

(White, continued from page 5)

What are we implying by such statements? Are we conveying the idea that NFP is to be valued only as a natural contraceptive? Should pregnancy and the gift of new human life ever be portrayed as a punishment for breaking the rules?

We want to convey a noble understanding and appreciation of the alternating cycles of fertility and infertility. Is not our dream to liberate and enable couples to be wise stewards of this knowledge? What words can we use? Perhaps by simply saying, "These are the days of fertility which you would use to become pregnant and these are the days of infertility which you would use when choosing not to become pregnant." "You are free to choose and it's o.k. to change your mind."

Our responsibility as NFP providers is to teach what we have been fortunate to learn about God's wonderfully awesome gift—the power to co-create a new human life. NFP teachers are in a unique position to bring about change in this contraceptive minded world. We possess a power to help couples see that their informed actions do not mean "breaking the rules," but rather freely saying "yes" to the Divine invitation to bring forth new life.

In real life NFP teachers are frequently asked, "Is this time safe?" By responding with, "This is a time of fertility," the NFP teacher removes the contraceptive bias with its inherent suggestion of cheating and rule-breaking. Gently and consistently used, this type of language can effect a real change in attitudes. Combined with thorough education in recognizing the fertility or infertility of each day, we truly become sexually liberated in thought, word, and action.

Each of us involved in NFP education can identify other words that have contraceptive connotations. None of us is immune to occasionally slipping into the use of language that conveys attitudes which we really don't mean. We must always be on the alert in our choice of words. Finally, I recall a little sign in a school classroom I visited recently which said, "You never fail until you stop trying! Happy Teaching!"

Phyllis A. White, CNFPE is Director of Education at the NFP of Greater Kansas City, Inc.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

### "Witness Couples — A Unique Contribution"

Kay Ek  
Diocese of St. Cloud, MN

One of the most exciting and innovative aspects of the Saint Cloud Natural Family Planning program is the concept of "Witness Couples." It began about nine years ago when we started seeing the trend of women-only at our classes turn into couples. We liked the change and wanted to encourage it.

In order to appeal to the young couples we realized that our instructors, some of whom had been instructing since the early 1970's, could use a little help from the younger generation. So, we came up with the idea of having young couples, who were using NFP, talk to the newly instructed couples during their third instruction for 10-15 minutes.

The young, attractive, and energetic Witness Couples would speak openly and honestly about their love for each other and how NFP has enhanced their marriage. Everyone loved it. The new couples felt affirmed in their choice of NFP and the Witness Couples felt like they were contributing in a very positive way to our program. And of course, the instructors especially appreciated the contributions of the Witness Couples because it enabled their message to be felt with a greater impact.

On January 1, 1989, the Bishops of the State of Minnesota adopted a Common Marriage Policy which suggested that *all diocesan marriage preparation courses provide at least the First Instruction in Natural Family Planning*. Knowing full-well that there would be couples in the marriage preparation courses who would have less than positive feelings toward the new guideline, we incorporated our Witness Couples into the class. As a result of the Witness Couples our number of engaged clients has increased markedly. By the time of their marriage, they are ready to use NFP.

From January through June 1990, 460 couples attended the eleven marriage courses in St. Cloud. The average number of couples committing to NFP was 33%. This compares with 11% in the outlying areas of the Diocese, where NFP is included as part of the weekend, but Witness Couples have not been incorporated as part of the process. The 33% adopting NFP are those who committed to returning for chart reviews every two weeks and attend successive classes. The drop-out rate is very low. Occasionally a couple will change their mind about continuing with NFP, and later others will decide to adopt it. Without exception, those who drop out are the couples who indicate the use of contraceptives.

---

*"The young, attractive,  
and energetic  
Witness Couples would  
speak openly and honestly  
about their love for each  
other, and how NFP has  
enhanced their marriage."*

---

If a couple indicates that they are sexually active in their relationship, they are encouraged by the instructors to abstain until marriage. These couples once challenged to this new way of life are very open to this suggestion, which is reinforced by the diocesan policy on cohabitation adopted in 1984 by Bishop George H. Speltz.

Recruiting for couples to witness is an on-going process. Instructors, through the process of teaching and follow-up are asked to alert the NFP Director to couples who are especially suited for this role. They are then recruited and trained for this process. There are presently 17 couples who share in the duties of witnessing at the marriage

preparation course and at the third instruction, at which the discussion of abstinence is an integral part.

Young couples often indicate that the reason they were convinced about NFP is that they wanted in their marriage what they saw in the Witness Couple's marriage, namely the love and concern for each other and the shared responsibility. "We wanted *our* marriage to be like that couple's marriage!"

Thousands of couples in the diocese of St. Cloud are successfully using NFP. It is because of the strong support from retired Bishop George H. Speltz and present Bishop Jerome Hanus, O.S.B., that this program continues to flourish. The Witness Couple program, as part of the St. Cloud program, is here to stay.

---

## GEORGETOWN '90: "A REFLECTION"

---

*Beverly Malona,  
Diocese of Buffalo, NY*

I intended to go to the Georgetown conference as an observer. When I received the international list of conference participants, I recognized some, but many participants were not the "NFP regulars." Marketing professionals, pharmaceutical representatives, engineers, communications professors, behavioral scientists, statisticians, and government Ministers of Youth are just a few of the diverse disciplines that were represented. There were as many levels of NFP awareness as there were participants.

The goal of the physician/researcher and the pharmaceutical representative was biomedical, namely, to devise a kit to "better" recognize the fertile time. While some focused on mucus assay, others continued to work on systems that are based on BBT and calendar rhythm. The latter made me realize the challenge and the responsibility this poses to teachers of STM and OM. The physiology underlying the methods that we teach are light years beyond BBT/calendar rhythm. Until this is recognized by all concerned, the ghosts of guess work, calculation and formula will continue to haunt modern NFP

wherever we introduce it. This is not just an American thought, but the thought of STM and OM providers from around the world.

I learned that there were very strong common bonds and goals among conference participants. First, and foremost, especially with STM and OM Third World providers, is the realization that quality NFP requires well tested and researched NFP teaching models and materials, well trained teachers and standardization. There was little doubt among the professional NFP providers present, that women were capable of learning observing and interpreting and that couples manage very well in quality programs. The reverse is true in programs that offer less. A quality, inexpensive, non-rhythm based kit will hopefully serve those who need it.

I was very pleased to see that there were participants that recognized the fact that behavior plays a vital role in good NFP use. As with any form of family planning, effectiveness is also a function of couple behavior and motivation. Poor communication, differences of use intention, influences and pressures of the extended family and stress affect the perception of effectiveness.

---

*"Our challenge is to never allow a vacuum to be created in the field of family planning."*

---

Representatives of contraceptive based programs were present. Many were willing to listen to ethical arguments against the use of barrier methods during fertile period. There was also a willingness by some to understand the importance of maintaining the integrity of NFP methods. These representatives needed to see the faces of NFP providers.

NFP methods and teachers have come of age. NFP methods are well researched as any method, credible and

represented by outstanding providers and researchers. The philosophy of NFP is strong enough to withstand the challenge. The theology of NFP is strong enough to meet the needs of our Catholic populations. Our challenge is to never allow a vacuum to be created in the field of family planning. Contraceptives/ abortifacients must never appear to be the only alternatives available. We must be highly visible both to contraceptive representatives and the general population.

I was happy for the opportunity to be present. I was also happy to see that NFP is seen as an alternative by health care professionals who believe that contraception "pollutes the internal environment." These same health care professionals see fertility as they see the environment. The more compatible you are with nature the better. These people were not afraid to state that the last twenty years of family planning have been a "contraceptive nightmare."

The Georgetown project represented many levels of understanding of NFP. It brought together people who shared information and challenged one another. These conference participants also represented many disciplines which will lend credibility to a onetime "grass roots" movement. I believe that for Diocesan NFP providers the Georgetown project presents us with this challenge: to provide the best NFP service possible through teaching models that clearly signify our philosophical and theological base. Above all, we are challenged to unite despite method preference. We must provide our couples with the choice of STM and OM in every diocese. Many of our programs offer very high levels of NFP service and have much to offer the Georgetown project and the world. I gained much from that week in Washington and managed to move from observer to participant easily. The atmosphere encouraged exchange.

Dr. Victoria Jennings, director of the Institute for International Studies in Natural Family Planning, Bernadette Travers, coordinator of the Conference and members of the Institute are to be commended for an event which made a significant contribution to NFP.