

*By Catherine Masters of the NZ Herald*

Auckland Catholic Bishop Patrick Dunn has given qualified support for contraception outside marriage - and is confident his views will not get him into hot water with the Pope.

Bishop Dunn, who has pledged cash to pregnant women to prevent abortions, said yesterday that if people insisted on "sleeping around" they should use contraception.

He said this view would not land him in trouble with Pope John Paul II, who is known for his strong stance against any form of artificial contraception.

While driving back from the Far North last night he said: "No, I'm not expecting to go to Outer Mongolia ... or Kaitaia, which is where I've just been."

At the same time he said he was vehemently opposed to artificial contraception within marriage and followed his church's stance passionately.

Asked what the Catholic Church's attitude to sex outside marriage was, he said there was no policy to follow.

"The church doesn't have a policy on how you do it because it doesn't promote it.

"I suppose the point I [am] making is that if people are going to do this anyway, then I would say first of all please don't do it.

"But if you are going to do it, and of course many do, then certainly try to restrict the harm that you may well cause to yourself and to others."

Asked if in that way at least he advocated the use of contraceptives, the bishop said: "Well, not that I'm saying I advocate contraceptives ... Yes, I suppose that I am."

And asked how that fitted with the papal ban on contraception, Bishop Dunn said it was important to take the ban within the wider context of the Catholic teaching that sexual activity should take place only within the committed relationship of marriage.

"It's in that context that we can see there is some flaw in the artificial contraception mentality, which is hurtful or damaging for those that use it. "That's the church's vision. Now a lot of people don't share that, can't see it, but it makes some sense to me.

"I think it's a very difficult teaching that's hard to grasp ...

"I certainly support the church's teaching but people who engage in sex outside of marriage are acting outside the vision, if you like, that the church has of sexual activity anyway. That's sort of like uncharted territory, so I'm saying be sensible ..."

The Catholic Church, he said, was in fact "incredibly romantic" in its view of humans, sex and marriage.

Everyone, even people with broken marriages, dreamed and believed in a committed, fulfilling relationship.

"So the vision and the dream still holds because I think it's closely connected with the deepest human aspirations."

Bishop Dunn felt he was not being contradictory.

"If people are just going to go and, let's say, sleep around in a totally irresponsible way, then the church as such doesn't have a policy there.

"But the church's beautiful vision certainly doesn't mean that people like that are supposed to go round getting pregnant, or getting everyone pregnant just in a totally irresponsible way ..."

If people chose to ignore the church's vision, he said, then its teaching no longer applied.

"I would say you're playing with fire, so be as careful as you can."