

## **Responding to *Humanae vitae*'s call to minister to married Couples:**

### **THE DIOCESE OF PHOENIX History of the NFP Center**

*1974-2005*

*By Peggy Frei, RN*

The Holy Spirit must have been hovering over St. Francis Xavier Church in the Fall of 1974. It was then that many parishioners and patients had begun to ask Dr. Sam De Francesco about natural, Church-approved methods of family planning. Generously responding to their requests, "Dr. D." started the Phoenix Natural Family Planning Center (PNFPC) by instructing clients in monthly lectures at St. Joseph's Hospital. In many ways, Dr. D. personally responded to Paul VI's appeal to "men of science" to help married couples live God's plan for their marriages!

As word spread, Dr. D. recruited women from those he had instructed to help with the on-going follow-up of clients. One of those women, Maria Fitzpatrick, RN, became the first volunteer director of the Center. The Natural Family Planning (NFP) services grew. By 1976, an Instructor Training Program was developed, and the classes were expanded to a series of three, with continuing follow-up. During this time, Fr. Marc Calegari, S.J., an instructor at Brophy College Prep., became involved in the development of client materials. Fr. Calegari provided many articles, resources (e.g., hand-outs), and was instrumental in teacher training. He challenged all who became involved with this ministry to keep abreast of the newest NFP research and to study and discuss the pertinent Church documents. Fr. Marc also insisted that the teachers be honest and open about their own married sexuality.

In 1978, with the support and encouragement of Ray Jennett, MD and Sr. Alice Montgomery, the PNFPC was opened on the campus of St. Joseph's Hospital, where it remained for 16 years. In those years teaching was expanded to outlying areas of the state, teachers were sent to international conferences on NFP and both Janet Kistler and Maria Fitzpatrick became paid, part-time employees of St. Joseph Hospital. The instructor training program and client education system continued to be refined and eventually Sympto-Thermal method (STM) educational materials were adopted from Northwest Family Services (Portland, Oregon). Recruitment of teachers and advertisement of the PNFPC's services were the priorities. A grant was obtained to translate the materials to Spanish and Luz Trujillo provided a major contribution to that effort. Further growth occurred in 1980 when Bishop James Rausch mandated an NFP clergy education in all vicariates. At the completion of the NFP Center's visits with the priests, referrals from clergy increased by 33%.

In 1985 PNFPC was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and was greatly boosted by support of the Diocese of Phoenix, several physicians and other benefactors and major contributors such as Eddie Basha, Ted O'Malley, Arizona Bank and the Dr. Earl Baker Fund. The PNFPC consistently received support for continuing its operation from the Diocese of Phoenix' annual Charity and Development Appeal (which began under the influence of Bishop

Thomas O'Brien) and received 50 % of its total budget from this Catholic diocesan fund. For development such as updates of client materials, translation, scholarships, new technology, instructor training etc., PNFPC was dependent on donations and funds received from the client classes provided. The instructors were trained and certified volunteers who received a small stipend to defray their transportation/ childcare costs while providing classes. PNFPC then and now is continually indebted to and prayerfully thankful for those who have supported this ministry, including: Bishop Thomas Olmsted; many local priests and parishes; NFP clients and teachers; the Knights of Malta; Catholic Community Fund; and friends of NFP.

After 16 years at St. Joseph's Hospital, PNFPC found a new home in St. Theresa parish where offices were provided for several years. NFP instruction continued at St. Theresa's along with providing the NFP portion of marriage preparation programs. In addition, NFP teacher training also occurred at this site. In 1999 the center moved its administrative office to St. Mark's parish in central Phoenix. Classroom space was also donated for teaching sites throughout the Valley at twenty different parishes and at St. Joseph's Hospital.

In the early 1990's Fr. Tim Davern collaborated with others in the diocese to implement the Introduction to NFP as a requirement of marriage preparation for those marrying in the diocese of Phoenix. Since that time a much larger number of engaged Catholics were educated about NFP and Church teaching which supports its use in marriage.

In 2005, 2,081 people received the Introductions to NFP in English and 288 in Spanish. Those who attended classes for instruction in the use of NFP were: 240 English and 20 Spanish. In addition to classes in NFP taught by this center we also endorsed couples and their programs teaching other methods of NFP including Josefina and Fernando Camou and Armida and John Escarcega teaching the Family of Americas (cervical mucus method) at St. Catherine of Sienna parish and David and Carol Winstanley who teach the Couple-to-Couple League Method (STM) at St. Timothy parish.

PNFPC has been in existence and enjoyed many successes due to the generosity of numerous people. The founders and guides in the beginning stages were: Janet Kistler with 23 years of dedication as Center director; instructors, some of whom taught as long as 20+ years before retiring, include Peter and Carol Fejes, Joe and Liana Settanni, Duke and Beverly Beattie, Mary Ryan, Bob and Judy Carlisi, Fran and Cheryl Neuer, John and Jackie O'Block, Ryan and Sue Clement, Sam and Mary Ann McAllen and Ken and Jennie Webdale. These dedicated teachers all have been responsible for teaching NFP to couples and enabling them to live a healthy, moral and effective way of married sexuality.

Those who have volunteered as members of the Board of Directors, some for many years, include: Fr. Louis Sigman; Fr. Tim Davern; Fr. Rob Clemens; Dr. Michael Rock; Pat Morales; Jim Anderson; Deacon Colin Campbell; Deacon Joe Stickney; Cindy Leonard and many office assistants. These dedicated people have brought wisdom, generosity and conviction to this ministry.

The PNFPC has also received medical and ethical consulting from Dr. Jim Statt for many years. Dr. Statt served as board member, instructor, medical consultant and as an NFP-Only

physician in his OB-GYN practice. Maria Diaz who is fluent in Spanish, became a part-time office assistant in 1999 and later an instructor and enables the center to better serve the Spanish-speaking people. Peggy Frei, an instructor and board member joined the Center in 1999 as an “interim director until she found a replacement.” Peggy once remarked that she was having such a “great experience” that she didn’t have to look “very hard to find a successor!”

In 2005 there were 42 volunteer instructors, two full-time office employees and one regular volunteer who developed and maintained the data base (Rachel Duke). Various resource updating was begun including that of the English client and instructor materials, and the translation of materials into Spanish and Vietnamese (under the guidance of John and Teresa Vu). A new goal, to introduce more couples to Pope John Paul II’s “*Theology of the Body*” so that they may accept NFP as part of their lives, was added to the program.

We thank God that the Holy Spirit was “with us” in 1974 and continues to be present with us!

2006-2017  
By Cindy Leonard

In 2007, Peggy Frei retired and longtime instructor and board member, Cindy Leonard, stepped into the role of Director of the Phoenix Natural Family Planning Center. Peggy agreed to supervise Cindy’s first two teacher trainings until she became a trainer with Northwest Family Services soon afterwards. In 2008, the Diocese of Phoenix went through a process of making each parish an independent legal entity. Doing so meant that any agency who desired to meet at a parish had to obtain a \$2 million insurance policy and would need to complete paperwork for each of their meetings. This was hard to accept for our organization because we met in so many parish halls all over the valley for several classes per course. We also could easily obtain a \$1 million insurance policy but had difficulties finding an agency to provide higher coverage that we could easily afford.

Due to the insurance challenge, PNFPC staff asked the Vicar General, Fr. Fred Adamson, to consider honoring an offer from Bishop Thomas Olmsted a few years earlier in 2003. When Bishop Olmsted arrived in the Diocese, he suggested that the PNFPC become an office of the diocese. This was speedily and easily agreed to and though the PNFPC remained located at St. Mark’s for the remainder of that fiscal year, Cindy Leonard, as Coordinator and Maria Diaz, as Administrative Assistant, moved into beautiful offices in the Diocesan Pastoral Center during the following year. Josefina Camou was also provided a cubicle to use for her part time position as Hispanic NFP Coordinator.

In January 2010, Bishop Olmsted promulgated *Our Covenant of Love*, the new marriage policy with a mandate for full NFP education for all couples during marriage prep. The rollout for the announcement for the new policy allowed for pastors to require it in their parishes earlier than January 2010, and about 30 did so, helping us to test the waters. Our focus leading up to promulgation was teacher training, parish rep. training, and obtaining an excellent online NFP program, which we happily found with Northwest Family Services.

Bishop Olmsted's policy was designed as a three-year initiative with the following focus per year:

- ❖ New marriage preparation policy (2010)
- ❖ Strengthening existing marriages (2011), and
- ❖ Remote marriage preparation (2012)

Starting in 2010, the Office of NFP began the systematic development of a high school leadership program to meet the 2012 focus. Cindy Leonard and LeeAnne Abel co-authored a three-year high school curriculum: *Catholic Academy for Life Leadership or CALL*, which received the Imprimatur from Bishop Olmsted. Each year thereafter, approximately 200+ youth completed the first year of the program and about 60 individuals graduated, having fulfilled all requirements during three high school years. Countless parents have also received pro-life, chastity education in this way as parental attendance is encouraged.

Each year the Office of NFP hosts a Valentine's Day Mass and Appreciation Dinner for teacher couples, NFP parish reps., and presenters for God's Plan for Joy-filled marriage. Bishop Olmsted presides at Mass with over 100 in attendance. In 2017 there are about 100 active teachers in almost all major methods and about 35 Parish rep. couples. The Diocese of Phoenix's NFP ministry staff helps to host events for the local Catholic Physician's Guild, fostering a warm relationship between the physicians and the diocese. There is an annual St. Gerard Mass for those impacted by infertility (which includes the dissemination of helpful resources). A monthly support group has also been established for infertile couples. Approximately 1,000 couples are taught per year. Refresher classes are provided for special circumstances including breastfeeding and perimenopause. Speakers are provided for diocesan Catholic schools. Diocesan NFP ministry staff have also provided input on Catholic high school curriculum in the areas of biology, human sexuality, chastity and prolife subjects.

The Diocese of Phoenix Office of NFP has a large, vibrant NFP community. It is a testament to the past support of our many bishops and the current support of our wonderful shepherd, Thomas J. Olmsted, Bishop of Phoenix!

---

@2017, Diocese of Phoenix. Used with permission.