
NFP, the Theology of the Body, and Our Marriage

Michael and Alysha Chambers

Many will tell you that the responsibility of being permanently faithful to one person is too great and that being open to life is too much of a burden. They say contraception brings with it freedom and life; however, we have found that it is in openness to God, to each other, and to new life that true freedom is obtained. This is what living Natural Family Planning (NFP) can help couples to experience.

Alysha was in college when she first heard NFP mentioned. All she knew then was that it existed and the Catholic Church considered it a good thing. Michael, a convert to Catholicism, grew up believing that contraception was good and that all couples should use it. Our first real understanding of what NFP is, and what the Church teaches came during our marriage preparation program. We learned that NFP at its core is simply knowledge of the physical changes one can observe in the woman's fertility cycle. It gives couples a way to measure and chart their fertility signs. We also learned how responsible parenthood is the virtuous application of this fertility knowledge.

One unexpected aspect of NFP that impressed us was how it fosters communication between spouses. Couples practicing NFP discuss the future of their family with every cycle. Knowing how to discuss such important matters has proven a great blessing to many marriages. Michael decided that blessing, by itself, was enough of a reason to learn NFP.

Another theme we discussed in marriage preparation was the Theology of the Body. It helped us understand who we are and how God created us. It is through our bodies that we express who we are spiritually. Also, because we were made in the image and likeness of God, our bodies are supposed to reflect who God is which means we are to act as He acts. How does God act? He loves. God's love is a total gift of self. God's love is life-giving. As husband and wife one way we love like God is through our sexuality. If NFP is studied in this context, our appreciation of each other as man and woman increases because the uniqueness and dignity that God has imprinted in our bodies is revealed. It was at this point that Michael realized NFP was not moral birth control; rather, it is a complete way of life honoring one's spouse's sexuality and fertility. It is loving naturally – the way God designed it.

In studying NFP in the context of the Theology of the Body, both of us have become more open to each other, to God, and to children. We truly believe that "children are the crown of marriage" and we pray that God will bless us with children some day. Until then, we will "make our plans but hold them lightly." For us, that means planning to use NFP both when we are attempting or delaying pregnancy, all the while striving to hear and do God's will!

Michael and Alysha Chambers, Diocese of Arlington, Va., were married September 24, 2005. This article first appeared in the Couple to Couple League's *Family Foundations* (Jan/Feb. 2006). It has been edited to fit this publication and is printed with permission.