

FORUM

Diocesan Activity Report

Vol. 7, No. 4, Fall 1996

"Talking the Talk"

You've heard the comment "walk the talk," haven't you? Usually it's used to indicate the necessity of practicing what one preaches. That concept is certainly true, but more can be said. Not only should we be mindful that our actions speak louder than our words, but we also need to be aware of "how" we communicate with each other. This is especially true in NFP ministry. Our ministry typically involves a combination of "witnessing," or "walking the talk" and speaking publically, or "talking the talk."

NFP ministry counts on the witness of the people who promote it. We understand that both NFP and Church teachings on responsible parenthood are misunderstood by people within and without the Church. It is the witness of the couples who use NFP that speaks so eloquently to those who "don't get it." Witness can be "natural," as in how an NFP husband shows thoughtfulness to his wife. It can be informal, as when an NFP wife shares her experiences with a new friend over a cup of coffee. Witness can also be a combination of informal and formal, such as when a couple is

asked to speak at a Pre-Cana, or marriage encounter. Whatever the format, witness plants good seed that, we pray, will later lead to conversion. In addition to this central way of promoting NFP, it should also be clear to NFP promoters that at one time or another, we will find ourselves speaking in front of a group of people. It is when we are in that setting that we may need some tips to help us put our "best foot forward" and do our utmost to be strong instruments in God's hands.

From time to time all NFP promoters should take a critical look at "how" we communicate the messages under our charge. For example, when you are asked to give a talk be sure you are clear on "what" the task is that you have been asked to do. For example, if the Family Life Director requests that you speak on NFP for 45 minutes at the next Pre-Cana, ask him or her to be more specific. Will an overview of methodology be the topic? Should you look at just the benefits of NFP use in marriage? Or, will a presentation primarily concerned with Church teachings be the focus? The

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In this issue...

we take a look at the importance of effective communication for NFP acceptance. There are a variety of ways in which we communicate the good news of NFP and the truth of the Church's teachings which support its use in married life. Some of those ways are formal, as in classroom instruction, and others are informal, as in the daily witness of an NFP couple. No matter what form communication takes, it is always important to put our best foot forward. In line with our focus on communication, be sure to take a look at our new column "Around the World." We think it will be important and fun, to get to know the NFP community internationally. Happy Fall!

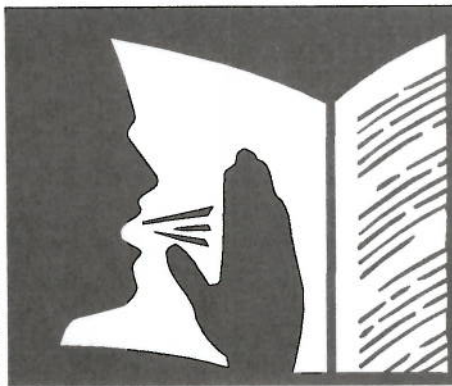
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topic of NFP is complex and can be approached in many ways, so the first step is to define what aspect of the topic you will speak on. Linked to the content of your talk are the essential points you want your audience to remember when they go home. Forty-five minutes is not a long time and usually 15 minutes are saved for questions and answers. You would therefore have to drive home your points in 30 minutes or so. Within that time constraint only two or three points realistically should be offered.

In addition to the content of a talk on NFP, some general tips on public speaking should also be kept in mind. Authors Niki Flacks and Robert W. Rasbery in their book, *Power Talk* (The Free Press, 1982), provide good information which can easily be applied to NFP promoters. They cast their advice in the "do's" and "don'ts" of public speaking. Let's take a look at them:

- Don't tell your audience that you're nervous. They have no idea how little sleep you got the night before, nor whether you had enough time to rehearse. Remember: what you tell the audience is what they will know; and how you act in front of the audience is what they will assess. Therefore, be confident, you have something important to share, so do it!
- Don't apologize. When a speaker begins a talk with, "I'm sorry I'm not an expert on this," or "I'm not really too sure about all this," that establishes audience insecurity. You will be telling them that they are going to be in for either an inaccurate or disorganized speech. Also remember that apologies are made in an effort to get the audience's sympathy; however, good sympathy can be acquired in more positive ways (like an engaging and warm presence). In any case, people do not attend classes or talks in order to feel sorry for someone, they come to learn.



- Don't adjust your clothing throughout your presentation. Dress at home! It is highly distracting to see someone pulling at a sleeve, straightening skirts, and fussing with collars. The experts note one exception to this rule. You may build into the structure of your speech the need to convey such excitement that you loosen your tie, take off your jacket, or roll up your sleeves. That lets the audience know that you are supremely comfortable with your content and with them.
- Don't panic or stare out at the audience for help if your mind goes blank. Believe this— YOUR MIND WILL CLEAR! Even if you can't think of precisely the next word, simply go on to another point. You can always go back later and fill in the blanks. In addition, your listeners will never know you went blank if you don't let them know by a panic reaction. However, if you do succumb and let them know you have forgotten something, a little humor goes a long way. You can let them know that you are human and will "reboot" your mental computer later.
- Do take your time with transitions. Going from one thought to another is the hardest task in the body of the speech. Once you are into your next thought you know what supporting information, illustrations, and anecdotes you can use. The difficulty usually comes in remembering the

next point. By taking a moment to think, you will find your mind will come to the rescue. If you rush yourself, your mind may well disappoint you.

- Do move when you need a moment to refocus your concentration. Movement releases tension for the speaker. Random movement, however, is a nerve enhancer, so don't pace!
- Do sprinkle your smile liberally throughout your speech. When you tell an anecdote, you can enjoy it too. When you smile the audience realizes you're comfortable and that communicates professionalism.
- Do aim for variety in your gesturing. This is a refinement. Watch out for the trap of the catch-all gesture. Some speakers get caught waving their arms in a particular way over and over again, regardless of what they are saying. It begins to look like you are directing a choir.
- Do remember the audience has no idea what you planned for this presentation. They don't have a copy of your outline notes. If you leave something out or bungle some words, they probably won't even know the difference unless you give your error away by stiffening, stopping, or starting over. You are the authority for them as long as you continue to be in control. When you waver, they lose faith in you. Experienced speakers count on being able to think on their feet because they know they can be stimulated by the audience to find new and better ways of communication.

Keeping in mind the above points, along with the advantage of knowing you are engaged in the work of the Church, will prepare you to be your best the next time you are asked to speak on NFP publically. ■