**BULLETIN BRIEFS**

General Information on Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods represent authentic family planning. They can be used to both achieve and to postpone a pregnancy. NFP makes use of periodic abstinence from sexual intercourse based upon the observation of the woman’s natural signs of fertility, in order to space births or to limit the number of children when there is a serious reason to do so… this practice fosters in couples an attitude of respect and wonder in the face of human life, which is sacred. It also fosters profound respect for one’s spouse, which is necessary for… authentic intimacy.(*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan,* U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 20)

NFP is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman’s menstrual cycle. Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile phase of the woman’s cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy. NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of the child. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife. (Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010, p. 23)

The natural methods of family planning (NFP) do *not* depend on a woman having “regular” menstrual cycles. NFP information treats each woman and each cycle as unique. NFP teaches a woman to watch every day for her signs of fertility. NFP therefore works with menstrual cycles of any length and any degree of irregularity. It can be used during breastfeeding, just before menopause, and in other special circumstances. NFP allows a woman to understand the physical signals her body gives her to tell her when she is most likely to become pregnant. (See: *NFP, Myth and Reality*, NFP Program, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a unique form of fertility education. Specifically, NFP is the title for the moral, natural and healthy, modern and scientifically reliable methods of family planning. These methods teach married couples how to identify and understand their combined signs of fertility. This information then helps married couples plan to achieve or postpone a pregnancy. NFP is morally good because it helps married couples respect God’s design for married love.(*Theresa Notare, PhD, Assistant Director, NFP Program, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*)

*Who can use NFP?* Any married couple can use NFP! A woman need not have “regular” cycles. NFP education helps couples to fully understand their combined fertility, thereby helping them to either achieve or avoid a pregnancy. The key to the successful use of NFP is cooperation and communication between husband and wife—a shared commitment. NFP is unique among methods of family planning because it enables its users to work with the body rather than against it. Fertility is viewed as a reality to live, not a problem to be solved. (*What is NFP?* NFP Program, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, see: <http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/what-is-nfp>)

*…on the morality of NFP*

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality. These methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them, and favor the education of an authentic freedom. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2370)

Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods “reflect the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, and promotes openness to life and the gift of the child. By complementing the love-giving and life-giving nature of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife.” (See: *Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry*,NFP Program, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010)

When … by means of recourse to periods of infertility, the couple respect the inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative meanings of human sexuality, they are acting as “ministers” of God’s plan and they “benefit from” their sexuality according to the original dynamism of “total” self-giving, without manipulation or alteration. (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, no. 32)

*…where to learn more about NFP*

Learn about Catholic teaching on responsible parenthood and Natural Family Planning. Visit the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops NFP Program’s website at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning>.

Want to learn a method of Natural Family Planning in a class near your home? Visit the U.S. Bishops’ online diocesan NFP coordinators’ directory at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/find-an-nfp-class.cfm>. Be sure to look up your state and diocese for local contact information.

Learn a method of Natural Family Planning in the comfort of your own home. There are national NFP providers who offer distance learning, through correspondences and even the Internet. See: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/nfp-home-study.cfm>.

**NFP Pioneers and Promoters**

“Christian married couples are called to be generous in the service of life. That is simply the whole tenor of the biblical-historical tradition on marriage.” (John Kippley in, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant*, 1991, p. 72. Mr. Kippley, along with his wife Sheila, is co-founder of the Couple to Couple League, a national NFP provider organization.)

“Christian married couples are called to trust God, to trust that if they are generous, He truly will provide. In my opinion, such trust is one of the most difficult aspects of being Christian in the age of technology.” (John Kippley in, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant*, 1991, p. 72. Mr. Kippley, along with his wife Sheila, is co-founder of the Couple to Couple League, a national NFP provider organization.)

“Natural Family Planning is …. a means of fertility awareness that encourages husbands and wives to love each other through communication and self-control during times of abstinence.” (John and Sheila Kippley in, *The Art of Natural Family Planning*, 1996, p. 1. Mr. and Mrs. Kippley are co-founders of the Couple to Couple League, a national NFP provider organization.)

“As you go through married life, you will go through different stages regarding your fertility. There may be times when you think the Lord is telling you that you should be postponing pregnancy; at other times, you may recognize that He is calling you to try to achieve pregnancy. …Natural Family Planning is there to help you in each stage of your fertile lifetime.” (John and Sheila Kippley in, *The Art of Natural Family Planning*, 1996, pp. 5-6. Mr. and Mrs. Kippley are co-founders of the Couple to Couple League, a national NFP provider organization.)

“Periodic abstinence (the timing of intercourse to coincide with the infertile time [of the woman’s menstrual cycle]), when practiced in accordance with the principles of responsible parenthood, is a morally unobjectionable method of responsible conception regulation, and is not ‘contraception.’” (Josef Röetzer, MD, *Family Planning the Natural Way* , 1981, p. 34. Dr. Röetzer is the founder of the Sympto-Thermal Method of NFP.)

“The desire to belong to each other in love and to assist each other in character growth is a noble motive for marriage and highlights the personal side of marriage sadly neglected in previous centuries. But it would be just as much a mistake for a couple to withdraw into themselves and completely reject the call to raise up new life.” (Josef Röetzer, MD, *Family Planning the Natural Way* , 1981, p. 23. Dr. Röetzer is the founder of the Sympto-Thermal Method of NFP.)

“Natural conception regulation, beyond being a method of fertility control, is a way of life, with all its positive consequences for a couples’ relationship. … the increased self-knowledge that is gained by the woman about herself and by the couple about their relationship is more than worth the effort expanded.” (Josef Röetzer, MD, *Family Planning the Natural Way* , 1981, p. 34. Dr. Röetzer is the founder of the Sympto-Thermal Method of NFP.)

“The husband and wife obtain in marriage the privilege of the closest act of human co-operation with God and His creative power. After our creation and our redemption, this share in the creation of new human life is our most precious gift.” (John Billings, MD in, *The Gift of Life and Love*, 1997, p. 7. Dr. Billings, along with his wife, Dr. Evelyn Billings, is co-founder of the Billings Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning.)

“Love that does not include sacrifice is incomplete. Sacrifice or pain joyously embraced for the sake of the loved one is at the heart of the mystery of love. This helps us to understand why the happiness of the physical sexual union should at times be set aside … for the sake of the other and for their children.” (John Billings, MD on married periodic sexual abstinence in, *The Gift of Life and Love*, 1997, p. 8. Dr. Billings, along with his wife, Dr. Evelyn Billings, is co-founder of the Billings Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning.)

“Fertility is a vital element of the human organism. The biological differences which exist between male and female irrevocably determine their earthly roles within the whole of humanity, providing for a creative partnership between men and women which extends … into the whole meaning of their sexuality.” (John Billings, MD in, *The Gift of Life and Love*, 1997, p. 9. Dr. Billings, along with his wife, Dr. Evelyn Billings, is co-founder of the Billings Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning.)

“In marriage the fertility of the husband and the wife bind themselves to each other and to their children, and an *intended* removal of the fertility of one or both of them separates them from each other and from their children.” (John Billings, MD in, *The Gift of Life and Love*, 1997, p. 9. Dr. Billings, along with his wife, Dr. Evelyn Billings, is co-founder of the Billings Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning.)

“The use of any method of Natural Family Planning requires the adoption of a form of behavior which, if it is the couple’s intention to avoid pregnancy, requires .… [periodic sexual abstinence, this] allows the couple to place into proper perspective the totality of their human sexuality.” (Thomas W. Hilgers, MD, *The Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning*, 1986, p. 36.)

“The underlying reason why young adults, engaged couples, and married couples should know Natural Family Planning is that this method teaches them that the body, as God made it, is the expression of the person.” (Richard M. Hogan and John M. LeVoir, *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage, and Family in the Modern World*, 1985,p. 59)

“Whereas contraception exists just for pregnancy avoidance, the methods of NFP can help couples to both achieve as well as avoid a pregnancy. In this sense, NFP is authentic family planning. As a natural, healthy approach to the management of human fertility, NFP methods have great educational value. These advantages move beyond biology and include enhancing the couple’s relationship through greater communication and shared responsibility.” (Richard Fehring and Theresa Notare, Eds. *Human Fertility: Where Faith and Science Meet*, 2008)

“To live with our bodies, and not in spite of them, is a discovery our ‘civilized’ world is just now making. An old Asian wisdom maintains that perfection is only acquired through the mastery of the body. The more one is able to live with his or her own body and master its nature, the freer is one’s mind and the wider the horizons.”(Ingrid Trobish, NFP author in, Mary Shivanandan’s *Natural Sex*, 1979, Foreword)

“Many couples say that an NFP lifestyle deepens their faith in God: ‘(NFP) involved us with the Truth ...We experienced ... *the* conversion point in our lives.’ ‘NFP is putting ourselves in God’s hands, totally allowing Him to work spiritually in our lives.’” (Author Mary Shivanandan quoting an NFP couple in, *An Introduction to Natural Family Planning*, Notare, ed., 2009, p. 22)

“Couples who adopt NFP to space the births of children find that it brings about many positive changes in their relationship and even becomes a way of life. It begins with acceptance, and even wonder, at the way the human body is made. As one woman noted, ‘Knowing and learning about what goes on inside of my unique body amazed me.’ Women especially find this information empowering. The woman gains a new respect for herself and often finds that her husband has a new supportive attitude: ‘My husband respects me as a person in my own right. He accepts my fertility as part of me.’” (Mary Shivanandan in, *An Introduction to Natural Family Planning*, Notare, ed., 2009, p. 22)

“The way of living which follows from the exercise of periodic continence leads the couple to deepen their knowledge of each other and achieve a harmony of body, mind and spirit which strengthens and encourages them on their journey together through life. It is marked by a constant dialogue and enriched by the tenderness of affection which constitute the heart of human sexuality.” (Mary Shivanandan “When Can We Use NFP: What the Church teaches on the moral spacing and limiting of births by spouses,” (Washington, DC:Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning, NCCB, 1997)

“NFP is the only social justice method. It gives power back to the people [married couple]. They gain in dignity when they become responsible. They become more human.” (Bob and Mary Kambic, NFP pioneers, commenting in, Mary Shivanandan’s *Natural Sex*, 1979, p. 10)

“The benefits of Natural Family Planning – self-knowledge, marital satisfaction, spiritual growth for both husband and wife – these make NFP unique.” (Lee Ann Doerflinger, “Natural Family Planning: An Unexpected Grace,” *Respect Life Program*, USCCB, 2002.)

“The Church’s vision of human sexuality is scripturally based, sacramentally real, morally honest, and spiritually rich.” (Theresa Notare, “Human Sexuality, Where Faith and Science Meet,” *Respect Life Program*, USCCB, 1994)

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