

# FORUM

Diocesan Activity Report

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## Living With Your Fertility: a presentation for all dioceses and all methods

*Kathleen M. Raviele, MD, FACOG*

She sat in my consultation room, inquiring about Natural Family Planning classes. The night before, this woman in her early 30s, the mother of two active boys, had convinced her husband she should come off the Pill. Her conscience had begun to bother her after she had participated in a *Christ Renews His Parish* program. With regret she said, "When we went on our marriage preparation weekend eleven years ago, they mentioned NFP in about five minutes at the end of the weekend. We didn't even give it a thought. Now that I look back on the last eleven years of our marriage I know our relationship in the sexual sphere would have been much better had we not been contracepting. If the whole point of sex is to prevent a pregnancy, I'm not interested."

As an NFP-only obstetrician-gynecologist and as a teacher of NFP, I had heard similar comments over the past twelve years. Couples would search for NFP after finding out what the Pill was really doing to the woman's health or that it was abortifacient. Other couples learned from friends that NFP is an effective and safe way to space children. One spouse might have had a spiritual conversion through a Marian devotion or spiritual exercises and have a great desire to follow Church teaching. Some may have been challenged to change their lives by a priest in the confessional. Those who were married expressed deep regret that they had not heard about NFP in detail when they were prepared for marriage.

The demand for NFP services in the Atlanta Archdiocese over the past twelve years has grown tremendously. Although the Catholic population is still less than 5%, it has doubled in the last ten years to 367,000 registered Catholics, an influx of Spanish-speaking people accounting for half of the increase. In 1991, there were two Sympto-Thermal teaching couples offering four courses per year; today there are 21 certified active teachers of all the methods, teaching in three languages. Additional teachers are in formation. Classes are starting up each month and the individual programs can start couples on short notice.

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### *In this issue . . .*

*we take a look at the many ways in which NFP is promoted in the dioceses.*

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Many of our priests, especially those who are newly-ordained, preach about NFP from the pulpit. They discuss it with couples preparing for marriage and in the confessional. In Reconciliation, the penitent is taken through spiritual exercises based on a detailed examination of conscience. This has brought about many conversions because often adults are still working with what they were taught in second grade and no longer know the nature of an individual sin. The grace from

mandated that all Catholic marriage preparation weekends would have a 45 minute program on NFP presented by an NFP teacher. The Archdiocese has always welcomed teachers from all NFP methods, so the challenge was how to come up with a presentation that would cover basic information, but not just about one particular program. Using slides obtained from two NFP programs, a presentation was developed. But it quickly became clear that to savvy, technically oriented

was also presented at the 2003, annual meeting and national conference of the Catholic Medical Association in Philadelphia.

“Living With Your Fertility Through Natural Family Planning” has several sections, including the theology of the body, anatomy and physiology, history of the development of contraception and NFP, some basic examples of charting, modern advances in NFP, the spiritual and psychological aspects of using NFP, effectiveness compared with various contraceptives, and couple satisfaction based on recently published research. The presentation comes with a script that can be studied and given from memory or read. Because it is PowerPoint, the order of the slides can be moved around or only some parts can be given. Depending on the speaker, the program of fifty-one slides takes 45 minutes to an hour to present. Because there is a script, the talk can be given by anyone who supports NFP.

For marriage preparation we learned it was good to get all the misconceptions out right away and involve the audience by asking them what they thought of NFP and what they wanted in their marriage. The presentation then treats God’s plan for marriage and the purpose of sexual intercourse. A background on the developments of the various methods of NFP over the course of the twentieth century is then paralleled with the origins of the birth control movement and the acceptance of contraception at the 1930 Lambeth Conference.

Following this, a general review of basic reproductive anatomy and physiology and natural biological markers is provided, without going into how to make observations or giving instructions on how to achieve or avoid pregnancy. The presentation is not meant to teach a method of NFP, but to get the listener interested in finding out more or to sign up for a

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making an informed general confession to the priest opens their eyes to the truth about contraception. A program called *Familia*, a study circle for young mothers, is led by knowledgeable Catholic women who guide women through papal encyclicals. In this program, which also can include the husbands, the encyclical *Humanae vitae* is covered early. In one group, there was a very dramatic response. Despite initial opposition to the teaching, after a priest explained the Church’s teachings on marriage, sexual intercourse within marriage, and the role of children, the women understood and accepted the Church’s teaching. One woman went on to train as an NFP teacher, another started implanting the eight embryos she had in frozen storage from the in vitro fertilization she had not realized was wrong.

In response to work by the Archdiocesan Office of Family Concerns, headed by Mary Ellen Hughes, and the NFP Office, directed by Lynn Crutchfield, as well as couples heading up Engaged Encounter, in October 1998 Archbishop John F. Donoghue

young couples, a less than top-notch slide presentation would not persuade them that NFP was modern, scientific or effective.

In early 2003, I explained our problem to Professor Richard J. Fehring (Marquette University) – we needed a professional presentation on Natural Family Planning. A presentation that could be used for RCIA programs, marriage preparation programs, medical groups, weekend parish mission presentations, or secular groups. In response, Dr. Fehring developed a generic PowerPoint presentation on NFP, which we began to use with various groups. Most presentations were at Engaged Encounter weekends or Three To Get Married weekends. The majority of listeners had never considered NFP and were there to fulfill the requirements for marriage in the Catholic Church. Modifications were made based on comments of the audiences, but particularly helpful were those of the marriage encounter facilitators, most of whom used NFP. The generic NFP PowerPoint presentation titled “Living With Your Fertility Through Natural Family Planning”

class. This section is followed by the conditions for effectiveness and comparison with contraceptives methods.

The presentation concludes with an explanation of holistic sexuality, the spiritual, physical, intellectual, social, psychological, and emotional aspects of being human, the gift of children and how decisions about parenthood should be made. The artwork that accompanies the slides is colorful and captures the interest of the audience. One purchaser already stated, "It's very well done, and the note pages are complete and helpful. I'm already putting it to good use—I've been asked to present to the St. Luke Society (medical students, residents, doctors, nurses, etc.) at our parish on February 2<sup>nd</sup> about the science of NFP. Your slides of the method history, hormonal levels, mucus and ClearPlan pictures probably will save me several hours prep time. It's so much easier having slides already done and done so well."

When we realize that fewer than 5% of Catholic couples are practicing NFP and that the rates of sterilization, abortion, and contraception are the same among Catholics as the general population, practices the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describe as "intrinsically evil," a lot of work needs to be done. In his letter to the Romans (10:14,15) St. Paul says, "And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!"

We believe this presentation will help to get the good news about love and marriage and natural family planning to the people.

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Dr. Raviele is an NFP-only Ob/Gyn.*

## The Marquette University Institute for Natural Family Planning now has available a generic NFP introduction PowerPoint presentation

### "Living With Your Fertility Through Natural Family Planning"

#### Presentation content includes:

- Definition of NFP
- NFP development, how it works and the various types of NFP systems
- Couple marital and spiritual dynamics

*This presentation is not NFP system specific. It can be used in marriage preparation and other settings for a general orientation to the methods of Natural Family Planning.*

#### The CD includes:

- 51 PowerPoint slides
- Commentary for each slide in the Note View section
- A written commentary as a MS Word document
- A generic NFP presentation evaluation form as a MS Word document

**CD is available for \$30.00**

**CD with a hard copy of the slides and commentary in a 3 ring binder is available for \$40.00**

*Checks should be made out to Marquette University Institute for NFP*

Please send check with name and return address to:

Mary Schneider, RN  
Marquette University  
College of Nursing  
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P.O. Box 1881  
Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881

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# The Apologetics of Natural Family Planning, Explaining and Defending Church Teaching

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Steve Weidenkopf

Although it's been nearly 40 years since the promulgation of Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae vitae*, which reiterated the 2,000-year-old constant teaching of the Church on the immorality of contraception, contraception and Natural Family Planning (NFP) are still "hot" topics in the Church. One is confronted with contraception from the culture on an almost daily basis. Most people have seen the pharmaceutical company commercials with the strikingly beautiful models hawk-ing the newest contraceptive invention; explaining to the TV viewing public that this new device is the most effective, least intrusive and best skin-care product on the market. Whenever one confronts the issue of contraception not only from the culture but even from within the Church, the teachings on contraception and NFP continue to prove challenging to those engaged in the New Evangelization.

How are we as faithful Catholic parents, Marriage & Family Life Directors, DREs, RCIA Directors, NFP providers, catechists, and laity to respond? What we need is a way in which to explain to all audiences the timeless beauty and truth of God and the teachings of His Church. What we need is an "Apologetics of NFP" that will help us to explain and de-

fend the Church's teaching on contra-ception and NFP.

## The What and Why of Apologetics

Before we can develop an Apologetics of NFP we need to first understand what apologetics is and what it is not. Apologetics is not "apologizing" as our culture might understand that word. The root of apologetics, *apologia*, is a noun that means to give "a formal defense or justification, especially of one's opinions, position or actions." Apologetics means to give a reasoned explanation for the teachings of our faith. Why should we develop an Apologetics? Why be concerned with giving a reasoned explanation for the teachings of our faith? Quite simply, because the First Pope in his First Encyclical told us we should. St. Peter wrote: "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15). Not only does St. Peter exhort us to defend our faith but he gives us very sage advice on *how* to do it: "with gentleness and reverence." When developing an apologetical response to defend our faith we must always keep in mind that apologetics is not an end in itself and there are limitations associated with apologetics.

Apologetics is not a complete catechesis, but a stage in the process of sharing the Gospel. Apologetical arguments cannot make someone believe -- only God can do that. Hopefully, the Lord can use us as His instruments to help someone on the path of belief and conversion. Finally, we know that arguments are no substitute for the joyful lived witness of the faith. We should never underestimate the power and effectiveness of a lived witness. People are more apt to respond to the call to conversion upon seeing the faith lived joyfully than from reasoned arguments.

So now that we understand what apologetics is and its limitations, we need to look at *how* we go about "apologizing" for the teachings of our faith. There are four main points to remember when answering that question.

First. We must follow the example of Jesus, the Master Apologist. We need to study the Scriptures and see how Christ Himself called people to conversion -- how He explained and presented the teachings of God. Then we must follow His example.

Second. We must develop the proper attitude. Yelling, telling others they're wrong and that if they persist in their thinking nothing but the eternal fires of Hell awaits them, is not a prime motivator. Our attitude must be one that inspires and invites others into sharing the joy that we personally experience through a life lived in conversion to Jesus Christ and the teachings of His Church. St. Josemaria Escriva summed up this point nicely when he wrote: "Long face, rough manner, ridiculous appearance, unfriendly attitude. Is that how you hope to inspire others to follow Christ?"<sup>1</sup>

Third. We must develop the effective habits of an apologist. Mark Brumley, in his book, *How Not to Share Your Faith -- The Seven Deadly Sins of Catholic Apologetics and Evangelization*,



lists the following effective habits every Apologist should cultivate: prayer, study of Church teaching, clarity of thought and argument, dialogue (apologetics is not a monologue), faith, hope and charity.

Fourth. We should be mindful of the “Golden Rule of Apologetics” which Archbishop Fulton Sheen popularized: we can “win the argument and lose a soul.” The idea is not to win the argument and paint another victory star on the side of our apologetical airplane, but rather to joyfully defend and explain the teachings of our faith with reason and then leave the conversion of the individual up to the grace of God.

Now that we understand what apologetics is, its limitations and a process by which we learn how to apologize, there is one last step to consider before presenting concrete ways to give a reasoned defense of the teachings of the Church regarding contraception and NFP: we must consider who our audience is. *How* we apologize will depend on to *whom* we are apologizing. We recognize that we need to present the teachings of the Church to all peoples, but when it comes to the teachings on contraception and NFP the vast majority of our efforts will involve two groups of people – Catholics and Protestants. Within those groups there are varying levels of understanding. Some uninformed, others may be informed yet dissent for various reasons. It is extremely important to dialogue with each person and ask questions that will provide insight into where this particular person may be coming from. Obviously, this approach works best in a one-on-one setting; for group settings it will be easier to explain the teaching of the Church and then address individual situations with a question and answer period.

## The Game Plan

Now that we’ve laid the groundwork, we’re ready to develop effective ways to explain and defend the teachings of the Church on contraception and NFP. The first thing we need is a game plan. This game plan lays the foundation for talking with people who oppose the Church’s teachings, it consists of talking about human sexuality, contraception, and then NFP.

It is very helpful when apologizing for NFP to go back to the beginning — the creation of men and women. When confronted by the Pharisees on the issue of divorce, Our Lord indicated that if we want to understand how we are to live marriage and sexuality as God intended, we need to go back to the beginning.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, taking our cue from the Master Apologist, we need to begin with a discussion of the teachings of the Church regarding the human person: every human person is

created in the image and likeness of God. Each human being is a union of a body and a soul. God created us male and female, one in dignity, equal and complimentary. Remember that in apologetics we try to explain and defend our faith, not necessarily seek to convince. Some people may disagree with what we believe about the dignity of the human person. For the purposes of

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## The How of Apologetics

- 1 Imitate Jesus**  
Prayerfully read the Gospels, notice how Jesus himself called people to conversion
- 2 Develop the proper attitude**  
Do not...  
    be hostile...  
    be critical or condemn...  
Rather,  
    Be...  
    inspirational...  
    hospitable and joyous!
- 3 Develop effective habits**  
Pray –  
    build a personal relationship with the Lord  
  
Practice faith, hope and charity  
Study Church teachings  
Listen to people  
Clarify your thoughts and arguments  
Work on dialogue
- 4 Maintain the “Golden Rule of Apologetics”**  
Do not try to “win the argument”  
Explain the Church’s teachings with love, clarity and reason – plant good seed!  
Commit the person to the Lord for conversion
- 5 Know your audience**  
Different people need different approaches!

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apologetics, that's fine because what we are attempting to do is help that person understand that, given what we believe about the human person and sexuality, our teachings on contraception and NFP are reasonable and defensible.

Next, we need to spend some time discussing what we believe about human sexuality. This will prove somewhat of a challenge as the vast majority of people think sexuality is about the actual, physical act of sexual intercourse. However, we know that sexuality does not merely refer to the physical act through which spouses give themselves to one another as a gift but rather "concerns the innermost being of the human person as such."<sup>3</sup> "Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others."<sup>4</sup> We believe that the human person has an innate vocation to love -- to image the very life and love of the Trinity in the world. Based on this understanding of the human person and sexuality, we offer a reasoned defense for the morality of NFP use in marriage and the immorality of contraception.

When apologizing for the Church's teaching, we must first make certain that we *know* the teaching. The teaching is presented positively by Pope Paul VI, who wrote: "But the Church, calling men back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, interpreted by her constant teaching, teaches that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life."<sup>5</sup> This teaching derives from the natural law, i.e. from the "inseparable connection, willed by God and which man may not break of his own initiative, between the two elements of the conjugal act: the unitive and procreative."<sup>6</sup> Armed with the exact teaching of the Church, there are a few more tools we need to place in the tool chest before we reply to the most common objections about this teaching.

## More tools for the trade

Put the issue in perspective. Cultivate the attitude of G.K. Chesterton who said, "It amuses me to remember that the more my opponents practice birth control, the fewer there will be of them to fight."<sup>7</sup>

Define contraception. Contraception is the "choice by any means to impede the procreative potential of a given act of intercourse."<sup>8</sup>

Equip ourselves with Church teaching by reading, knowing and even memorizing certain passages of *Humanae vitae* and by using concepts from Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. We should also know passages of Scripture (in particular, Genesis 38) and the

writings of the Church Fathers. It's important to note that all the Church Fathers who mention contraception condemn it. Another helpful tool is to have quotes from notable persons of other faiths (or none) who have recognized the immorality of contraception. For example, Theodore Roosevelt, Gandhi, Sigmund Freud and T.S. Eliot have all written against contraception.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, knowing and discussing the famous "predictions" of Pope Paul VI are helpful for illustrating the reasonableness of the Church's teaching on contraception.<sup>10</sup>

Equipped with the correct understanding of Church teaching, and the above-mentioned tools we can now identify the common objections to Catholic teaching against contraception and then utilize the tools we have put in place to give reasoned replies.

## Common objections among Catholics

1. The teaching on contraception has never been infallibly proclaimed.
2. The Church teaches "I must follow my conscience" and my conscience tells me contraception is okay.
3. My priest said it was okay to use contraception.
4. Although this is current teaching, the Church will change in the future.

Applying our tools, here are some suggested apologetical replies:

1. A teaching does not have to be officially proclaimed infallible to be true. The pope and the bishops have received the gift of "Apostolic Succession," and are guarded by the Holy Spirit to sanctify, govern and teach God's people. This means that when they teach on a matter of faith and morals, they cannot err. The Second Vatican Council guides the faithful on this point and says that papal teaching on faith and morals is binding (i.e. requires submission of mind and will) even when it is not taught infallibly.<sup>11</sup>
2. It is true the Church teaches us to follow our consciences. But as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, conscience is not an internal excuse box that allows us to do whatever we please. Rather it is

*...the interior voice of a human being, within whose heart the inner law of God is inscribed. Moral conscience is a judgment of practical reason about the moral quality of a human action. It moves a person at the appropriate moment to do good and avoid evil.*<sup>12</sup>

We might also remember St. John Neumann's com-

ments: "You must follow your conscience but you must know what your conscience is following." Catholics are obliged to inform their consciences in accordance with God's truth as revealed in sacred Scripture and Tradition.

3. Priests are called to teach in the light of God's truth. They have a serious responsibility to teach what the Church teaches. Popes Pius XI, Paul VI, and John Paul II have all exhorted priests to preach the truth about the Church's teaching, and never to mislead the people.
4. The Church's teaching has been consistent and will not change. As Paul VI reminds us: "the Church was not the author of the moral law and therefore cannot be its arbiter; she is only its depository and its interpreter, and can never declare to be permissible that which is not so."<sup>13</sup> The Church can neither change the prohibition of the Commandment against lying nor the teaching against contraception.

## Common objections among Protestants

1. It's not in the Bible.
2. This is just a Catholic issue.

Here are some apologetical replies:

1. Many Protestants hold to the view of *sola scriptura* - that Scripture is the only source of God's divine revelation. This argument assumes that contraception is not condemned in the Bible. Actually, the story of Onan in Genesis 38 describes a contraceptive act committed by Onan (withdrawal) and God's punishment for that act (death). Many insist that Onan was killed not for the contraceptive act but for refusing to have children with his dead brother's wife as required by the Law (which he refused to do by his contraceptive act). However, Deuteronomy 25:7-9 describes the punishment for refusing to raise up offspring as public humiliation by the brother's wife by having her take off his sandal and spit in his face. Because of the punishment of death, it is clear that Onan was killed for his contraceptive act, not for his "refusal to raise up offspring."
2. Contraception not just a Catholic issue. All the major Protestant reformers - Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Wesley - all condemned contraception and held to the apostolic teaching. In fact, until 1930, all Christians maintained this teaching. The very fact that Christians are divided on this teaching is a modern phenomenon. It is also helpful to use quotes from non-Catholic personalities mentioned earlier to illustrate that this is not just "a Catholic thing."

## Other objections

Additional common objections frequently used by all who oppose the Church's teaching on contraception is that the world is "woefully overpopulated," or that "responsible behavior" would be to "promote condoms to stem the spread of AIDS." One should first point out that the world is far from overpopulated; most Western industrialized nations are having to deal with an aging population and a decline in fertility rates! Since the industrial revolution more people live in or near large urban areas because of the availability of employment, this causes overcrowding and transit issues, but overcrowding is not the same as overpopulation. With regard to many developing countries, a poor distribution of resources among or within nations coupled with unstable or unjust governments is the root cause of societal suffering, not overpopulation!

In terms of AIDS, the Church teaches that an evil act is not permitted even if good may come from it. Thus, contraception, an intrinsically evil act, cannot be used to help prevent the spread of AIDS. Moreover, contraceptives, including condoms, are notoriously poor preventers of AIDS. African countries that have seen a dramatic reduction in the spread of AIDS have robust educational programs that teach the need for abstinence outside of marriage. The Church urges scientists to develop medicines not only to help those suffering from AIDS, but to prevent the spread of the disease as well.

## What the Church teaches

Now we can move on to apologize for NFP. Again, it is important to know exactly what the Church teaches. The teaching on NFP is found principally in the section of *Humanae vitae* on responsible parenthood.

In relation to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised either by the well-thought-out and generous decision to raise a large family, or by the decision, made for grave motives and with respect for the moral law, to avoid a new birth for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, Pope Paul VI outlines the fact that "God has wisely arranged natural laws and rhythms of fertility which already of themselves bring about a separation in the succession of births."<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the Pope makes explicit that married couples, for serious reasons, may make use of these "natural laws and rhythms" to postpone pregnancy.

If then, there are serious motives for spacing births, motives deriving from the physical or psychological

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conditions of husband and wife, or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that it is then permissible to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions and to make use of marriage during the infertile times only, and in this way to regulate births without offending the moral principles that we have just recalled.<sup>16</sup>

## Other tools?

Some other tools that we need to have in our apologetical chest are:

### *Humor*

Disarm a myth with humor. For example, if a person believes that the Church teaches that a woman is to have “as many children as biologically possible,” launch the discussion on a humorous note. Say, “the Church does not teach us to toss reason out the window.” Then continue with the truth about generosity and openness to life.

Continue the conversation with an explanation of the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood and how it is exercised.<sup>17</sup>

### *Resources*

When ever promoting the Church’s teachings on responsible parenthood and NFP, have available a list of certified NFP teachers. People need to be given the means to live out the truth. Also, keep in mind that the lived witness of NFP will be more powerful than any reasoned argument, so your example will speak volumes!

### *Know the facts*

Never exaggerate the facts of NFP methods or use. Know what the data demonstrates with regard to achieving as well as avoiding a pregnancy. In addition, it is helpful to talk of NFP as “a way of life.” Help people see that this is authentic family planning – for *achieving* as well as postponing a pregnancy.

### *Know the myths and dispel them*

“NFP is just Rhythm” – we need to explain that modern means of NFP are not the same as that method which was not particularly accurate. Modern means of NFP are scientifically based, utilizing the readily observable signs of fertility present in each menstrual cycle (assuming fertility is not suppressed).

“NFP is nothing more than Catholic contraception” – there is a fundamental distinction between NFP and

contraception. Discuss the definition of contraception – the choice by any means to impede the procreative potential of a given act of intercourse. In other words, the intentional sterilization of the sexual act. “Abstinence,” which is a “main ingredient” of NFP for pregnancy avoidance, is never a sinful act. The end may be the same with NFP and contraception, i.e. to postpone a pregnancy, but there are moral ways of achieving that end and immoral ways. Oftentimes a question is raised regarding whether NFP can be used in a contraceptive manner. The answer is “no” because NFP is not contraception. However, NFP can be used for selfish and for less than serious reasons and those motives could be sinful. This fundamental distinction between NFP and contraception is perhaps the single most important aspect of apologizing for NFP. Even well meaning Catholics sometimes do not understand this distinction and end up causing confusion about the Church’s teaching.<sup>18</sup> It is incredibly important to know the distinction and to develop a way to articulate that distinction to others.

“NFP doesn’t work” – scientific studies prove NFP as effective or more so for pregnancy avoidance than many contraceptives on the market. As with contraceptives, NFP must be used properly by the couple to ensure the high effectiveness rate. The real question to ask the person who says NFP doesn’t work is: “Why doesn’t it work?” Did the person take an NFP class from a certified NFP instructor? Did the woman attend class when her fertility was suppressed and thus did not really learn the method? Was NFP used properly in the marriage? I know of a case where the wife wanted a large family but the husband did not. The husband agreed to use NFP because it could postpone pregnancy. Utilizing NFP, the wife knew when she was fertile, but because she wanted a large family, she told her husband she was infertile and then became pregnant. So, the husband now believes NFP doesn’t work -- actually, it worked perfectly!

“It’s up to God to determine how many children we have” – although we would all acknowledge that it is ultimately God who determines the size of our family, God asks us to be responsible co-creators with Him. We are not mindless drones. The Church calls us not only to procreate but to educate as well, and married couples are asked to do both responsibly. It is also helpful to illustrate the benefits associated with an NFP lifestyle when explaining and defending the inherent goodness of NFP. Some of the benefits of NFP include: marital enrichment, it is medically safe and healthy, increases health awareness, it’s inexpensive, effective and can help in achieving pregnancy.

There is a desperate need of an apologetics of NFP in



our culture and in the Church. We must develop an effective way for faithful Catholics to evangelize and catechize on the truth and beauty of human sexuality. Of course, no reasoned argument can truly take the place of a joyful lived witness. More people will come to embrace the Church's teaching on contraception and NFP when they see the joy and beautiful effects this lifestyle has on married couples. With so few Catholics living and embracing these teachings (5% or less), the time is ripe for a "New Evangelization!" Imagine a Church where 95% of married couples lived an authentic Christian marriage! Then we could change the culture and build a civilization of love.

### End Notes

1. *The Way*, #661.
2. See Matthew 19:3-8.
3. *Familiaris consortio*, #11.
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2332.
5. *Humanae vitae*, #11.
6. *Ibid.*, #12.
7. Alvaro de Silva, *Brave New Family—G.K. Chesterton on Men & Women, Children, Sex, Divorce, Marriage and the Family*. (San Francisco: Ignatius press, 1990), p. 197.
8. Christopher West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage, Answers to Your Honest Questions about Catholic Teaching* (Ann Arbor, MI: Charis Servant Publications, 2000), p. 112.
9. Cf. *Ibid*, p. 119.
10. These predictions included: an increase in conjugal infidelity; lowering of morality; loss of respect for women; and government abuse. See *Humanae vitae*, #17.
11. See *Lumen gentium*, #25.
12. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Glossary.
13. *Humanae vitae*, #18.
14. *Ibid.*, #10.
15. *Ibid.*, #11.
16. *Ibid*, #16.
17. Responsible parenthood is exercised through biological knowledge, self-control, making a reasoned decision on the size of one's family, understanding and respecting the moral order as created by God and recognition of duty towards God, selves, family and society, cf. *Humanae vitae*, #10.
18. See Frederick W. Marks, *How to Preach against Contraception, Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, July 2003, 8-15.

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# Escape from Fuddledom

*Sharon & Mike Phelan*

**"Do remember you are there to fuddle him."**

*Screwtape to his nephew-devil Wormwood*

### Mike

This is a conversion story. My wife and I are converts from an offshoot of Catholic Christianity called Fuddledom.

Fuddles, as we might call ourselves, have grown up during the richest period of economic prosperity in the richest country in the history of the world. We know little of external suffering, and what we do know of internal suffering we usually entertain ourselves around. Most of the wounds we have acquired are self-inflicted. Additionally, our knowledge of history is often shallow, and we lack connection to the sufferings of the past.

This makes growing up difficult. We Fuddles put off the markers of the grown up as long as we reasonably can—graduation, work, marriage, children, retirement savings, commitment in general. We flop around through our early years with a mixture of philosophies, passions, goals, and a bunch of diversions. Our adolescence can easily extend well past the point that our bodies reflect it.

The one area where many of my fellow Fuddles may lead the league in pain is in their broken families. Perhaps the lack of external conflict causes generations to circle the wagons and fire inward. This kind of suffering, though, doesn't help the maturity process but, rather, slows it. Alas, Sharon and I don't have this excuse. Both our homes were rock-solid Catholic foundations of love.

If it weren't for love, I might still be fuddling through Fuddledom.

### Sharon

Although I grew up Catholic, unlike Mike I had not heard of Natural Family Planning before we were engaged. My first thoughts were, "Oh, I think my parents did that." Not a good thought to have at the time, since my next thought was "Look at our family 'I'm the middle member of seven kids' YIKES!" (seven fantastic, giving, loving kids, I might have added, but somehow that didn't occur to me at the time). Plus, Mike and I both wanted to wait a couple of years before having children

*(Continued on p. 10)*

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(Continued from p. 9)

and we were pretty sure four was the maximum number we wanted. NFP surely did not sound like the path for us. In addition, I also had a question fostered I'm sure by the times, friends, etc.: "What right does the Church have to tell us how to run our sex life?"

## Pedagogy of Hard Knocks

### Mike

The world, the flesh, and the devil can be very persuasive. The weight of the sexual revolution and its inferred path to happiness (rarely a direct claim) coupled with silence from the Christian point-of-view, adds up to a heavily one-sided paradigm on the issue of sexuality. Both of us bought, at least in part, the lie, and paid the price for our lack of discernment.

I found myself drawn to girls from an extraordinarily early age. I can remember in first grade hearing the girls at school talk about who they "liked" and wondering if anyone "liked" me. I had friends who were boys, but the girls were special, mysterious, other than I was. Their beauty and difference called to me.

This original call became twisted, though, with my introduction to pornographic media (which nowadays includes all media) and, more frequently, the pornographic thought-base of my peers as a teen. More and more, I found myself less and less able to view women as people. A paradigm of woman-as-object took root and grew in my mind, heart, and imagination. I recognized this in myself, and it made me angry. What was the problem? But shame kept me from asking the question aloud, and the silence from our home and the Church on the matter convinced me Christianity had nothing to say about it. Not that I really searched or investigated the claims of the Church; after all, Fuddles don't do such things.

### Sharon

Every relationship before I met Mike was missing something no romance or great physical attraction could satisfy. It wasn't until after I had returned to my Catholic faith after some time away that God gave me the extraordinary gift of my husband whom I saw for the first time when I was a Eucharistic minister and he came in my line (slyly moving from another area in the church he told me some time later). Little did I know how telling this was, as I would be giving myself as gift someday to Michael the way the Lord gives himself to us in Communion.

## Echoes in the Heart

### Mike

But after "searching for love in all the wrong places" and several failed relationships, I found Christ again through a thriving parish and priests fully alive preaching an uncompromising gospel. When I eventually met Sharon at this same parish, God let me sense in her that same pure calling to woman I'd felt as a boy. Oh, she was *beautiful!* The first time I saw her, she gave me the Body of Christ as a Eucharistic minister (OK, so I went across the church to make sure I was in her line).

Fortunately, I had heard about Natural Family Planning in college, so I was open from the outset to trying it in our marriage. The classes only served to strengthen my conviction that the manly thing to do was to protect my wife from the harm contraception could cause. The couples who taught it also inspired me. Their joy was palpable.

### Sharon

My first exposure to NFP came as part of our engagement period when we took the required Introduction to NFP class. I sat in the class with my arms folded and an *almost* closed mind

and heart. But, it was there I started to realize (although didn't yet want to admit it to anybody) that my thoughts about NFP came strictly from a place of ignorance.

In the classes I learned the effectiveness of NFP and its scientific basis. I was amazed. I also loved that from the beginning Mike didn't want me to submit my body to any harmful side effects that the chemical alternatives like the pill might have. Most importantly I learned that the pill had the ability to act as an abortifacient; no one had EVER told me that, and I had been on the pill for a short time years before. We used NFP for the first 3 years of our marriage to avoid pregnancy. It "worked!" Or so I thought it did, with my naive definition of "worked" at the time. Others were surprised that we didn't become pregnant within the first few months of being married.

## Sell all you Have—The Connection Between Financial and Sexual Trust in God

### Mike

The next turning point was our introduction to John Paul II's Theology of the Body. The conversion and healing I experienced following Christopher West's presentation of the pope's poetic exegesis overwhelmed me. A desire to deeply learn and share this with others began to grow. But how? We first had to go to Washington DC, across the country, and be immersed in the Christian vision for marriage and family at the John Paul II Institute.

Our trip from Phoenix to Washington, in August of 2003 raised amazement and alarm from many we knew. On paper, it seemed to be financial suicide. We were going to uproot from two solid jobs in well-developed careers. The house would have to be sold. The retirement and college savings put on hold. Knowing my responsibility to the family as husband

and father, this gave me pause.

But the pause was brief. God had allowed conversion in this area of life early in our marriage. When we talked and prayed in the first year of our marriage about the control of our checkbook (following a sermon by a priest whose name I forget but who I hope to thank some day in Heaven!), we began to tithe and trust—and peace followed. Looking back on things, this was also the end of our financial struggle. Money simply ceased to be a problem. We did not become rich, but we were able to rid ourselves of debt, freeing our family for this future adventure. And the peace that settled on us was the peace of placing our checkbook in the lap of our heavenly Father. God moved one financial difficulty after another out of our way, calling us to deeper conversion all the while.

I don't think it is accidental that most divorces occur over the central agitations of sex and money. Looking back, I'm convinced that trusting in God's provision in the area of finances, and more slowly in the area of our sexual relationship and openness to children, were deeply connected. The issue, in either area, is fundamentally not about correct numbers but about to Whom (or whom) we entrust our family.

### Sharon

I can honestly say that my real trust in God came when we started to LIVE NFP after our first child was born. I started to give up control of the issue, which made it increasingly easier to trust Him in all other areas of our lives. The financial area is one that had been especially tough for me. So, you can imagine my reservations when I heard from Mike the first time about his desire to move our family of now five (Jonathan and Liam were our next gifts showing NFP was "working") to Washington, DC for him to get his masters degree at the John Paul II Institute for Studies in Marriage and

Family. Although I had been transformed somewhat by Christopher West's presentation of the Pope's Theology of the Body, it had not affected me as deeply as it had Michael. After much prayer, time in adoration, and a talk from a blind priest that God sent directly to me (you know, the one you go to hear a speaker in a church full of parishioners and you feel like He's talking right to you through this person), I was ready for my next leap of faith.

But nothing is impossible for God. He worked everything out amazingly, with several miracle stories attached, too long to include in this article, about how we actually got to DC and are doing fine, with more support than we ever dreamed possible.

### Be Not Afraid

#### Mike

When the Pope repeats this refrain, one thing he is *not* saying is that there is nothing to be afraid of from a certain position. From a purely horizontal point-of-view, what encouragement should we expect? There seems to be much to fear in living out the vocation of marriage in a Christ-imitating, self-emptying fashion. What will people say about our large family? Can we really afford this (does it really cost \$300,000 to raise a child)? Will we be able to give them the time, love, and guidance that they need as individuals? What about my wife's body? Can it withstand another pregnancy?

Whatever the reasons we hold back from the gospel's calling to us as married couples, Christ will move us past them if we simply trust. "Trust? But that's hard!" Yep, until you realize that you're trusting *someone* to take care of your family. That someone is probably yourself, and I think if we look back at the pan-

orama of our own lives honestly, and if we've had any experience of answered prayer, we'll admit that God is a far more reliable basis for hope than we are. And for some reason, He desires this hope to take practical form in at least these two areas—money and sexuality. Teaching NFP for seven years and talking to couples about these issues, Sharon and I have *never, not once*, met a husband or wife who says about this giving with body or money, "It's the dumbest thing I ever did." We consistently see a mixture of surprise, joy and peace. And surprise, joy and peace are really good things for a marriage.

### Sharon

A final note on the idea of NFP "working." Recently we announced the wonderful news that our fourth child is on the way. We received many comments like "That NFP really works, huh?" Mike and I found it interesting to observe that to most folks for NFP to be "working" means you *don't* get pregnant. We know it can work in that way but one of the things that really happens through living with NFP over the years is that you are *awakened* and realize how wonderful children are, that they are truly gifts from God. NFP has seen me through the journey from fear, to acceptance, to a great joy in my fertility. So now I can say with confidence finally that NFP is *working* for Mike and me! We are so grateful that He has brought us to this point. We have been befuddled about many things in our lives, but NFP has been key in a faith life that is difficult to see as possible without the sacrifice it calls for. We don't know what our next step is in Phoenix when we return, but we surely know that continuing to get the word out about NFP will always be a big part of our lives.

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# The Theology of the Body—Giving NFP a Boost

Rev. Charles Goraieb

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As a seminarian studying philosophy I was introduced to the works of Dietrich Von Hildebrand and others who called themselves phenomenologists. These writers included Karol Wojtyla (who had already become the Vicar of Christ) and his stunning work, *Love and Responsibility*. The more I studied and reflected on the work of these writers the more certain I became that God's plan for human sexual love was not an arbitrary list of do's and don'ts but an integrated tapestry that must be seen as a whole. And at the center of this plan is the much debated teaching in *Humanae vitae* regarding the inseparability of the two ends of marriage. In order to preserve the dignity of the spouses and their sexual expression, each and every act of sexual love must both foster their unity as husband and wife and be open to the possibility of new life.

This simple yet profound insight of our church is at the center of so much going on both within the church and the broader society. In his 1968 encyclical affirming this truth, Pope Paul VI predicted that a failure to see the inseparability of these purposes of sexual love would give rise to a long list of dark offenses against love. In hindsight we can see just how prophetic he was. Unfortunately, it has also become the point of departure for the voices of dissent that have echoed so loudly in the past 35 years.

Through God's grace, my experience has been very different. Almost immediately I began to see just how

essential this teaching would be to me as a future priest if I was to offer real assistance to my flock. It was as if the Lord had placed a master key in my hand, assuring me that this was the way to free many who were imprisoned in the pain of sexual chaos.

Beginning with my first parish assignment I have always insisted that couples seeking to marry would have to take the *entire* NFP course, explaining to them that the introduction alone would do them very little good. With few exceptions, couples have accepted this requirement and most have expressed appreciation for their exposure to the course. I am not naïve enough to think they all have put it into practice, but at least their horizons had been expanded.

Early on some of my closest lay friends were couples teaching NFP. Over and over again they would tell me how difficult it was to stand before 30-50 couples who are glaring at them, just daring them to challenge their practices or opinions. What our Church teaches is, without doubt, God's Word and the basis for true self-donation and mutuality in marriage. Why is this so hard to get across? Why so much hostility? What could we do to touch people's hearts more effectively?

About seven years ago I began to study the Holy Father's teachings known as the Theology of the Body. While not easy reading, it soon became clear that this is what we were missing. Here was a comprehensive and inspiring way to see God's plan

for human love based not on the Natural Law but on Scripture and on every person's experience.

The Holy Father starts his work with the dialogue Jesus has with the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3ff regarding the indissolubility of marriage. On two occasions in this dialogue Jesus refers to God's original plan for man and woman, the plan revealed "in the beginning." To understand what this original plan was, we must go to the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. Before sin disrupted their unity, our first parents lived their union in awe and gratitude for the gift each one was to the other. This gift was freely given and joyfully received. They had no fear of being reduced to objects of sexual pleasure or being rejected by the other. It would not have occurred to them to use their sexual love to manipulate or seek to dominate the other. Adam wasn't concerned about losing his independence and Eve seldom experienced "headaches." The respect, mutuality, trust and openness in their relationship is summed up by that amazing line in Genesis 2:25: "the man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame." We know that many of these qualities in their relationship changed as soon as they both fell into sin. But because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, there is hope for us all. As the Holy Father points out repeatedly, the nature of our first parents, who were made in God's image and likeness, remained unchanged. God's plan for each human being remains the same even though we must contend with sin in order to achieve it. This plan is summarized in the document from Vatican II called the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)* chapter 24:

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one. . . as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human rea-



son, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.

We can highlight three basic points from this passage. First, the love between spouses is intended to be a mirror, an icon of the love which exists between the three persons of the Godhead. More specifically, the Pope argues that it is in their sexual union that spouses reflect to each other, as much as is possible in this life, the perfect union of love in the communion of persons of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secondly, human beings are created to freely donate themselves in love to another. In fact, we can not fully realize our human dignity unless we do so. And following this second point he concludes that inscribed in our very bodies as male and female is our complementary need for another. Man is incomplete in his maleness without woman and visa-versa. He calls this the *nuptial meaning of the body*.

If you are thinking that this is just abstract theology, then let me try to apply it more practically to marriage. Our starting is the idea of the gift which we are all called to make of ourselves (that is true whether we are married or single, although the gift is obviously expressed differently in the latter case). On their wedding day, spouses make four promises to each other: they vow to give themselves to each other freely, completely (no other parties), permanently (until the death) and open to life (to be fruitful, God willing). These four vows are renewed each and every time they express their love sexually.

The damage which can result from breaking the first three vows is not hard to grasp. If husbands force them-

selves on their wives or if one of them is having an affair or if they marry with the idea of it being just a temporary relationship, the marriage will soon be in big trouble. So isn't it logical to assume that breaking the fourth vow could also strike a fatal blow? Contraceptives allow couples to renege their wedding vows. It also means that they have used the nuptial meaning of their bodies to say something which is false. As the Pope says, they have "lied" with their bodies (the "lie" of fornication and adultery is even more pernicious).

As a pastor who works constantly with married couples, I am deeply indebted to Pope John Paul II for giving us a new and inspiring way to get couples' attention and take a closer look at NFP. In most cases I don't go into a deep explanation of the Theology of the Body with them. But I do get the main ideas across by making my case for the benefits of periodic abstinence, the essence of NFP. If attempting to convince a couple to be open to NFP the conversation might go as follows:

"Would you two like to experience your sexual love as a sacred and holy event?"

The answer is usually, "of course Father."

"One of the drawbacks of contraceptives is that they exempt the man from having to respect and follow the natural cycles of his spouse. He now thinks that there is nothing to prevent her from responding to him sexually whenever he would like."


"Yet we all know that men and women have different sexual constitutions. Men are easily stimulated and are almost always eager. A woman's sexual drive on the other hand, follows monthly cycles of ebbs and flows. Failure to honor and observe these differences can cause tremendous friction. Over a period of time many women get the sense that

they are not understood and in fact are being used. Her spouse, on the other hand, may not understand why she is not as responsive as he would like her to be."

"In fact, there is something of an undeclared war that exists in many relationships where the husband seems to constantly be seeking sexual affection only to be rejected by his wife. He begins to wonder if she still loves him. She, on the other hand, feels that his only interest in her is sexual because he seems to constantly pursue it. It also seems that this is the only time he shows affection for her. (their body language at this point will speak volumes)."

"So, what can be done to change this? Adopt the practice of periodic abstinence as the foundation and spirituality of your marriage."


If I have gotten their attention, I then describe some of the benefits of periodic abstinence:

 **Please pray for the repose of the soul of Most Rev. George Speltz, retired Bishop of the Diocese of St. Cloud.**

Bishop Speltz was a pioneer in diocesan NFP ministry. It was Bishop Speltz who established the first paid professional diocesan NFP staff in the United States. Among those of us who labor in NFP ministry, he was known as a holy and courageous promoter of the Church's teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood.

Because of the prophetic vision of Bishop Speltz, the NFP office of the Diocese of St. Cloud was planted on rich ground and has grown through the years.

**May his soul rest in peace!**



Improved communication.

Better understanding of your spouse's emotional and sexual makeup.

Acquisition of the virtues of self-denial and self-mastery (without self-mastery, it is impossible to make a sincere gift of oneself).

The monthly cycle of self-denial followed by sexual union provides the tension and release which keeps both spouses attuned to each other (it also gives the couple a built-in method to experience the paschal mystery of death and resurrection).

Couples learn to show their affection in a multiplicity of ways besides sexual intercourse.

Responsible parenthood now rests on the shoulders of both and not just the one using the contraceptives.

Some 95% of the couples who prac-

tice periodic abstinence stay married (based on anecdotal evidence).

NFP couples have sexual intercourse more frequently and find it more satisfying than couples who contracept (also based on anecdotal evidence).

Ordinarily there is a relationship between the faith which the couple possesses and their openness to hearing all this. Yet even those whose faith is immature can still be reached by appealing to their longing to see their relationship prosper and their love deepen. Modern men and women may not be moved by long-standing Church teachings or the natural law, but an appeal to their experience and ways to improve their lives will always have an impact.

In his excellent biography on the Pope (*Witness to Hope*) George Weigel

says that the Theology of the Body is a ticking time bomb set to go off sometime in this century. What the Holy Father has given us is a profound treasure that will take some time for the Church to assimilate. Once that process is in motion, we can expect many people of all faiths to be listening very carefully as the Church's voice rises above the din to proclaim the truth. In the meantime, we all can set about the process of learning and enriching ourselves with these teachings. Below I include some recommended resources that can help you deepen your understanding of the Theology of the Body. It is a breath of fresh, sweet air for all of us who want to serve God's people and turn their hearts towards the Author of Love. May it be a boost to all of you. And may the Holy Family guide and protect us all.

## National NFP Awareness Week July 25-31, 2004



Plan your diocesan activities now.  
Watch for a postcard coming in the mail soon!

Fr. Goraieb is pastor of St. Henry's Parish in Buckeye, Arizona. He can be contacted at: [cgoraieb@aol.com](mailto:cgoraieb@aol.com)

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# EWTN – Getting the Word Out

*Erick Carrero*

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I often tell people that Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the pre-text for the context. Marital chastity is the context we are aiming for, but many will only get there through the practice of NFP. I believe that one reason why many couples are not familiar with “what” NFP is, “why” use it, and “how” to use it, is that NFP is a foreign phrase in their lives. Therefore, it is always a good thing to find more and better ways to get the NFP message out to the public in many and varied ways.

Over a year ago while my family was driving home from a family trip, we stopped at EWTN headquarters in Irondale, Al. We’d never been there, and those who have been know how unique this visit can be. As we wandered around waiting for the next guided tour, a friendly gentleman came over to us and greeted us in Spanish after hearing my children speaking in Spanish in the reception area. This was Enrique Duprat, Director of Hispanic Productions for EWTN.

He gave us a personalized tour in Spanish, and as we talked more, we found we had many areas of common interest. What seemed to be a fortuitous encounter, turned out to be a clearly providential one. We discovered that Enrique also had a desire to educate people about NFP, and this is where the idea of a series of 13 NFP programs was born. I left Birmingham with Enrique’s suggestion to send him a proposal for a series of programs on NFP.

In this effort to educate couples about the many aspects of marital

sexuality, I contacted a group of like-minded friends to share the potential of this project. The idea was to gather to professionals from various fields and methods to present to viewers the fact that NFP is good, can make you grow as a person, and is part of the bigger context of marital chastity.

The planning and development stages required long hours of telephoning and e-mail networking. But in the end, I believe, it was worth it. Here are some things that we learned from producing our NFP series that will help us in future projects.

## **There are different ways to reach different people**

Television challenged us with a diverse audience of educated and less educated viewers. Having a physician present information, for example, would be appealing to the more educated viewer, but intimidating or even boring to others. Relying on a witness talk was appealing to many couples, but others would find the lack of formality or scientific backing to be less believable. Although addressing the effectiveness of the method was crucial, some may see that as more of the contraceptive mentality we are trying to heal. In an effort to respond to these concerns, we presented a quilt of segments that were sewn together by a moderator to give an overview of the Culture of Life, in which marital chastity and NFP are an essential part.

Be creative with the budget. Those who work in the non-profit sector know of the challenges of funding “great ideas.” As we got deeper into the planning of this series, we realized

that it was going to cost more than what we thought. “Expect the unexpected” was true more than ever. Yet God’s providence showed us that there were other people excited about this project who were willing to get involved, even at their own expense.

There were two witness couples scheduled to come to Alabama but their filming had to be cancelled due lack of funds. This happened after all of the segments had already been arranged. My wife, Sonia, suggested that we try to find a place in California (where our guests lived) to tape their witness. I contacted the Family Life Office of the Diocese of Fresno and they said they would be happy to lend us their studio. At the time, I didn’t even ask what the cost was for using their crew. The next day, as we made further arrangements, the Family Life Director told me that he had contacted a pro-life friend who offered to pay for the crew’s expense.

## **Learn the art of being subtly blunt**

Due to the length of the series (13 programs), we were able to address many topics. Some dealt with human physiology, the joy of a couple coming off of the Pill, or how NFP helps you to give witness about chastity to your children. A pastor spoke about the changes of heart in his parishioners as more of them learned NFP. He explained how it encouraged them to be more involved in parish life and to participate more in the Sacraments. These and other issues were discussed to show the far-reaching extent of living the NFP lifestyle. But regardless of the subject, we made sure that all the participants shared that striving to live the truth that the Church proclaims about marriage and family gave them peace and joy. Viewers might not relate to certain theological jargon, but the truth about the human person is something they can relate to.

We always emphasized that we owed them that, and that it is our treasure to share.

### TV bridges a social gap

One of the bigger challenges we face today is how to make a convincing presentation to a population that we are less familiar with. While I have been an advocate of on-line courses and thorough training for NFP instructors since I started to work for Couple to Couple League in 1997, it is clear to me that many of those couples who have home computers are less likely to have children than those who do not have them but have a TV. I appreciate television and visual media in general because with the right script we are able to reach many social groups, including educated, unemployed, migrants, homemakers, etc.

### The look is as important as the message

There is nothing more bland than a bad home video. Commercial TV sets the standard and, if we want any part on this media, that's what we should aim for. We were clear that we didn't

want to make an NFP "infomercial," as that would ruin credibility. EWTN gave us an opportunity to use their facilities and excellent crew to produce top quality material. We are also working to develop more programs based on this series. Now that we have the professional footage, we can develop more programs to serve various needs.

### This project truly was a two-way street

EWTN gave us a great opportunity to share our message with people around the globe. It also benefitted because EWTN ended up with a program that met their goals and objectives as an apostolate. This was also a commercial agreement. We need to be aware that there are other radio stations or TV stations that could use our talents, if the product we present is right for their audience.

### Spiritual networking is vital

This project started with two people sharing their hope for a series of programs about NFP. It became a reality because of the efforts of many — many

of whom are seen in the shows, others who prayed and offered sacrifices for its success. A healthy spiritual life will prevent us from working very hard on our own plans while ignoring those of God.

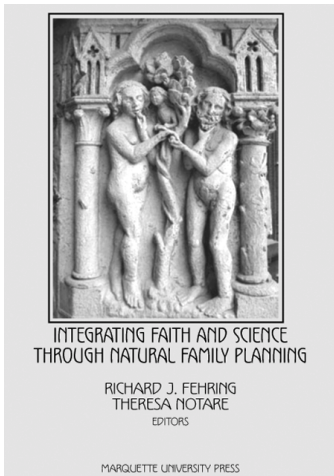
These are some reflections on a project that seemed to be a dream two years ago. We now are receiving e-mails from all of Europe, Central and South America and we realize this is a lot bigger than us. We also realize that we have a great responsibility as well. As we work harder to get the word out about NFP, we are obliged to work smarter and holier — and to keep praying for the Lord's blessing.

The series is being transmitted by cable and you can also watch it on-line from EWTN web site [www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com). For programming information go to EWTN web site or to CCL's Spanish web site [www.planificacionfamiliar.net](http://www.planificacionfamiliar.net)

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*Erick Carrero is the Director of Spanish Development for the Couple to Couple League. Erick travels extensively in the U.S. and Latin America promoting NFP and training NFP teachers. He is the author of a simplified NFP manual for less educated couples. Erick can be reached at [ecarrero@ccli.org](mailto:ecarrero@ccli.org).*

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## COORDINATORS' CORNER

# Simplicity Wins – Your body knows

Judith Leonard

*This is a narrative about an idea whose time has come – marketing NFP to the general public. I am writing this as a gift for you so you may realize what you can do in your diocese.*

*It all began in February 2003 with a phone call from Family of the Americas Foundation, a non-profit, faith-based, ecumenical organization, requesting a budget proposal for test marketing Natural Family Planning (NFP). Family of the Americas Foundation had received a grant to conduct the project and our program of the Catholic Diocese of Wichita, was selected from nationwide markets to launch a test campaign on the benefits of the Ovulation Method of NFP. A novena to the Holy Spirit quickly ensued!*

### Project mission and goal

**O**ur goal was to create awareness and test acceptance for the Natural Family Planning message in the Wichita metropolitan service area (MSA) among a primary target audience. Reaching out to the entire community, including Hispanics, with various marketing and public relations tools to both promote NFP and test the best marketing strategy was therefore the focus of the media campaign. The project mission included our having to complete three important tasks:

- Train additional teachers to provide quality NFP services to married and engaged couples, using Family of the Americas Foundation's materials, and providing compensatory salaries.
- Provide instruction on human fertility and procreation including a fundamental education of the fertility cycle and how to interpret the physiological signs of fertility.
- Expand our capacity of current office operations through an additional teaching site, phone line, computer equipment, audio-visual equipment and staff as needed for twelve months.

### Plan of action

The support of our then-Bishop of Wichita, Most Rev. Thomas J. Olmsted, and the size, cultural and demographic mix of Wichita, made our diocese an ideal venue for the first-ever major multi-media campaign promoting NFP.

Pre-campaign market research conducted in the Wichita area established that 47% of women 18-45 years were interested in learning more about NFP. A telephone survey of 307 women was completed by July 7, which showed that women under thirty-five are very open to a natural means of family planning for future reference. Those women who have used artificial birth control are also looking for a natural means that is safer, healthier and devoid of harmful side effects. All of the women who were called were very concerned about their present as well as physical well being. The medical reports on the effects of artificial hormones on the female body and the related incidence of cancer have alarmed women and caused them to be more receptive to natural alternatives.

To begin, Bishop Olmsted sent a letter to every parish in the diocese.

Also, over 25,000 bulletin inserts describing the upcoming media campaign in Spanish and English, were distributed throughout the diocese. Given the age and demographics of the target market, radio and outdoor boards were determined to be the most efficient means to get the message out. To jumpstart the campaign, four strategically located billboards were purchased in high trafficked and visible locations. Radio spot buys were made with fifteen stations to ensure the message would reach its target. With the area's growing Hispanic population, spots were also placed on the area's Spanish radio stations. The radio ads ran for 12 weeks, 1,693 times

**"This NFP project has been a great blessing for our local Church and the larger community. Already we have seen so many positive results ... What gives me special joy is the way that this campaign has given so much new encouragement to those who already practice NFP, and to the teachers, doctors and others who have been strong supporters for many years."**

**Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted**

for a reach of 95.7% and a frequency of 23.7. Seven hundred public service announcements were an added bonus.

The credibility and clarity of our message was critical because this was the first mass marketing of a concept with limited awareness. Conveying the advantages of NFP was a challenge, as its benefits span the physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and

intellectual. A theme line was developed touching on all aspects: 99% Effective. 100% Natural. Your Body Knows.™ Using a soothing, sincere female voice and simple piano background, the three commercials ran in equal rotation, each with a relaxed, storytelling theme that accommodated the simple, straightforward language. Accompanying billboards featured soft-focused photography of a woman on a bed, sage green graphics, the theme line and our office phone number.

### NFP Teachers = “Heros”

A three-day crash course of training was held in July for 25 people, including two physicians, the Family Life Director and others outside the immediate Wichita area, including one woman from the adjoining diocese of Dodge City. Additional teachers were needed as 24 classes were scheduled in English and in Spanish during those important 12 weeks. Teachers also worked several hours each day answering phones, with the busiest times being the noon hour (lunchtime). The greatest responses were from the 20-24 age group (28%) and 25-29 age group (31%). The majority of the callers were non-Catholic (78%). A good number were male (14%). The stories they all shared were about wanting to get off of artificial birth control and to practice something natural and more loving. One 33-year-old husband heard our ad and thought it sounded so-o-o good. He called us and said he just knew “there *has* to be an alternative” we’ve “been having problems with” the pill.

Teaching sites were added within the Hispanic community. The Spanish radio station interviewed our teachers and promoted NFP classes on the community calendar. Brochures and schedules were mailed out and follow up calls increased the registrations.

Physicians called and offered to support our efforts. The first doctor who called us offered the use of his office for teaching. Another wanted us to emphasize the low cost benefit of NFP for low and middle income married adults with little or no health insurance. One of our physician teachers told his first class of his own conversion away from contraceptives and also how he and his wife adopted their son. The class included a couple struggling with infertility and several Protestant couples. One woman asked why she hadn’t heard of NFP before. The doctor’s answer started out “well, there’s not much money in it.”

After the first week, two television stations contacted us for interviews. The news coverage led to increased hits on our website, calls to our office from outside the metropolitan service area, and letters to the editor of the daily paper, *The Wichita Eagle*.

Our project became a topic of conversation in work places, homes and schools. We received more than a dozen visits from students in high school, college and technical schools looking for information and for help with class presentations and papers. There were positive unsolicited letters to the editor of the daily newspaper and the discussion still continues.

### Results and future?

This campaign truly broke ground. The results speak to a new openness toward Natural Family Planning and the many benefits it offers. Now that the campaign is over, we realized that we could have fine-tuned the project. For example, we should have stated our phone number more than once on the radio ads and been more selective with our radio spots by tracking the top responding stations. But that said, we were successful in this first attempt.

We are awakening young women to this sensible alternative. As Bishop

When asked about the wonderful results of the media campaign, diocesan NFP director, Judith Leonard said that the “effort has borne fruit and may well be the model for similar programs in other dioceses.” She added that other committed Catholics might be challenged to fund campaigns in other cities.

Olmsted said, “This is a dream come true. The possibilities for good are immense.” We are so proud of the beautiful billboards and radio spots produced by Melissa Cohlma Marketing. The radio ads have reached the hearts of the unreachable.

This project fits perfectly into the new evangelization that the Holy Father has begun – especially when he speaks about children as the “Springtime of the family and society.” NFP is building better marriages and building better families. “The history of mankind, the history of salvation passes by way of the family. The family is placed at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love.” (*Familiaris consortio*, 86.6)

We are boldly going forward with our NFP media message and women are grateful to hear about a healthy alternative to artificial birth control. You are welcome to contact us for media samples and further information to start a campaign in your city or diocese.

With gratitude to the Holy Spirit!

Judith Leonard is Director of the Natural Family Planning office in the Diocese of Wichita. To view the billboard see [www.nfpwichita.org](http://www.nfpwichita.org). Contact: 1-800-813-2410.

# News Briefs

## *In Memoriam*



Natural Family Planning lost a good friend on November 5, 2003 when Fr. Ronald Lawler, O.F.M., Cap. died. Fr. Lawler was the founding president of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, a theologian, author of chastity education materials, and a strong supporter of Natural Family Planning. He will be deeply missed.

## *Congratulations*

Congratulations to the Phoenix NFP Center on its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary! The Center turns "30" in April. Many blessings for thirty more years of growth in NFP service and education!

## Events

**February 28, 2004.** The Diocese of Lansing NFP Program's 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Catholic Bioethics Seminar. This seminar explores Catholic ethics and bioethics using the USCCB's Ethical and Religious Directives. *Contact: NFP Program, 517-342-2587; E-mail, NFP@DioceseofLansing.org*

**March 1, 2004.** The Diocese of Yakima's NFP education outreach day to clergy and laity. Sponsored by the diocesan NFP Advisory Committee through the Office of Social Justice/Respect Life, the event is made possible through a grant from Our Sunday Visitor Institute. The morning session for priests includes DDP Assistant Director, Theresa Notare speaking on diocesan NFP ministry to priests. The evening session is for engaged and married couples, NFP teachers and

couples, directors of religious education, youth ministry, and singles ministry. Spanish simultaneous translations will be available. *Contact: Jane Villeneuve; 509-965-7110; E-mail, jvillanueva@yakima diocese.org.*

**March 6, 2004.** The Philadelphia Natural Family Planning Network and Catholic Medical Association's conference, Facts of Love: Bringing NFP to Parish Life. *Contact: www.pnfpn.org.*

**March 8 - 12.** Northwest Family Services's Provider Education and Certification program in STM, Portland, OR. *Contact: Northwest Family Services, 4805 N.E. Glisan St., Portland, OR 97213; 503-215-6377; 1-800-939-NWFS; 503-215-6940 FAX; service@nwfs.org; www.nwfs.org.*

**March 2004.** One More Soul offers teacher training in the Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning, through the Family of the Americas Foundation. Classes are scheduled in Dayton, OH. *Contact: Steve Koob, One More Soul, 800-307-7685; Steve@OM Soul.com*

**April 23 - 24.** National Forum on the Theology of the Body, sponsored by Theology of the Body International Alliance (TOBIA) at Gettysburg, PA. Speakers will take a fresh approach to reflecting upon the Theology of the Body through using various disciplines such as psychology, bio-ethics, and iconography. Practical issues such as dating and teen chastity will also be addressed. Speakers include: Katrina Zeno, Dr. Phil Mango and Fr. John Schroedel. *Contact: 307-635-4233; www.theologyofthebody.net.*

**May 8, 2004.** The Creighton Model FertilityCare™ Practitioner Program,

Garrison, N.Y. Phyllis White, CFCE of FertilityCare™ Center of Kansas City is the teacher trainer. *Contact: Phyllis White, 816-224-1177; FAX 816-229-3390; fcckc@sbcglobal.net.*

**June 11 -12, 2004.** Marquette University College of Nursing Institute for Natural Family Planning and the Wisconsin and Chicago Guilds of the Catholic Medical Association are co-sponsoring a conference "Human Sexuality, Health Care, and the Catholic Church." The conference is at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. Registration is \$50, a limited number of scholarships are available for students. *Contact: muinstnfp@marquette.edu. or richard.fehring@marquette.edu.*

**June 27-30, 2004.** Couple to Couple League's convention at Lewis University, Romeoville, IL. A registration form can be downloaded and printed from the Internet. *Contact: www.convention.ccli.org*

**July 21-24, 2004.** The American Academy of FertilityCare™ Professionals' 23<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting, Omaha, NE. The central focus of this year's conference is on NaPro Technology – medical science at the service of the human person. Register online at: *www.naprotechnology.com* or FAX registration to: 402-488-6525.

**Aug. 23 – Dec. 12, 2004.** Marquette University's Online NFP Teacher Training Program For Health Professionals. The Marquette University College of Nursing NFP Teacher Training program is a professional online educational experience Approved according to the Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry. The program prepares the participant to provide professional



NFP services and to qualify for certification through the Diocesan Development Program for NFP. This educational program was designed for health professionals and involves a 3 credit NFP Theory Course and a 3 credit NFP Supervised Practicum. The Marquette University online NFP Teacher Training Program was developed through a generous grant provided by Our Sunday Visitor Institute. *Contact: Prof. Richard J. Fehring, DNSc, RN, Director, at Richard.fehring@marquette.edu.*

**November 5-7, 2004.** BOMA-USA's national conference in Dallas, TX. Teacher training sessions and Teen STAR training will follow the conference from November 8-11, in both English and Spanish. *Contact: boma-usa@msn.com.*

## Resources

**Archdiocese of Boston,** Natural Family Planning Program has developed a 60 minute presentation, including slides, script and discussion tool entitled *Planning Your Family Together*. Topics include: Scientific Foundation of NFP, Frequently Asked Questions, Benefits of NFP, Church Teaching, Couple Witness and more. *Contact: Mary Finnigan, NFP Coordinator, 617-746-5803; E-mail mary\_finnigan@rcab.org.*

**Diocese of Lansing** has developed a video, "Introduction to NFP." A manual is included with every DVD copy. *Contact: Rita Michaels, RN, NFP Coordinator, Diocese of Lansing, 300 W. Ottawa St., Lansing MI 48933; 517-342-2587; 517-342-2446 FAX; nfp@dioceseoflansing.org; www.nfplansing.catholicweb.com.*

**Northwest Family Services** has available three online courses: a chastity educator course for those who want background in the Theology of the Body; an NFP client course and an NFP Provider training course. The client education course includes follow-up and chart review. *Contact: Northwest Family Services, 503-230-6377; www.nwfs.org and www.facts.cc.*

### 2004 BOMA-USA Teacher Training

Lowell, MA • April 3-May 4

Chicago/Techy, IL • May 21-25

Charlotte, NC • June 11-15

*Contact BOMA-USA at 651-699-8139; boma-usa@msn.com; also see www.boma-usa.org*

### 2004 Couple to Couple League Teacher Training Seminars:

#### English

Garnerville, NY • Feb. 14 & 15 and Mar. 13 & 14

Ashville, NC • Feb. 28 & 29 and Mar. 27 & 28

Toledo, OH • Apr. 17 & 18 and July 10 & 11

Bemidji, MN • Apr. 24 & 25

Romeoville, IL • June 26 & 27

Austin, TX • Sept. 18 & 19 and Oct. 9 & 10

Bismarck, ND • Sept. 24 & 25

#### Spanish

Cincinnati, OH • Mar. 20 & 21 and Apr. 17 & 18

Romeoville, IL • June 26 & 27

#### Clergy Seminars

Cincinnati, OH • April 13-15

Cincinnati, OH • Oct. 2-28

#### Physician Seminar

Cincinnati, OH • Sept. 17-19

**Contact: Couple to Couple League, 513-471-2000; www.ccli.org.**



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Theresa Notare, Editor

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