

---

# Generating Support for NFP

Rev. Robert R. Cannon, M.A., J.C.L.

---

In the recently completed 1992 National Diocesan NFP Profile Report, diocesan NFP coordinators were asked to identify those factors inhibiting their NFP efforts. The three most troublesome areas mentioned repeatedly were: 1) clergy support; 2) misinformation/ignorance with regard to NFP itself, coupled with the need for a full range of educational efforts "on all levels"; and 3) program funding. As a priest familiar with Church structure and as one supportive of NFP, I'd like to offer a few concrete suggestions to strengthen the NFP efforts of diocesan coordinators.

## 1. Clergy Support:

When reflecting on how to elicit strong clergy support, it might help to begin with some background. Generally speaking, most lay persons involved in any apostolate in the Church when asked if they receive adequate support from their clergy, commonly note that their clergy offer only "limited" encouragement. You should know that the majority of clergy are genuinely thankful for every sacrifice of service which people make. However, I must admit, that it is very easy to allow the opportunities for praise of people to pass by. Both bishops and priests are not exempt from the human weakness of "taking people for granted". Everyone involved in ministry in the Church has a responsibility to become more mindful of the need to learn how to affirm and support each other.

Part of the difficulty facing all clergy is attending to the ever increasing multiplicity of pastoral demands and needs. This is further aggravated by limited resources and the amount of time that can be devoted to any single ministry. It is important for all those who labor in the Church to understand that there are a full range of ministries, a variety of groups, and a list of priorities which

must be balanced. The question, then, is not one of good will and support, but rather one of perception. Part of your challenge will be to convince both bishop and priests that NFP is not only needed in the diocese but also how you can help satisfy that same need.

No where else in the Church do the clergy face more formidable challenges than in the area of our teaching on human sexuality. We all know how misunderstood the Church's teachings are on this topic. Yet, the clergy must teach God's people and provide resources for his people to understand and to live these teachings. People who are knowledgeable of the Church's teachings on conjugal love and responsible parenthood, users of NFP, as well as teachers of any of the methods of NFP offer a partial solution to this pressing pastoral need in a diocese. Your expertise is a real blessing.

We know that about half of the dioceses in our country have an identifiable NFP program. The other half has programs at all levels of development, with a good amount having only "contact persons" (those diocesan staff who refer clients to the local NFP independent teachers). Diocesan NFP coordinators will have a structure to work through which is different from that of the independent NFP teacher who has minimal diocesan support. Yet, certain activities can be engaged in which would benefit both. I would only caution the independent NFP teachers to consider working on strengthening their connections with the diocesan NFP contact person in order to work toward fuller participation of the diocese in this ministry (this work is too hard to not have a network of support). In addition, when you are new to NFP ministry, be sure to check with your chancery to see if an NFP program already exists and if there is a diocesan policy or guidelines for teaching human

sexuality, fertility appreciation or chastity education. You don't want your good efforts to be perceived as trying to "usurp" the structure which is already in place.

In order to draw out stronger support from your clergy I would suggest that diocesan NFP coordinators try the following:

- A) *Know "who's who" in your diocese.* Then, talk with as many key personnel as possible; e.g., Bishop, Superintendent of Schools, Religious Education Director, Vicar General, Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Vicar for Social Services, Director of the Family Life Office, Head of Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, etc. People have to know who you are and what you are trying to do. Ask them about any concerns that they may have. Ask them for their advice in having your efforts be successful. For the diocesan NFP Coordinator, consider inviting anyone of these people to join your Advisory Board.
- B) *Talk with each Dean.* A Dean is a pastor who is responsible to the bishop for the ministerial efforts of a cluster of parishes in the diocese. Ask each dean for the opportunity to address their deanery clergy. You can do a basic NFP promotional presentation, answer questions, and look for pastors who seem willing to have you come to their parish. This is an excellent format to educate the clergy on the most recent Church teaching and scientific information on NFP. Most dioceses have this deanery format. Your diocese may have episcopal vicars who exercise pastoral responsibility to the bishop over an area of the diocese. Talk to all of them if need be.

C) *Meet with pastors personally.* Explain what your program can do for the married, engaged, and the young people in the parish. The pastor will be concerned about your competency, cost, time required for his involvement, use of facilities, materials, etc. Have a plan of action and some concrete answers before you meet with him. But the support of your pastor is only one step in gathering parish support for NFP. Offer to address the other clergy in the parish, the parish staff (e.g., DRE, Youth Minister, and Principal) and parish council. All you have to do is have one parish become supportive of your NFP efforts and you could meet many of the needs of an entire area.

## 2. Misinformation and Education:

It is common knowledge that there continues to be a tremendous amount of misinformation about NFP. NFP methods are still being linked to "rhythm" in the average American "reproductive" cultural mind. In addition, there remains a serious lack of sophistication of our Catholic understanding of the gift of human sexuality, conjugal love, and responsible parenting. Therefore; wherever possible, "Educate!", "Educate!", "Educate!" There are a plethora of avenues for you to explore and utilize, for example:

A) *Guest speaker.* Organizations are always looking for speakers to fill-out the agenda for meetings or to provide continuing education. Be willing to speak to organizations both on a diocesan level and parish level to promote NFP and to gather support for your efforts; e.g., women's and men's groups, those involved in Engaged Encounter Weekends, Marriage Encounter weekends, Cursillo Ultreya's, Knights of Columbus, Parish Guilds, Youth Groups, CCD teachers, Catholic high school teachers, Parent groups, etc. Determine for yourself if you need to reach out beyond the Catholic community in your area.

B) *Media relations.* Sit down with your diocesan communications director to discuss what avenues of educating the public are available through: the diocesan paper; bulletin inserts; TV, or radio programs, etc. The commercial media, be it T.V., radio, or print, are often open to presentations or articles on NFP. In secular papers, the editor of the "Religion" section of the Sunday edition is always looking for new articles. You might become a regular columnist.

## 3. Finances:

Regardless of the ministry, money is tight for everyone both on the diocesan and the parish level. There never has been enough money to go around for all the good things that we would like to do. The most successful NFP programs rely on a variety of sources for program funding. The most common funding sources are diocesan subsidies, donations from individuals/organizations, and/or client fees to subsidize NFP efforts. Therefore, work to avoid relying completely on any single source of funding. Money can be found:

A) *Parishes.* Most pastors will part with a small amount to donate to promoting NFP (especially if you are willing to help them, they'll be willing to help you).

B) *Donations.* When you address different groups, ask them for a donation to support the NFP effort. Even better, ask for an annual donation of some amount. The amount doesn't matter as much as encouraging continued support for your efforts. You can reciprocate by being willing to return to the groups and give an NFP update.

C) *Mailing list/Newsletter.* Develop a mailing list of supportive individuals, organizations, and individuals. Through it, you can ask for donations directly. Many programs have a newsletter for keeping contact with their NFP supporters. A newsletter is really essential for developing an NFP support network in a diocese.

D) *Identify supportive groups.* There are groups who are attracted to supporting NFP because it supports Church teaching on human sexuality. Local councils of the Daughters of Isabella; Catholic Daughters; Knights of Columbus; Holy Name Society; Diocesan Council of Catholic Women; any type of interfaith alliance for Chastity promotion; various Pro-Life groups, etc., may be willing to help in a variety of ways. Draw them into your efforts.

E) *Non-profit groups.* Investigate non-profit groups as potential sources of funding. Depending upon your NFP status, some non-profit groups, e.g., United Way or even Protestant churches, might contribute to your NFP program. In some instances, it is possible to tap into Title X money.

Promoting and establishing clergy support both on the diocesan and the parish level, continuing education, and finding sources of funding must be seen as part and parcel of your ongoing work to strengthen NFP in your diocese.

Finally and most importantly, I must underscore the need for a united front. For the new NFP Coordinator or new NFP teacher, before you try any of the suggestions offered:

- 1) Know what NFP efforts are already operative and ongoing in your diocese;
- 2) Learn the history of NFP in your diocese;
- 3) Get to know the other individuals who are involved in NFP services in the diocese;
- 4) Know where teachers have received their training.

A little investigation can help you link up your efforts with those who support NFP, avoid past mistakes, and ensure a great return on your time and effort. ■

*Rev. Robert R. Cannon, M.A., J.C.L., is Vicar for Marriage Matters in the Diocese of Venice, FL. Fr. Cannon assists the DDP in different projects, especially through overseeing the data collection of the annual National Diocesan NFP Program Profile Report.*