### HOLY FATHER'S PRAYER INTENTIONS — JANUARY

Reprinted as a show of our solidarity with Pope Benedict XVI. **GENERAL** That in our time, unfortunately marked by many episodes of violence, the Pastors of the Church may continue to indicate the way of peace and understanding among peoples. **MISSION** That the Church in Africa may become a constantly more authentic witness of the Good News of Christ and be committed in every nation to the promotion of reconciliation and peace.



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