



LOVE BEYOND MEASURE

Natural Family Planning...
supporting God's gifts of love and life in marriage

Married Love and the Gift of Life

By Rev. Robert R. Cannon, MA, JCL



Married love is a sacred gift beyond measure. As Pope Francis writes, “Love is more than a mere feeling” its fruitfulness “allows us to experience the happiness of giving” (*Amoris laetitia*, 94). The unique giving of self by the spouses reflects God’s love—love beyond measure!

In the book of Genesis, from the very beginning of creation, God designed marriage to image His love in the world—love that is permanent, faithful, total, and fruitful. God created marriage to be a covenant of shared love to unite a man and a woman for the whole of life, to become one flesh. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body” (Gen 2: 24). Between a baptized man and a baptized woman, marriage is a sacrament instituted by Christ (see *Code of Canon Law*, c.1055, §1, §2).

Marriage as envisioned by God has a richness and depth far different from the typical secular approach to marriage. The bishops of the United States

expressed this uniqueness very simply in this clear teaching about the purpose of marriage which is:

[M]ore than a civil contract; it is a lifelong covenant of love between a man and a woman. It is an intimate partnership in which husbands and wives learn to give and receive love unselfishly, and then teach their children to do so as well. (*Married Love and the Gift of Life*, p. 3).

At the heart of marriage lies the gift of human sexuality. The two-fold powers of love and life shared by spouses expresses a “nuptial” hope-filled quality. Love comes to life in the one flesh union of spouses. By its very nature and purpose, married love is meant to be a total gift of oneself. When a husband and a wife give themselves entirely to each other, their sacrificial love imitates the saving love of Christ poured out for our salvation.

One virtue often not mentioned regarding marriage is marital chastity. Chastity of mind, heart, and body supports fidelity in married love. Chastity empowers spouses to honor these gifts. It fosters a selfless, generous love, and reverence for each other. The virtue of chastity strengthens spouses to reject anything that would harm the dignity and sanctity of their marriage. It is a powerful antidote against a secular culture that undermines the sacred nature of marriage and family. An important aid to marital chastity are the methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP).

Today we are fortunate to have ethical methods of NFP which can aid a married couple in their desire to become pregnant or postpone a pregnancy. By understanding the signs of fertility and infertility a married couple can better cooperate with God's plan for their marriage. The methods of NFP help spouses to act responsibly in stewarding the gift of fertility they both share. Chastity is an essential element in NFP as spouses embrace God's design for marital love. That is because the NFP means to postpone or avoid pregnancy is periodic sexual abstinence. When the couple discerns that God is not calling them to have another child, they then do nothing to harm God's design of love and life. They simply abstain from the marital embrace during their time of fertility. Through marital chastity, husband and wife learn how to express their love through the wisdom of restraint—meaning that they will discover and live those little ways of expressing tenderness, respect, and consideration to each other. Then when they move into the infertile time of their fertility, husband and wife can be free to express their love as only they can in marriage.

If you are married or getting engaged to be married, consider learning a method of NFP. The practice of an NFP method will be a blessing in your marriage. NFP can help you and your spouse to embrace God's gifts of human sexuality, fertility, marital love, and parenthood. If a husband and a wife want to nourish their love and grow their family, NFP methods can become a practical and ethical support of their marital union.

Learn More

The US Bishops' NFP Program has good information for your marriage at usccb.org/nfp.

To learn more about Catholic teaching on marriage, married love and responsible parenthood, see usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/church-teaching.

Read the US bishop's document *Married Love and the Gift of Life* at usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Married-Love-and-the-Gift-of-Life-English-version.pdf.

To learn more about NFP see usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/what-natural-family-planning.

Want to learn a method of NFP? Visit usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/nfp-national-providers.



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Questions? Contact nfp@usccb.org.

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