

FORUM

Deus Caritas est – Benedict XVI's First Encyclical

The focus of Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical is love. Specifically, the Holy Father explains the nature of human love and Divine love, noting that human love is only its real self when united with Divine love.

The encyclical is divided into two parts. The first part treats the nature of love, both from the perspective of secular humanity and the Judeo-Christian tradition. In this section, the Holy Father masterfully summarizes a complex history in a few short paragraphs. He examines how the Western world understood the nature of human love (*eros*) from the time of the Greeks. He carefully unpacks the ancient Jewish understanding of love and discusses how that changed with Jesus and His Gospel. In his positive remarks about the nature of *eros* – that human love is fundamentally good – the Holy Father may very well be the first Pontiff to record such an insight. But, he adds, *eros* must be informed by God's love (*agape*) if it is to reach its potential.

The second part of the encyclical may be surprising to the reader who assumed that the Holy Father would next turn to reflect on the Sacrament of Marriage (especially because he uses conjugal love as an example in the first half). But the surprise is that Pope Benedict XVI applies this integrated vision of love to the Church's charitable ministries. He reminds all who take up works of charity to do so with the love of Christ – for without this type of love, the works will be less than what they should be.

Deus caritas est is an inspiration. It can be used to shape chastity education and programs for the engaged and married. It is essential for social justice formation. This first encyclical of Benedict XVI beautifully enhances our understanding of authentic Christian love lived in our world.

Deus caritas est Excerpts

1. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us." We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with . . . a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

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2. God's love for us is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are. In considering this, we immediately find ourselves hampered by a problem of language. Today, the term "love" has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings. . . . we speak of love of country, love of one's profession, love between friends, love of work, love between parents and children, love between family members, love of neighbor and love of God. Amid this multiplicity of meanings, however, one in particular stands out: love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison. So we need to ask: are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to

designate totally different realities?

3. That love between man and woman which is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings, was called *eros* by the ancient Greeks. Let us note straight away that the Greek Old Testament uses the word *eros* only twice, while the New Testament does not use it at all: of the three Greek words for love, *eros*, *philia* (the love of friendship) and *agape*, New Testament writers prefer the last, which occurs rather infrequently in Greek usage. As for the term *philia*, the love of friendship, it is used with added depth of meaning in Saint John's Gospel in order to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The tendency to avoid the word *eros*, together with the new vision of love expressed through the word *agape*, clearly point to something new and distinct about the Christian understanding of love.

In the critique of Christianity which began with the Enlightenment and grew progressively more radical, this new element was seen as something thoroughly negative. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Christianity had poisoned *eros*, which for its part, while not completely succumbing, gradually degenerated into vice. Here the German philosopher was expressing a widely-held perception: doesn't the Church, with all her commandments and prohibitions, turn to bitterness the most precious thing in life? Doesn't she blow the whistle just when the joy which is the Creator's gift offers us a happiness which is itself a certain foretaste of the Divine?

4. But is this the case? Did Christianity really destroy *eros*? Let us take a look at the pre-Christian world. The Greeks-not unlike other cultures-considered *eros* principally as a kind of intoxication, the overpowering of reason by a "divine madness" which tears man away from his finite existence and enables him, in the very process of being overwhelmed by divine power, to experience supreme happiness. All other powers in heaven and on earth thus appear secondary In the [ancient] religions, this attitude found expression in fertility cults, part of which was the "sacred" prostitution which flourished in many temples. *Eros* was thus celebrated as divine power, as fellowship with the Divine. The Old Testament firmly opposed this form of religion, which represents a powerful temptation against monotheistic faith, combating it as a perversion of religiosity. But it in no way rejected *eros* as such; rather, it declared war on a warped and destructive

The encyclical is organized as follows:

Introduction

Part I: The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History

- A Problem of Language
- "Eros" and "Agape"-Difference and Unity
- The Newness of Biblical Faith
- Love of God and Love of Neighbor

Part II: Caritas: The Practice of Love by the Church as a "Community of Love"

- The Church's Charitable Activity as a Manifestation of Trinitarian Love
- Charity as a Responsibility of the Church
- Justice and Charity
- The Multiple Structures of Charitable Service in the Social Context of the Present Day
- The Distinctiveness of the Church's Charitable Activity
- Those Responsible for the Church's Charitable Activity

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form of it, because this counterfeit divinization of *eros* actually strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it. Indeed, the prostitutes in the temple, who had to bestow this divine intoxication, were not treated as human beings and persons, but simply used as a means of arousing “divine madness”: far from being goddesses, they were human persons being exploited. An intoxicated and undisciplined *eros*, then, is not an ascent in “ecstasy” towards the Divine, but a fall, a degradation of man. Evidently, *eros* needs to be disciplined and purified if it is to provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns.

5. Two things emerge clearly from this rapid overview of the concept of *eros* past and present. First, there is a certain relationship between love and the Divine: love promises infinity, eternity—a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence. Yet we have also seen that the way to attain this goal is not simply by submitting to instinct. Purification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or “poisoning” *eros*, they heal it and restore its true grandeur.

This is due first and foremost to the fact that man is a being made up of body and soul. Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of *eros* can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved. Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness. . . . Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love – *eros* – able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.

Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. *Eros*, reduced to pure “sex,” has become a commodity, a mere “thing” to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man’s great “yes” to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely

material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, *eros* tends to rise “in ecstasy” towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.

6. Concretely, what does this path of ascent and purification entail? How might love be experienced so that it can fully realize its human and divine promise? Here we can find a first, important indication in the Song of Songs, an Old Testament book well known to the mystics. According to the interpretation generally held today, the poems contained in this book were originally love-songs, perhaps intended for a Jewish wedding feast and meant to exalt conjugal love. In this context it is highly instructive to note that in the course of the book two different Hebrew words are used to indicate “love.” First there is the word *dodim*, a plural form suggesting a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching. This comes to be replaced by the word *ahabà*, which the Greek version of the Old Testament translates with the similar-sounding *agape*, which, as we have seen, becomes the typical expression for the biblical notion of love. By contrast with an indeterminate, “searching” love, this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.

It is part of love’s growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being “for ever.” Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the di-

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mension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks towards its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal. Love is indeed "ecstasy," not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Lk 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. Mt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; Jn 12:25). In these words, Jesus portrays his own path, which leads through the Cross to the Resurrection: the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit. Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfillment therein, he also portrays in these words the essence of love and indeed of human life itself.

7. [The Holy Father summarizes his discussion about love to this point. He continues and restates his most significant question: "Whether the message of love proclaimed by Scripture and the Church's Tradition has some connection to the common human experience of love, or whether it is opposed to that experience?" He further describes human love in terms of *eros*, and explains how it has come to indicate "worldly" or "ascending" love. He also describes *agape* love and notes that it has often been described as "descending" love. He shows in this section that they are not opposed but that human love needs Divine love.]

In philosophical and theological debate, these distinctions [of *eros* and *agape*] have often been radicalized to the point of establishing a clear antithesis between them: descending, oblation love—*agape*—would be typically Christian, while on the other hand ascending, possessive or covetous love—*eros*—would be typical of non-Christian, and particularly Greek culture. Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life. Yet *eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the

beloved, bestows itself and wants to "be there for" the other. The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. Jn 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. Jn 19:34).

- 12 . . . in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of . . . a suffering and lost humanity. . . His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form.
13. Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (cf. Jn 6:31-33). . . The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood. The sacramental "mysticism," grounded in God's condescension towards us, operates at a radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish.
14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental "mysticism" is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become "one body," completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself.

The National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage: What It Is, What It Can Be

H. Richard McCord

In November 2004 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops voted unanimously to undertake a National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage. They agreed that the Initiative would be a broadly-based collaborative effort to *promote, preserve, and protect marriage*, understood both as a sacramental reality and a human institution.

This effort is a timely and necessary one. Ten years ago a national coalition of persons involved in research, education, communications, social work, advocacy, law, and public service started what has come to be known as the “marriage movement.” The movement’s rallying cry continues to ring true.

“The time has come to shift the focus of national attention from divorce to marriage and to rebuild a family culture based on enduring relationships. Making marriage in America stronger will require a fundamental shift in cultural values and public policy. No one sector of society is responsible for the decline of marriage. We are all part of the problem, and therefore we all must be part of the solution.”¹

Five years later the marriage movement had gained in numbers and increased in strength. More voices combined to offer the following pledge.

“We come together to enlarge and energize this emerging effort to renew the marriage vow and the marriage vision. We come together to help more men and women achieve a caring, collaborative, committed bond,

rooted in equal regard between the spouses. We come together to pledge that in this decade we will turn the tide on marriage and reduce divorce and unmarried childbearing, so that each year more children will grow up protected by their own two happily married parents, and so that each year more adults’ marriage dreams will come true.”²

Twenty-five years ago our society and Church began to acknowledge that family life was in trouble, that this basic institution could no longer be taken for granted. The White House Conference on Families focused a spotlight on certain problems. The U.S. Catholic Bishops adopted a pastoral plan for family ministry and mobilized resources in support of families. The ensuing decades saw energy and creativity poured into research, programs, policies, ministerial infrastructure, and produced a deeper awareness of the value and role of families. The Bishops’ Synod on the Family (1980) and the subsequent teaching document, *Familiaris consortio*, by Pope John Paul II in 1981 were key events in shaping a “pastoral initiative” for families.

Today the time has come for another initiative. We seem to have reached a point where the basic institution of marriage can no longer be taken for granted. The emergence of a marriage movement testifies to this. So too does the experience of pastoral ministers. Most of us can cite the trends. The marriage rate is falling. Cohabitation, seen as an alternative to

marriage, is on the rise. The divorce rate has fallen slightly, but not enough to make a real difference. More divorces are occurring in the early years of marriage - evidence perhaps of not finding the perfect soulmate-spouse or achieving other high expectations. And then there is the raging debate about “same-sex marriage” and similar unions. This has called into question the very definition of marriage and understanding of its natural boundaries and purposes. Marriage has become a matter of interest and concern not just for religious groups but also in the public arena.

With all this as background, Bishop Kevin Boland (Savannah) said to his brother bishops when proposing a pastoral initiative on marriage: “As leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States, we can help to create a positive climate that places healthy marriages at the heart of strong families, a strong nation, and a strong and holy church. This is a pastoral moment we should seize upon.”

The idea of a broadly-based pastoral initiative arose from a more limited idea, presented by one bishop, for a pastoral letter on marriage. The Committee on Marriage and Family Life liked this idea but thought it needed to be expanded. So the Committee sketched out the broad lines of an effort that would make a pastoral letter the centerpiece of an initiative, emphasizing the bishops’ teaching and pastoring responsibilities. They also included other elements in a descriptive statement of mission.

The pastoral initiative will

- deal with contemporary concerns about marriage from a foundation in Catholic doctrine and pastoral practice
- draw from the experience and expertise of many, including married couples
- address various audiences with-

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in the Catholic community, and also offer a positive message and evangelizing witness to society

- directly produce and encourage others to produce resources that help local pastoral ministers to do more effective teaching and pastoral care.

The Committee went a step further and outlined goals directed both toward the Church and toward society.

Goals for the Catholic Community will

- 1) Demonstrate pastoral concern for strengthening marriage at all its stages and in its many circumstances, particularly through our listening to the experience of the Christian faithful.
- 2) Offer authoritative teaching and pastoral guidance about marriage as a sacrament, a vocation, and a human institution.
- 3) Connect Catholic belief and authentic Church teaching with the major issues present in marriage today.
- 4) Promote more extensive and effective ministries to marriage particularly in parishes.

Goals for Society will

- 1) Offer a specific Catholic witness to the meaning, value, and sanctity of marriage.
- 2) Join our voice and efforts with those of our fellow citizens who are working in various social sectors to promote, strengthen, and protect marriage.
- 3) Encourage laws, public policies, and other social strategies that would strengthen marriage in light of its contribution to the common good and its benefit to individuals, families, and communities.

These goals will not be accomplished fully no matter how many years are devoted to the effort. But, if attention and resources are given to them over a sustained period of time, progress is possible. Those who work in the Pro-Life and NFP ministries know this well.

The current chairman of the USCCB Committee on Marriage and Family Life, Bishop Joseph Kurtz (Knoxville), has used the metaphor of a stage and a spotlight to describe the present situation. Marriage has appeared on the stage of public consciousness and a light is being shined upon it. The light will not stay there forever. Mixing metaphors, we might say we have been given a window of opportunity. But lights dim or move onto other subjects and windows close!

Knowing this, the bishops organized the pastoral initiative into three phases and began their work straight away in 2005. The first phase (2005-2007) consists of research and consultative activities. The second (2007-

2008) involves the drafting, revision, and approval of the pastoral letter. During the third phase (2008 and beyond) the Committee will work with other organizations to produce parish-based resources to improve marriage ministry.

The first phase of research and consultation is oriented not only to surfacing material for a pastoral letter. As essential as this is, there are many other needs and opportunities for this kind of exploration. Thus, for example, the pastoral initiative sponsored with Creighton University a colloquium of theologians and social scientists to have a dialogue about how their respective fields can promote and sustain marriage as a community of life and love. The proceedings of this program, including all the papers written for it, have been posted on the USCCB website for the pastoral initiative (www.usccb.org/lacity/marriage/npim.shtml). Similarly, one can find other resources on the website that have an immediate value and use in the field and are also foundational material for the bishops to use in a pastoral letter. Many more such items will be produced in the year ahead. The website contains a first-year report of progress and a preview of the next year.

A very important component of the consultation phase has been a nationwide series of focus groups. To date, nearly 60 dioceses have held over 150 focus groups on marriage involving couples who are engaged, newly-married, in middle years and in later years of marriage, as well as single young adults, divorced persons and remarried couples, interchurch couples, and Spanish-speaking couples. The reports from these groups contain a wealth of information and insight. Many of the diocesan leaders who organized the groups mentioned how they were beneficial to the local ministry as well as to the national effort. Although the individual participants of the focus groups may be at different levels of spiritual maturity and faithfulness, they have provided the bishops with valuable insights because their lives are shaped by the Sacrament of Marriage. Sponsoring these focus groups shows the extent to which the bishops recognize that their pastoral letter will be stronger if they gather the cumulative wisdom of those who live and have lived the Sacrament of Marriage.

At the conclusion of their 2004 statement on marriage and same-sex unions, the U.S. bishops encouraged the voices and witness of couples to come forward:

“Married couples themselves, by witness of their faithful, life-giving love, are the best advocates for marriage. By their example, they are the first teachers of the next generation about the dignity of marriage and the need to uphold it. As leaders of their family - which the

Second Vatican Council called a 'domestic church' (*Lumen gentium*, no. 11) - couples should bring their gifts as well as their needs to the larger Church. There, with the help of other couples and their pastors and collaborators, they can strengthen their commitment and sustain their sacrament over a lifetime."³

Invitation, collaboration, proclamation, these three activities I hope will suffuse the entire National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage. We are *inviting* many individuals and groups to support its mission, adopt its goals, and undertake their own activities in support of marriage. We are *collaborating* within the Bishops Conference on activities related to the pastoral initiative and encouraging collaboration among other ministry groups. We are *proclaiming* in many ways and in many places the Catholic belief about marriage as well as the need for our Church to become more obviously pro-marriage in its communities and ministries.

Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical offers a moving meditation on the centrality of love, human and divine, in the Christian faith. Of the many kinds of love he says:

"Amid this multiplicity of meanings, however, one in particular stands out: love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison."⁴

Married love is the gift of God to humankind and to his Church. It is the gift of the spouses to each other, to their children, and to their communities and society. It needs to be promoted, preserved, and protected now and for the future. The Bishops' National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage responds to that challenge and also issues it to you.

Endnotes

1. Council on Families in America. *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation*. New York: Institute for American Values, 1995.
2. Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, et al. *The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles*. New York: Institute for American Values, 2000.
3. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers on Marriage and Same-Sex Unions*. Washington DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004.
4. Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus caritas est*. Washington DC: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006.

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“Promoting and Sustaining Marriage as a Community of Life and Love,”

A Colloquium of Social Scientists and Theologians

October 24-25, 2005

Colloquium Papers:

“Marriage as a Unitive and Procreative Partnership,”
John Grabowski, PhD

“The Lifecycle Stages of Marriage,”
Sr. Barbara Markey, PhD

“Marriage as a Covenant and Sacrament,”
Julie Hanlon Rubio, PhD

“Patterns and Predictors of Success and Failure in Marriage,”
Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, PhD

“Seeking a Soulmate: A Social Scientific View of the Relationship Between Commitment and Authentic Intimacy,”
W. Bradford Wilcox, PhD

“Marriage as a ‘School of Love,’”
Wendy M. Wright, PhD

To read these papers see
<http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/npim.shtml>

NFP and the Barriers to Change

Micheline M. Lockerd

As a NFP promoter who happens also to be a counselor I've wondered at my own poor statistics. Reluctant husbands have found themselves thanking me for involving them in treatment they came to kicking and screaming. Brooding preteens who started family therapy with a firm resolve to limit their involvement to shoulder shrugs have often warmed to the process, made touching revelations, and even been openly grateful. Similar "conversions" seem to be in the offing whenever my husband and I make our pre-Cana NFP presentations. We see nods all around the room with direct eye contact all through the presentation and direct requests for materials about upcoming classes—all very promising signs. But in fifteen

years of this outreach work not one of these pre-Cana couples has signed up for our full NFP class. It's obviously not that NFP has failed the credibility test with these couples or made them angry; it's simply irrelevant in their world. Why do I go on expecting them to change beliefs and behaviors they don't experience as a problem?

Last year an in-service at work brought me in contact with a new paradigm for understanding the dynamics at work when human beings face the prospect of change. I immediately saw the applications the Trans-theoretical Model has for addressing the problem of low adherence to the Church's teaching on the regulation of human life. I was hearing about a model for change that pointed directly to the reason for my failures and made

sense of them. Starting from a careful conceptualization of motivation for change, it offers well researched interventions for inspiring commitment to change. What excited me even more was the detailed presentation of skills needed to address both the ambivalence and the resistance that are such common barriers to change. Motivational Interviewing takes the concepts of the Transtheoretical or "Stages of Change" Model and teaches a therapeutic style that corrects for interventions that unwittingly stiffen resistance rather than lessening it.

Since that initial exposure to the Transtheoretical Model developed by Prochaska and DiClemente, I have seen applications of the model being made in setting as varied as organizational psychology and disease management. Using the assumptions of this model NFP coordinators all over the United States could approach pastors and parishioners knowing they are fully prepared to move people out of the limbo of ambivalence. And the last thing any of us want to do is to lock someone into resistance because of a false step in the face of their normal aversion to change. Our goal is to change their focus from the difficulties of change to the existence of a real problem that they are capable of addressing with success and joy.

I hope to present in a future article the actual assumptions of this model and the well researched techniques that are being used with such effectiveness in settings all over the country.

Micheline Lockerd is a clinical psychologist. She and her husband Benjamin are trained in STM by Northwest Family Services.

Reflection

The meaning of the word "holy," includes "being wholly devoted to the work of God." Are you and your spouse devoted to doing God's work in your marriages?

Living in accordance with God's design for love and life is one clear step on the path to being wholly devoted - as a couple - to God.

May the Lord of love and life draw you ever closer to each other and to Him!

NaProTECHNOLOGY® – *Healthcare Women Really Need*

Sr. Renée Mirkes, OSF, PhD

NaProTECHNOLOGY® is a dynamic, universal women's health science developed by Dr. Thomas W. Hilgers and his colleagues at the Pope Paul VI Institute. Evolving over three decades of clinical research, Natural Procreative Technology (NPT or NaPro) utilizes a standardized and prospective system of cyclic monitoring¹ whose biofeedback is critical in helping women understand their health and fertility. One abiding hallmark distinguishes NPT's 30-year history: A woman's healthcare goals—the regulation of fertility or the identification and treatment of reproductive abnormalities—are realized in cooperation with her natural gynecologic system.

Here I bring the defining concepts and accomplishments of NPT into dialogue with those of the Woman's Health Movement (WHM),² a major healthcare initiative that, since the 1960s, has continued to gain momentum in American mainstream medicine. Speaking for the former is a representative group of female patients who recount their experiences with NPT in a book entitled *Women Healed*.³ Personifying the latter are the initial architects and contemporary leaders of the WHM.

What the reader is about to discover is how a comparative "conversation" between these two contemporary healthcare phenomena elegantly sets the power of NPT in bold relief. First, NaPro embodies all that is worthy in the WHM. Second, NaPro eclipses the best of what the WHM has to offer. And, third, NaPro excludes any Women's Health Movement proposals/practices that fail to realize health in either female patients or the culture.

Women's Health Movement

The Women's Health Movement has its roots in the 1960s medical trend that reshaped the "paternalistic" standard of physician-patient relationship into a more participative model. Female patients began to insist that they partner with their medical caregivers in pursuing a comprehensive, woman-focused health plan.

In 1973, the feminist pole of the WHM came to light when Boston Women's Health Collaborative published the book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. The text may have been women-friendly in the sense of helping female patients

better understand how their bodies function. But it represents a travesty against women by trumpeting contraception, sterilization and abortion as "healthy" components of reproductive "freedom" and "choice." Predictably, and without so much as a hint of critical filtering, the WHM viewed the passage of *Roe v. Wade* as a catalyst for its reproductive health policies.

The formation of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Health was another "giant step" for the movement. The 1977 Caucus, in turn, convinced the U.S. Public Health Service Task Force on Women's Health to conduct important and much needed studies. The latter uncovered two principal concerns: first, research in women's health issues was woefully underrepresented and, second, the *prevention* of illness and disease, not just their treatment, needed to be put center stage in women's healthcare.

In 1990, the NIH established the Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) to take responsibility for establishing policy and promoting research on women's health. Around the same time, Dr. Bernadine Healy, first female director of NIH, launched the Women's Health Initiative, a fifteen-year, \$628-million study that focused on postmenopausal women and looked at the prevention and causes of heart disease, colon cancer and osteoporosis.

In 1992, the Council on Graduate Medical Education identified 42 essential training components to prepare physicians to provide comprehensive healthcare to women. A year later, Congress asked the Department of Health and Human Services to study women's health and, particularly, how it was addressed in graduate medical education.

According to its best goals and objectives, then, proponents of the WHM believe that:

- 1) Women's health is both preservation of wellness and prevention of illness that includes screening, diagnosis and management of conditions more common or more serious in, or unique to, women.
- 2) Women's health is a holistic concept that comprises biopsychosocial wellbeing.

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- 3) Women's health must be comprehensively studied so that:
 - (a) basic diseases can be analyzed within the larger picture of woman-specific responses and
 - (b) the menstrual cycle can be seen as a bodily phenomenon that affects and is affected by a woman's total health.
- 4) Women's health must be properly researched with studies that address the female body and female health needs throughout the continuum of a woman's life.
- 5) A woman's health is best pursued with sensitivity to her values and her experience in wellness and illness.
- 6) Health is optimally facilitated when women are informed participants in their own care. And
- 7) Women's health is best supported with a multi-disciplinary team approach.

According to its worst objective, proponents of the WHM believe that women are exercising "responsibility for their health" by electing practices/procedures such as abortion, contraception, sterilization, safe sex, and assisted reproductive technology (ART).

NaProTECHNOLOGY® & The Best Goals of the WHM

"Holistic and woman-friendly"

"I had never before received such prompt, effective, women-centered medical care."⁴

By offering a holistic approach to health and a healthy gyn-ecology, NPT is, without question, woman-friendly. As one patient put it: "There are many kinds of healing-physical, psychological, moral-and my experience [with NPT] resulted in all three."⁵ Its comprehensive versatility springs from the fact that it can be used by women in a variety of reproductive situations-avoiding pregnancy, achieving pregnancy, breastfeeding and infertility-and from the ingenious way that it networks procreative health with general health.⁶ Take the case of women with polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD). Patients who successfully undergo NPT treatment for PCOD often experience short-term health benefits: relief from hirsutism, skin problems, abnormal menstrual periods and infertility as well as reduction of their risk for PCOD-associated long-term health problems: heart attack, heart disease, hypertension, type II diabetes, endometrial cancer and postmenopausal breast cancer.⁷The holistic health benefits these patients experience consistently exceed their expectations.

What's more, the comprehensive approach of NPT translates into promoting health at every stage of a woman's life. In adolescent and young women, NaPro not only addresses the issues of irregular and painful periods but it also promotes fertility and sexuality appreciation. In thirty to fifty year-old women, the NPT approach focuses on the whole panoply of gynecologic and high-risk obstetric conditions. In peri-menopausal women, NPT deals with the often confusing and debilitating effects of waning fertility, without the adverse side effects of oral contraceptives. And in post-menopausal women, NaPro offers bio-identical hormone replacement as a way to promote bone and heart health.

When it comes to realizing the WHM goal of viewing the female cycle within the big picture of general health, NPT "scores a bulls-eye."⁸ Its system of tracking the ovulatory and menstrual cycles (identifying the biological markers of menstruation, cervical mucus [fertility] and infertility) is the basic tool used by all female patients to monitor their cycle. The holistic benefits of this prospective and standardized system of charting are perhaps most dramatically illustrated in women who suffer from premenstrual syndrome or post-partum depression. Working off chart-derived bio-indicators or their symptoms, the NPT approach to PMS and PPD not only brings the woman's progesterone and hCG to normal levels but also restores her sanity and her overall ability to deal with life. One patient described the results of NPT treatment as "almost miraculous"⁹ another likened the resolution of her depression and irritability symptoms to having her battery recharged¹⁰; another said that, after relief from the misery of PPD, she owes her life to her NPT physician.¹¹

"Person-centered"

"I finally felt respected and knew that someone listened to me and wanted to get to the root of my problems."¹²

The British philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe, once made a statement about love that also happens to aptly describe the person-focused approach of NPT. "When we are loved," she said, "we are the plan: we are the center and purpose of all the decisions made by those who love us." Within NPT healthcare, every woman is treated as a person to be loved for herself, never used or objectivized, never seen as a number that is crammed into a one-size-fits-all treatment plan. As one woman described her NPT physician: "I finally found a doctor that looked at me as an individual"... a doctor who took "into account the clues that my body seemed to be providing, and put the pieces together [in] an effort to facilitate health, not just pregnancy."¹³

Another patient's story gives moving testimony to that same person-centered, life-giving care emblematic of the NPT approach to health. She had suffered her entire life with fatigue, inability to concentrate, unexplained weight gain, and poor circulation. Even worse, no physician had ever been able to diagnose, much less alleviate, her condition. Through a full series hormone profile timed cooperatively with her cycle, Dr. Hilgers was able to discover that the patient was suffering from a hormone deficiency. Imagine the woman's relief when, first, she discovered that her debilitating symptoms were real (as opposed to "in her head" as her previous doctors had suggested) and, second, when she finally found herself on the road to recovery. Her response to NPT treatment? "Thank God Dr. Hilgers took such an educated and loving approach."¹⁴

"Patient-specific and freedom-enhancing"

Before NPT treatment, "I felt disconnected from my body-feeling nothing but misery; flat, dark, tired. Never in my wildest dreams . . . did I think my depression was biological in origin. I was placed on four hCG injections every month (Peak + 3, 5, 7, and 9) which . . . helped my ovaries produce appropriate levels of estrogen and progesterone. My depression disappeared immediately and, I am happy to report, has not returned."¹⁵

One of the critical goals of the WHM is to make the female body the focus of the woman's patient education and of her diagnostic, treatment or prevention plan. By teaching a woman to track her cycles, NPT not only makes the individual patient knowledgeable about female physiology but it also teaches her about her own physiology, how her body is functioning on any given day during any given cycle. This is a patient-specific system of biofeedback at its finest, as this next woman's experience with NPT illustrates. "I knew more about my body," she writes, "than I would have (had I received my gynecological care) anywhere else. I learned how all of the systems in my body are related and why treating my health holistically has the most benefit for my body."¹⁶

Sounding that very same theme, other patients thank NPT for the freedom and sense of wellbeing that comes from being "completely in tune with [their] body"¹⁷ and "in control of [their] health."¹⁸

"Stewardship-focused empowerment"

"My message to all women is to be informed and to be empowered. NPT will continue to provide answers for [all the] reproductive issues that you may deal with in your lifetime. The charting is an excellent medical record and can be a valuable tool in the evaluation and treatment of a myriad of

*female disorders."*¹⁹

Not uncommonly, women struggling with infertility will come to the Pope Paul VI Institute after being treated by physicians who could never tell them why they were not able to get pregnant. Let me be clear. I am not claiming that NPT resolves every case of infertility. In fact, it may actually take longer to get pregnant with NPT than it does with IVF or ICSI. But, over the long run Dr. Hilgers has found that NPT is up to three times more effective than IVF in assisting infertile couples to achieve a pregnancy.²⁰

But even when infertility patients fail to conceive their own biological child-and this is the point I really want to make-they are eternally grateful to their NPT caregivers for leaving no stone unturned in identifying and treating the conditions causing their infertility. After years of misdiagnosis, NPT's thorough diagnostics finally offer these patients some treatment direction, some answers-and solutions-to their problems. "This was the first time in over 6 years," one woman wrote, "that a doctor"-instead of pressuring me to attempt a pregnancy with "all the fancy infertility procedures"-could actually tell my husband and me what was wrong."²¹

And, of course, knowing what's wrong is the first step to taking intelligent responsibility for one's health, for exercising proper stewardship over one's body. Indeed, stewardship-focused empowerment is just one more forte of NPT healthcare.

"Prevention-oriented"

*"I know that the therapy I have received from Dr. Hilgers at the Pope Paul VI Institute has saved my life."*²²

Educating women about the importance of annual mammograms, pap tests, and a healthy lifestyle with exercise and proper nutrition has steadily advanced the WHM goal of prevention-focused healthcare. NPT certainly promotes these female screening measures, but its prevention goals are of a much wider scope. Consider the following.

First, with progesterone treatments timed according to the woman's cycle, NPT has prevented severe depression, self-inflicted injuries, and even suicide in women suffering from post-partum depression. Second, with progesterone and hCG supplementation, NaPro has averted serious erosion of marital and family relationships by providing relief for women struggling with the debilitating symptoms of PMS. Third, with the use of progesterone and hCG, NPT has an impressive success rate in preventing repeat miscarriage in women who have lost three or more previous pregnancies. Fourth, its system of charting prevents a variety of troublesome

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health conditions from becoming major problems. Fifth, the use of naturally compounded progesterone administered cooperatively with the menstrual cycle prevents recurrence of ovarian cysts and their associated abdominal pain. Sixth, with progesterone administered cooperatively with the woman's cycle, NPT obviates the need for the surgical management of ovarian cysts.²³ Seventh, with bio-identical hormone replacement, NPT helps to prevent osteoporosis and heart disease in post-menopausal women. And, finally, preliminary data suggest that, because of the thoroughness of its assessment and management protocols, NPT could possibly prevent or at least detect some forms of female cancers in their early stages.

"Multidisciplinary and research-based"

*"We were supported, we were educated, we were in control of our family planning."*²⁴

The multidisciplinary approach that is unique to the women's health science of NPT, especially as it is presented at the Pope Paul VI Institute, includes a team of specially trained caregivers²⁵-OB/Gyns, a physician assistant, NPT nurses, FertilityCareTM practitioners, a family and marriage psychologist, and an ethicist. As a result, a woman who accesses NPT is diagnosed and treated not just medically but also from spiritual, moral and psychological perspectives. Each specialist contributes his or her own unique services to the broader schematic of realizing healthcare that works cooperatively with the woman's natural procreative system.

New Novena

Feast of the Annunciation

For the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25), watch for the new novena to Our Blessed Mother to be published in the 2006 Respect Life Program. The 2006 program will be posted on the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities website by Summer 2006. See: <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/index.htm>.

DDP/ NFP orders can be placed at:
1-866-582-0943; Order fax: 301-779-8596
or e-mail: customerservice@ifcweb.com

Furthermore, women and couples are so confident about NPT healthcare because they know that the exceptional reliability of its diagnostic and treatment protocols has repeatedly been documented in medical journals and, most recently, in a definitive textbook, *The Medical & Surgical Practice of NaPro-TECHNOLOGY®*. The latter summarizes the results of a 30-year clinical investigation into the complexities of the menstrual cycle and the way the accumulated data has been applied successfully to women's obstetric, gynecological and general health issues.

NaProTECHNOLOGY® Eclipses the Best Objectives of the WHM

"Marriage-friendly"

*"Just learning and applying the [FertilityCareTM] system in our lives solves so many issues, physical or mental, spiritual or marital. It makes some problems seem smaller and good marriages even better."*²⁶

The family-planning component of NPT, the Creighton Model FertilityCareTM System, boasts of its ability to promote marital health (it is no accident, either, that the WHM cannot boast of such an accomplishment). Enabling the couple to cooperate with, rather than destroy or suppress, the gift of their fertility, NPT is helping couples better understand what it means to collaborate responsibly with the "fruitful love of God."²⁷

One patient summed it up beautifully: "Before NPT and FertilityCareTM, I was responsible for all the procreative decisions, but now after 15 years of marriage, [my husband and I] were learning a whole new way of dealing with each other and our sexuality. Instead of controlling our fertility, we learned to let God into the picture."²⁸ Another woman marveled how planning a family responsibly-as NPT allows-worked its special graces in her life, teaching both her and her husband the real meaning of marriage and marital love.²⁹

Most importantly, though, the FertilityCareTM System demands that both spouses discuss their particular goals for building a family and regulating their fertility, not just once, but whenever their procreative plans need to be adjusted according to the changing situations of their marriage. Building interpersonal communication on the issue of family planning-and all the positive spin-off from this important skill-is one of the system's fringe benefits most frequently cited (and appreciated) by user-couples. "We were a happy couple," one woman wrote, "we communicated about procreative issues and our fertility and, as we have always said, if you can talk about mucus, you can talk about anything."³⁰

“Family-friendly”

*After getting hCG injections for PMS-related depression, “my husband said it was as if he saw a mask lift from my face. I could laugh again. The children were my joy. I loved life and living.”*³¹

With NPT’s positive impact on marriage, it is easy to see how its healing balm can effect the life of the entire family. As quoted above, many women who are treated through NPT attest to this effect. NPT builds healthy marriages and strong families, one family at a time.

“Culture-friendly”

My contention is that the healthy effects of NPT spill over not only into the personal life of the female patient, but also into her family and from there into society itself. At the most fundamental level, the science of NPT builds up the health of our culture by being open to, and inclusive of, religion and ethics.

The research behind NPT is genuine medical science; science at the service of human beings; science that neither “deifies itself nor defies faith.” As I have written elsewhere, “NPT is the flagship of natural procreative initiatives that are . . . producing the ‘good fruit’ of a truly human culture where knowledge, belief and behavior will be ordered to the good of present and future generations of the family of mankind.”³²

Undergirding and permeating much of the reproductive medicine endorsed by the WHM, on the other hand, is scientism: a scientific philosophy taking a materialist view of the human person and human behavior. Scientism is freighted with the reductionist errors of materialism, pragmatism, and individualism. It backs the reproductive medicine endorsed by the WHM and therefore skews the meaning of human life and the pursuit of health. The science of NPT avoids all of these errors and, in the process, distinguishes itself as a medical technology in dialogue with, not divorced from ethics and faith.³³

NaProTECHNOLOGY® Excludes all that is Unhealthy in the WHM

NPT excludes the WHM-endorsed practices of contraception, sterilization, IVF, abortion, and safe sex. Many women who access the family planning component of NPT are unhappy with, or morally opposed to, contraception and sterilization as methods of family planning. They are skeptical about, and appalled by, the reality that contraceptive means of regulating birth suppress fertility and pregnancy, treating them as burdens or diseases. These women see that fertility is a gift, the capacity to co-create a new human life with God. And because they are determined to cooperate with their

fertility in an intelligent way, they are eternally thankful that the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System is nationally and internationally available and allows them to do just that.

Oftentimes, infertile couples who investigate ways of conceiving their own biological child discover NPT after being disillusioned with the ART community. As one woman reports, “ART ignores the underlying fertility problems-or makes an anemic attempt to overcome the difficulties.”³³ It should come as no surprise, then, why infertile couples who find NPT after a kind of reproductive healthcare odyssey are grateful beyond words. Many are overjoyed (vindicated even) when, at a rate that exceeds that of high-tech methods, they achieve the pregnancy that the ART folks told them they would never do without their assistance!

Of course, induced abortion is simply not an option under NPT obstetric care. The objective is to do everything possible to facilitate the health and life for both mother and baby which, in the case of high-risk OB situations, means keeping the baby in the womb as long as possible.

Selective termination in the wake of a high-order pregnancy is another unhealthy solution endorsed by the WHM but excluded by NPT. First, it is a NaPro objective to keep multiple pregnancy rates to an absolute minimum. Whenever an NPT physician uses FSH drugs to stimulate ovulation, he/she follows the woman closely with ultrasound during her pre-ovulatory phase. If the sonogram shows multiple mature ovarian follicles, the doctor discourages the couple from having intercourse that cycle. In the second place, even should a multiple pregnancy occur, deliberately aborting the baby would be unthinkable for an NPT obstetrician who is dedicated to protecting and caring for both mother and baby.

Finally, when adolescents and single women access NPT for the treatment of irregular or painful periods, they learn to chart their cycles, to monitor their gynecology and, ultimately, to appreciate their fertility. Very quickly, these young women grasp the connection between a healthy self-respect and a healthy self-mastery in respect to sexual behavior. NPT is an amazing healthcare lodestar directing these young women along the path of genuine freedom, honest self-expression, and a chaste love.

Conclusion

NPT is what women should really want from healthcare because it provides what women really need: the opportunity to pursue the basic good of health encompassing physical, spiritual/moral and social wellbeing. NaProTECHNOLOGY® offers women what they really

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need and, therefore, deserve: healthcare that is woman, family, and culture friendly.

Endnotes

1. NPT uses the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System to enable the woman to monitor the day-to-day biomarkers that are familiar to women (menstrual flow, the mucus flow and dry days) as the phases of her monthly menstrual and ovulatory cycle. These biomarkers are recorded in a standardized and objective method called NaProTRACKING.
2. A good internet source for an explanation of the Women's Health Movement, its history, goals and objectives, is found at www.amsa.org/programs/gpit/women.cfm
3. Jean Packard, (ed.) *In Their Own Words: Women Healed* (Omaha: Pope Paul VI Institute Press, 2004). The stories of fifty women who were treated at the Pope Paul VI Institute for: family planning counsel, general health questions, treatment of repeat miscarriages, infertility, pre-term birth, PCOD, ovarian cysts, endometriosis, amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea, premenstrual syndrome, post-partum depression, hormonal and ovulatory dysfunction. These women candidly recount their frustration and dissatisfaction over the healthcare they received prior to their treatment at the Pope Paul VI Institute.
4. *Women Healed*, p. 225.
5. *Ibid.*, 107.
6. This patient's testimony confirms how NPT's holistic approach "provides a full evaluation of the entire reproductive system," and always with an eye toward general health: "I have a very complicated gynecological history and ... for over five years was incorrectly diagnosed as having pelvic inflammatory disease, spasmodic bowel, chronic back pain,

Girardeau, kidney stones and thyroid problems. I was given the birth control pill, but it caused numbness in my legs and weight gain. Then I came to the Institute. I learned to chart, began a hormone profile, and Dr. Hilgers did a laparoscopy ... and lasered the endometriosis. [He then] correctly diagnosed me with hypothyroidism and polycystic ovaries and partially occluded fallopian tubes. Following surgery and hormonal treatment, I had never felt better or more normal in my life. Practically all my symptoms went away; my periods came and went with no cramping or bloating." *Women Healed*, p. 109.

7. Thomas W. Hilgers, *The Medical & Surgical Practice of NaProTechnology* (Omaha, NE: Pope Paul VI Institute Press, 2004), p. 580.
8. *Women Healed*, p. 136.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 234
13. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
20. Hilgers, *Medical & Surgical Practice*, p. 691.
21. *Women Healed*, p. 73.
22. *Ibid.* p. 248.
23. Hilgers, *Medical & Surgical*, pp. 385-6.
24. *Women Healed*, p. 24.
25. The NaProEducation training programs include a six-month medical consultant program assisting physicians to incorporate the science of NPT into their medical practice; a thirteen-month program educating practitioners, those who will teach couples how to chart their cycles; a thirteen-month program assisting nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurse midwives and pharmacists to incorporate the science of NPT into their practice, and a thirteen month advanced program to train experienced FertilityCare™ practitioners to be supervisors and educators.
26. *Women Healed*, p. 31.
27. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum vitae (Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day)*, II, 8.
28. *Women Healed*, p. 197.
29. *Ibid.*, p.16.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 29
31. *Ibid.*, p.188.
32. Renee Mirkes, OSF, Chapter Four, p. 33, in Hilgers, *Medical & Surgical Practice*.
33. *Women Healed*, p. 59.

Mark your Calendar

Up coming Teen STAR workshops:

June 12-16, Bethesda, MD
Oct. 2-5, Minneapolis, MN

Contact: Hanna Klaus, MD, Natural Family Planning Center of Washington, DC and Teen STAR Program; 8514 Bradmoor Dr., Bethesda, MD 20817-3810; Tel. 301-897-9323, 301-530-9383; E-mail, hannaklaus@earthlink.net or hklaus@verizon.net; Website, <http://www.teenstarprogram.org>.

Sr. Renée Mirkes, OSF, PhD is director of the Center for NaProEthics at the Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction, Omaha, NE. For further information about the ethics center see <http://www.popepaulvi.com/NaProEthics1.htm>.

Signs of Hope

There is a lovely phrase in the Holy Father's first encyclical which is especially applicable to NFP ministry. He says: "Hope is practiced through the virtue of patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure." (CDE #39)

Those who labor in NFP ministry are among the most hopeful of people. They are like David facing the giant Goliath. They know that most people accept contraception as a basic fact of life and have little understanding of how bad it is for their marriages and society in general. They also know that most Catholics do not have a profound understanding of Catholic teachings on human sexuality, conjugal love and responsible parenthood. Still, they labor on and persevere against all odds.

NFPers faithfully teach and witness to the truth of God's plan for life and love in "good times and in bad." But even this hearty group can do with some "signs of hope" to refresh them on their journey. The following is just that.

The first reflection is by the president of Providence College (RI), Rev. Brian Shanley, O.P. It is his response to students' request to produce the play *The Vagina Monologues*. As many of our readers know, this play has become a popular theatrical event on school campuses (high school as well as college). The play is typically produced in conjunction with the national awareness week dedicated to educate about violence directed toward women. This trend is particularly dangerous because of the play's pornographic messages about women's sexuality. Sadly, many Catholic colleges and universities have fallen into producing this play in the name of "artistic" or "academic" freedom. Fr. Shanley's reflection is a sign of hope. He beautifully articulates clear policy on how such freedoms can co-exist with Catholic beliefs on a Catholic campus. In clear and precise language Fr. Shanley summarizes Church teachings on human sexuality. His message is worth sharing with anyone who may be confused about the issue of human sexuality and how artistic and academic freedom should co-exist with Catholic identity and mission in education.

The second piece is to introduce our readers to Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D., an economist, professor, author, wife and mother, who has written on the family and promiscuous sexual activity. She is a sign of hope because she has developed compelling secular language to speak about Church teachings on human sexuality, chastity, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, marriage and family life. Dr. Morse brings to the issues experience (both negative and positive), intelligence, faith and wisdom. Dr. Morse has appeared on numerous national talk radio shows and is a regular columnist for the *National Catholic Register*. She lectured in Rome at the April 1997 Acton Institute conference celebrating the fifth anniversary of the papal encyclical *Centesimus annus*. Her public policy articles have appeared in *Policy Review*, the *American Enterprise*, *Fortune*, *Reason*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Vital Speeches*, and *Religion and Liberty*. Through her publications, Dr. Morse is bringing God's truth on life and love to the general public.

Message Regarding "The Vagina Monologues"

Brian Shanley, O.P.

Dear Members of the Providence College Community:

Having spent my first six months trying to learn about the campus culture, I would like to inaugurate a series of letters reflecting on some of the most debated questions that I have heard discussed since I began my ministry as president. I begin with the question of what is the most appropriate way for the Providence College community to work together to prevent violence against women. Some people feel passionately that the college ought to sponsor a V-Day production of *The Vagina Monologues*, and I have often been queried about my position on this matter. To prepare a response, I have carefully read and studied the play. I have met with some of the student leaders of Women's

Will, the main sponsoring group, to listen to their perspective and share some of my concerns. I have pondered their position, discussed the matter with many people, educated myself about what other Catholic schools have done, and prayed to God for guidance. I have come to the conclusion that a V-Day presentation of *The Vagina Monologues* is not appropriate for a school with our mission. Let me explain why.

The back cover of my paperback edition of *The Vagina Monologues* asserts 1) that its principal aim is to be "a celebration of female sexuality in all its complexity and mystery" and 2) that it has been "hailed as a bible for a new generation of women." I would argue that both of

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these claims are false. First, far from celebrating the complexity and mystery of female sexuality, *The Vagina Monologues* simplifies and demystifies it by reducing it to the vagina. In contrast, Roman Catholic teaching sees female sexuality as ordered toward a loving giving of self to another in a union of body, mind, and soul that is ordered to the procreation of new life. The deeper complexity and mystery lies in the capacity of human sexuality, both male and female, to sacramentalize the love of God in marriage. Any depiction of female sexuality that neglects its unitive and procreative dimensions diminishes its complexity, its mystery, and its dignity. Moreover, to explore fully the dignity of woman requires not only a consideration of female sexuality, but also of the capacity of women for intellectual, artistic, moral, and spiritual activity; none of these dimensions are featured in *The Vagina Monologues*.

Second, the description of the play as a “new bible” is an indication that its depiction of female sexuality is meant to displace the traditional Biblical view that inspires the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The two positions are deeply and diametrically opposed. Nowhere is this clearer than in a monologue wherein the alcohol-fueled seduction of a sixteen-year-old girl by a twenty-four-year-old woman is described as resulting in “salvation” and “a kind of heaven.” What is thus characterized in traditional religious language is instead abusive, demeaning, exploitative, and morally wrong according to the true Bible. Precisely because its depiction of female sexuality is so deeply at odds with the true meaning and morality that the Catholic Church’s teaching celebrates, *The Vagina Monologues* is not an appropriate play to be performed on our campus. Therefore the college will prohibit the production of *The Vagina Monologues*.

Doubtless some will reply that this is a violation of artistic freedom. But artistic freedom on a Catholic campus cannot mean the complete license to perform or display any work of art regardless of its intellectual or moral content. Any institution which sanctioned works of art that undermined its deepest values would be inauthentic, irresponsible, and ultimately self-destructive. At Providence College artistic freedom is governed by the values embodied in our mission statement. A Catholic college cannot sanction the performance of works of art that are inimical to the teaching of the Church in an area as important as female sexuality and the dignity of women.

This policy will inevitably raise questions regarding academic freedom. The true meaning of academic freedom is often misunderstood; it is not the license to hold any view that one chooses. Academic freedom is instead always governed by truth. It is the freedom to pursue the truth in a discipline in accord with the accepted canons of

inquiry without any impediment by extraneous considerations. Prohibiting a theatrical production of *The Vagina Monologues* does not prohibit free inquiry about the play. All members of the campus are free to read, study, and discuss the play in various settings, especially the classroom. It is perfectly appropriate that we study texts that have diverse views in order both to broaden our understanding of others and to bring our own views into sharper focus. I fully expect that one result of this communication will be some controversy. As a long-time student of St. Thomas Aquinas, I think disputes are an important part of education, so long as they are conducted with charity. While arguments about intellectual positions help us to learn from each other, attacks on persons do not.

Instead of producing *The Vagina Monologues*, the best way for Providence College to work together to combat violence against women is to strengthen its commitment to support Project S.A.V.E. (Sexual Assault and Violence Education). Project S.A.V.E is a collaborative effort of many student groups to educate the campus about how to prevent violence against women and help survivors heal. The week-long effort will begin with a Mass on April 23rd to pray for victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence. It will continue with educational presentations, displays, and performances, and culminate with the annual *Take Back The Night* vigil and walk. The college’s administration will work directly with student leaders to make this week the centerpiece of our efforts to educate everyone about violence against women. I shall personally take part in events that week, and I encourage everyone in the community to play a role in making the week a success.

It is my hope and prayer that we can move beyond disagreement on the merits of a particular text and work together on a cause that unites us all. Let us strive for a deeper appreciation of God’s gift of human sexuality in all its complexity and mystery. Let us endeavor to educate the community about the peculiar threat to human dignity that is violence against women. Let us work together for the healing of all who have survived such violence. If our efforts are grounded in truth and animated by love, then by the grace of God at work within us, our efforts will bear much fruit.

Rev. Brian J. Shanley, O.P., Ph.D.

Rev. Brian J. Shanley, O.P., Ph.D., is a member of the Dominican Order of Preachers. He was installed as president of Providence College in September 2005 after teaching philosophy for over ten years at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC.

Signs of Hope *(Continued)*

Jennifer Roback Morse, an Economist with Word Sense

Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D., taught economics for five years at Yale University and then ten years at George Mason University. In 1991 she gave birth to a baby girl and she and her husband adopted a two-year-old Romanian boy. She left full-time university teaching in 1996 to move to California and concentrate on her growing family. From 1997-2005 she became a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. She and her husband are also foster parents in San Diego County. This brief biography provides the reader with only a skeleton of information about Dr. Morse. The bigger story is that, a Catholic by birth, Jennifer Roback Morse drifted away from the Church for a number of years, experimented with many of society's messages about sex, was wounded from these experiences and, as she admits, somehow by God's grace returned to the faith with a strong understanding about what is wrong with society's messages. The insights that Morse brings to the public square are a real sign of hope for those of us who care about helping people reject the false messages of society regarding sex and marriage.

Dr. Morse writes about human sexuality, cohabitation, marriage and the family. In her book, *Love and Economics: Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn't Work* (Spence Press, 2001), Morse shows why the family is the necessary building block for a free society and why so many modern attempted substitutes for the family do not work. The book also shows why the choice for self-giving love is a reasonable decision, and superior to alternatives proposed by liberal society. Her latest book, *Smart Sex, Finding Life-Long Love in a Hook-Up World*, is must reading for anyone who wants to help people make wise choices about love and marriage. In compelling secular language, Morse unpacks the dangerous myths about society's notions regarding sex, cohabitation and divorce. She uses snappy, direct language to discuss why reproductive freedom is an illusion; why recreational sex is not fun and why what she calls, "consumer sex" is anti-social.

Dr. Morse is available for consultation and has developed printed resources as well as workshops, seminars and retreats. The material in her on-site programs can be adapted for groups of marriage and family therapists, marriage ministers, NFP teachers, clergy, marriage law attorneys, and even financial planners, as well as just plain interested individuals.

Two samples of workshop outlines are:

The Costs of Divorce, What to know before you Un-do your "I-do"

Couples seeking divorce are well aware of the

attorney's fees. But are they really aware of the long-term financial impact of divorce?

This workshop covers:

- the immediate financial costs of divorce
- the impact of divorce on lifetime accumulation of wealth
- financial consequences for the next generation
- mental and physical health costs
- the costs of divorce on the well-being of children
- issues surrounding remarriage

Costs of Cohabitation, Unseen, Unanticipated Implications

(The material in this workshop can be adapted for groups of couples who cohabited before marriage, as well as currently cohabiting women or couples.)

The workshop covers:

- The big picture: consumer sex and natural sex
- How trends in divorce, cohabitation and marriage affect your clients or congregation
- The life-long impact of unmarried parenthood, including economic, social, educational, and emotional factors
- Why living together is preparation for divorce, not marriage
- "His" and "hers" views of the cohabiting experience, and why they are difficult to reconcile
- The unique problems cohabiting couples have after marriage
- Strategies for moving couples from cohabiting to marriage
- Why marriage isn't "just a piece of paper"
- Why Johnny can't commit: the difference in how men and women view the cohabiting experience.
- The big picture: building a culture of life and love, one marriage at a time.

Dr. Morse's scholarly articles have appeared in the *Journal of Political Economy*, *Economic Inquiry*, the *Journal of Economic History*, *Publius: the Journal of Federalism*, the *University of Chicago Law Review*, the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, *Social Philosophy and Policy*, the *Independent Review*, and the *Notre Dame Journal of Law Ethics and Public Policy*. Visit her web site at: <http://www.jennifer-roback-morse.com>

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Other signs of hope

- Another articulate and compelling voice for promoting the Church's teachings on human sexuality, conjugal love and responsible parenthood is Julie Loesch Wiley. See her article, "The Meaning of Sex: Fertility and the Recovery of Human Sexuality" at <http://www.godspy.com/life/The-Meaning-of-Sex-Fertility-Contraception-and-the-Reshaping-of-Sexuality-By-Julie-Loesch-Wiley.cfm>
- Olympic cross country skier, Rebecca Dussault is a wife, mother and devout Catholic. Last winter she appeared on EWTN's "Life on the Rock," where she talked about the importance of motherhood and family life, she also gave a strong plug for NFP. From *Catholic News Service* article (March 6, 2006): "although she [Dussault] did not win any medals at the Turin Olympics, she grabbed the attention of world media because [as Dussault put it] 'people were so curious' about her story: how she had the name of her favorite saint-in-the-making, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, on her skis and how she trained and competed all over the United States and Europe with her husband and son by her side." Visit her web site: <http://www.dussaultskis.com> and watch for a witness article in a subsequent issue of the *NFP Forum*.
- Richard Fehring, DNSc, RN, director of the Marquette University College of Nursing's Institute for NFP was interviewed by *Health* magazine (April 2006) on "natural" alternatives for couples with possible infertility problems. This one page column was very positive and treated both Dr. Fehring and the information he provided with respect.
- Bishop Thomas J. Olmstead, Diocese of Phoenix, committed his diocese toward mandating a full class of NFP instruction for the engaged. Diocesan staff and the Phoenix NFP Center are currently designing a viable strategy to prepare and certify enough NFP teachers to meet the future challenge.
- At the March 24, 2006 Consistory, Archbishop Carlo Caffarra of Bologna was made a cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI. For more than thirty years, Cardinal Caffarra has been teaching and promoting the Church's moral teaching. In 1981 he became the first president of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family in Rome. In 1988 he opened the JP II Institute in Washington, DC. Cardinal Caffarra is known for clearly articulating Catholic teaching on marriage, contraception, abortion and homosexuality. May the Lord continue to bless him.

SAVE THE DATES- August 11 & 12, 2006

Catholic University of America, Washington, DC

Human Fertility -

Where Faith and Science Meet

... an interdisciplinary conference

Examine from a variety of disciplines the subject of Natural Family Planning (NFP) and Catholic teachings which support its use in marriage.

Day One: Theological, philosophical and historical aspects of family planning and its related topics. Speakers from Catholic University, Georgetown University and State University of New York

Day Two: Current scientific research on Natural Family Planning

Speakers from the University of Heidelberg, the Pontifical University of Chile and others

Co-sponsors: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning; The Catholic University of America, School of Philosophy, School of Theology & Religious Studies; Marquette University, College of Nursing, Institute for Natural Family Planning; Co-sponsor of scientific sessions, Georgetown University, Institute for Reproductive Health

Who should attend?

- Professors of philosophy, theology and human reproduction
- Medical doctors (especially teaching faculty)
- Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants
- Members of hospital education departments and boards of ethics
- Faculty, NFP providers
- Diocesan NFP coordinators and teachers
- Catholic Family Life Directors

Watch for further information regarding agenda, registration, hotels in the area.

Inquiries: nfp@usccb.org

Can We Work with Non-Catholic Fertility Awareness Providers? *Misty Mealey*

As the demand for more “natural” family planning options increases, so do our chances of encountering non-Catholics who promote fertility awareness methods. Can we conscientiously work with these people? Or are the potential benefits just not worth the risks?

The Catholic Church may be the world’s biggest promoter of NFP—but she’s not the only one. In fact, secular proponents of “natural birth control” are becoming more common, particularly in urban areas.

In non-Catholic circles, NFP is usually referred to as a fertility awareness method (FAM). Unlike Catholic NFP instructors, who only promote a chaste use of the method and who do not refer out for immoral services such as sterilization or abortion, FAM providers are more diverse in their teaching and services. Some (but not all) see abstinence during the fertile time as unnecessary for those wishing to avoid pregnancy, and may encourage non-chaste genital contact or the use of barriers. They may also refer out for abortion, sterilization, and even contraception if the client does not wish to continue using FAM.

There is also a wide range of perspectives on the role of FAM within the FAM community. Some FAM providers promote fertility awareness strictly as contraception, while others promote it more holistically, as a family planning tool that can also help clients achieve personal and marital growth.

Given the common interest in promoting “natural” family planning, is it possible or even desirable for Catholic NFP providers to collaborate with

those who promote a secular version of “natural birth control”?

It depends on who you ask.

Janet Kistler is the diocesan NFP coordinator and director of marriage preparation for the Archdiocese of Washington. She has taught NFP for more than 30 years, and believes collaboration cannot work because the groups’ underlying philosophies are irreconcilably opposed. “The approach of FAM is strictly utilitarian,” Kistler says. “NFP is about understanding the gift of self, of accepting that there is a wide difference between abstaining and not abstaining. It’s accepting that sex is to serve marriage, not the marriage serving sex.”

John Kippley agrees, adding that any collaboration would add to existing confusion about NFP and marital chastity. “Eventually a condom manufacturer will take advantage of the fact that some in the NFP movement consider FAM to be a type of NFP instead of an immoral counterfeit,” says Kippley, co-founder of Natural Family Planning International and the Couple to Couple League. He argues that collaboration increases the possibility of scandal. Working together would give the public the impression that the Catholic Church does not see a moral difference between chaste NFP use and FAM, which does not necessarily discourage contraceptive behaviors.

Not all NFP promoters agree, however. Some think there is a way to at least support each other. Damon Owens, the NFP coordinator for the Archdiocese of Newark, is one such person. Damon is the founder of the New Jersey Natural Family Planning Association (www.njnfp.org) which

promotes NFP in secular venues. He believes God called him out of a successful engineering career to promote NFP. In addition to his work in the Archdiocese of Newark, he works for the St. Augustine Foundation in Yonkers, NY, promoting NFP to physicians. Despite the differences in philosophy between FAM and NFP instructors, Owens sees some level of collaboration as possible. “I see NFP as a tool to draw people into the struggle and work of discovering the divine origin and destiny of their personhood,” he says. “My prayer, challenge, and approach with each couple is to equip them with what they need at that moment in their life—nothing more, nothing less. Regardless of their spiritual maturity, they deserve to learn a thorough and reliable tool to monitor their fertility.”

Like Owens, Ilene Richman would like to see more collaboration between NFP and FAM providers. Richman is a FAM instructor and director of the Fertility Awareness Network (FAN) in New York, founded in the 1990s by some of the first FAM teachers. “I believe NFP and FAM providers can collaborate based on the values we do share: a desire for women to be healthy, living in accordance with nature, increased sexual pleasure and fulfillment, and a desire to help others,” she says. “Not everyone is interested in mixing healthcare and religion. Wouldn’t it still be better for more women to practice FAM instead of using the Pill?”

Richman reiterates that many secular providers see FAM as more than just reliable contraception. “We think of fertility awareness as information

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every woman and girl should have, regardless of what she chooses to do with that knowledge," Richman says. Many FAM providers share the same reverence for female fertility as NFP promoters do, according to Richman.

Some NFP instructors are theoretically willing to collaborate, but see the decision to work with a particular FAM provider as depending on a whole host of factors. Does the person actively promote unchaste behavior or barrier usage as part of instruction? Does she refer out for immoral services? Does she recognize the dignity of female fertility or does she promote other methods that actively suppress it? A collaboration with a FAM provider who does not actively promote morally-objectionable practices would be particularly helpful when trying to reach out to the medical community, they say. Being able to approach physicians with a non-Catholic who also has chosen to forgo traditional contraception would lend credence to natural methods and potentially open more doors.

It's clear that most Catholic NFP providers are not inclined to collaborate with FAM instructors. For the time being, the issue is still a theoretical one for dioceses. A survey of our NFP teachers in the Richmond Diocese indicated there are no FAM providers with whom to work. Nonetheless, it's important to begin thinking about these issues in preparation for the day when our posters are not the only ones promoting "natural" family planning methods around town.

Misty Mealey is the NFP coordinator for the Diocese of Richmond. This article first appeared in the Spring '06 issue of the NFP Messenger. It is reprinted here with permission.

We'd like to hear your opinion on this topic. Send letters to the editor - nfp@uscgb.org.

NFP Grant Approved

Natural Family Planning International, Inc., founded by John and Sheila Kippley, has approved a grant of \$16,200 to CCL of Slovakia for 2006. According to John Kippley, president of the organization, "the small size of the grant in no way reflects the importance of the work being funded. Though small, it still represents a challenge to raise that amount."

This work was previously part of the international outreach of the Couple to Couple League headquartered in Cincinnati. CCL's Board of Directors voted in 2004 to withdraw support from all international activity where the language of instruction was not English or Spanish. John and Sheila Kippley, founders of CCL, decided to create NFP International to help the former CCL operations in Eastern Europe. The Kipleys work as volunteers for the new organization.

The current focus of this new organization is to help the Church in Slovakia, a country that is 73% Catholic with 18 bishops and 2,628 priests (diocesan and religious). "We have one highly dedicated staffer, Jozef Predac, a father of five, whose heart and soul is in the promotion of chastity through proper NFP instruction," says Kippley. "Because of the Slovak economy, our grant pays his salary for a year. Predac has six volunteer teaching couples who share his dedication, and he has more in training. It is very difficult to find good people who are willing to work full-time in an apostolate whose future is uncertain. We think the contribution this apostolate can make to the Church and culture of Slovakia is worth every effort we can make to assist it."

According to David Prentis, a former minister of the Church of Scotland and now a Catholic who heads up the former CCL operation in the Czech Republic, the fear of a return of the communism still hangs over the citizenry of former Soviet bloc countries. The years of communism have had a very practical effect on local apostolic efforts: Eastern Europeans are generally still afraid to put their names on a course sign-up or on any kind of list. That fear plus a sluggish economy in Slovakia makes local fund raising efforts almost impossible.

The Kipleys believe that the Church demographics provide a great opportunity: "Our man in Slovakia will try to persuade some bishops to require engaged couples to attend a full course on NFP, as a few American dioceses currently do. When even two or three Slovak dioceses adopt such a policy, it will have a profound beneficial effect. We think it is tremendously important to work towards that goal, because marital unchastity is the primary cause of leakage from the Church. A more widespread practice of marital chastity is vital to keep Slovakia Catholic. We hope that some North American Catholics will want to join us in supporting this effort."

To support this work, send donations to NFP International, PO Box 11216, Cincinnati OH, 45211. Application has been made for tax-deductible status.

Contact: NFP International, 1-513-661-7396; visit www.NFPandmore.org

News Briefs

Announcements

The winning NFP slogan for National NFP Awareness Week was created by Tom and Patty Strunck of Ellicott City, MD, Archdiocese of Baltimore. This NFP couple came up with:

“Love, naturally . . . NFP”

This slogan will be the featured message on the 2006 NFP poster with the design by Lisa Toscani.

A hearty “thank you” to all who sent in their slogans!

Posters will be available for purchase by May 1, 2006. *Orders: 1-866-582-0943; customerservice@ifcweb.com.*

Diocesan NFP Coordinator Wanted!

The Archdiocese of New York is looking for a diocesan NFP coordinator. Congratulations to former coordinator, Julie Szwejbka who recently had her first baby and will be a full time mother. Marriage and Family Life Director, Sr. Mary Elizabeth is asking for resumes. *Contact: Director, Family Life/Respect Life Office, Archdiocese of New York, 1011 First Ave., New York, NY 10022; 212-371-1011, ext. 3186; E-mail, sr.mary.elizabeth@archny.org.*

NFP pioneer and international chastity educator, Hanna Klaus, MD was given the Abstinence-Education Award by Abstinence Clearing House at their last national conference. Dr. Klaus has spent more than 25 years training teachers to implement her Teen STAR curriculum. As many of our readers know, “STAR” stands for “Sexuality Teaching in the context of Adult Responsibility.” As a curriculum of fertility appreciation and chastity education, Teen STAR has docu-

mented success rates for helping adolescents to make the choice for chastity. Today Teen STAR operates in thirty-one countries including the United States. Congratulations Dr. Klaus!

The Alliance for Marriage (AFM) is a 501(c)³ non-profit research and education organization that you should be aware of. AFM is dedicated to promoting marriage and addressing the epidemic of fatherless families in the United States. AFM exists to educate the public, the media, elected officials, and civil society leaders on the benefits of marriage for children, adults and society. AFM also exists to promote reforms designed to strengthen the institution of marriage and restore a culture of married fatherhood in American society.

The Alliance for Marriage is committed to supporting the following public policy and civil society reforms:

PUBLIC POLICY REFORMS

1. Reduce the tax burden on married families with children.
2. Make adoption affordable for more married couples by providing increased tax incentives for adoption.
3. Require counseling directed at marital reconciliation for wives and husbands considering a divorce in families with children before a divorce is granted.
4. Eliminate all federal and state welfare policies which penalize welfare recipients who are married.
5. Fund public education campaigns emphasizing the importance of marriage and married fatherhood to the well-being of both children and adults.
6. Support community efforts that encourage fathers to commit to their children and families through marriage.

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In memorium

Two of our pillars of the diocesan NFP community have recently lost their mothers, Mary Culp, Diocese of Kalamazoo and Mary Pat Van Epps, Diocese of Memphis.

Please pray for the souls of their mothers and comfort for the families.

*Eternal rest grant unto to them O Lord,
And let the perpetual light shine upon them!*

Prayers needed

Another pillar of the diocesan NFP community, Henrietta O'Connor, Archdiocese of San Antonio, is in need of prayers. Henrietta has been diagnosed with breast cancer and will have surgery on April 10. Please keep her health in your prayers.

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CIVIL SOCIETY REFORMS

1. The media should offer more positive portrayals of marriage and married fatherhood which accurately reflect the positive influence of marriage on the lives of adults and children.
2. Educational institutions, including secondary schools and colleges, should adopt curricula and textbooks which accurately describe the benefits of marriage for adults, children and society.
3. Clergy should voluntarily enter into agreements to require a minimum level of pre-marital counseling prior to performing a wedding. When adopted by clergy in a given geographic area, such agreements tend to increase the percentage of couples who participate in pre-marital counseling.
4. Businesses should do more to voluntarily help strengthen their employees' marriages, including offering flex-time, job-sharing, and home-based work options.

To learn more see: http://www.allianceformarriage.org/site/PageServer?pagename=mic_mission

EVENTS

March 25, 2006. The Diocese of Pittsburgh's "NFP Promoter Workshop." Promoters are trained in both the scientific basis of NFP and the theology of human sexuality. This one day workshop includes: NFP science; Catholic theology; benefits of NFP to marriage; dimensions of adult learning; handling the "tough" questions. This workshop is free. *Contact: Office for Family Life and Catechesis, 412-456-3160; e-mail familylife@diopitt.org.*

April 3-7, 2006. Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction's "Love & Life Unlimited Conference," Omaha, NE. These conferences are tailored made for

priests, deacons, religious and lay ministers. *Contact: Education Programs; 6901 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE 68106; 1-402-390-6600; Fax, 1-402-390-9851; Website: www.popepaulvi.com; E-mail, education@popepaulvi.com.*

May 5-9, 2006. BOMA-USA teacher training, Oklahoma City, Ok. *Contact: boma-usa@msn.com.*

June 9-13, 2006. BOMA-USA teacher training, San Bernardino, CA. This training includes Spanish translation. *Contact: boma-usa@msn.com.*

June 25-28, 2006. Couple to Couple League's national conference, University of Central Arkansas, Arkansas. Among the speakers are Rev. Richard Hogan, NFP Outreach; Dr. Philip Mango, President and Co-Founder of Saint Michael's Institute for the Psychological Sciences, NY; and Mary-Louise Kurey, Respect Life Director, Archdiocese of Chicago. *See: <http://ccli.org/news/convention>.*

July 6-8, 2006. The Medical Institute for Sexual Health's national meeting, Chicago, IL, has the theme of "Sexual Health Today." The conference will address human sexuality as it relates to the whole person, including the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of healthy sexuality. The focus is on issues that demonstrate the current turmoil in the field of sexual health, including medical accuracy, risk behaviour and emotional consequences. Updated information on the most common STDs, including their treatment, prevention and prevalence, will be provided. Although a secular institute, the MISH provides valuable scientific information that NFP teachers and promoters can use in their programs. *Contact: www.medinstitute.org/events.*

July 19-22, 2006. American Academy of FertilityCare™ Professionals

annual conference, Albuquerque, NM, entitled "Reaching New Heights in Women's Health & Fertility." The purpose of the conference is to enhance the knowledge of FertilityCare™ Practitioners, nurses, physicians, other health care professionals, and clergy by addressing topics relevant to the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System, NaProTechnology®, natural methods of fertility regulation and allied fields, updating participants on current activities, research and trends, and focusing on future goals of FertilityCare™ profession. *See: http://www.aafcp.org/annual_meeting.html.*

July 22, 2006. The Diocese of Richmond's one day conference "Catholic Marriage and Family Planning." A pre-conference workshop on July 21 entitled, "An Introduction to 'A New Language' Study Series on John Paul II's Theology of the Body," is open to all registrants. Among the speakers is Mary Shivanandan, S.T.D., John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, who will also lead the pre-conference workshop. *Contact: Misty Mealey, Diocesan NFP Coordinator, 540-772-0463; misty@mealeys.org.*

July 23-29, 2006. National NFP Awareness Week. Watch for the postcard in your mail! *Orders for posters: 1-866-582-0943; customerservice@ifcweb.com.*

October 1, 2006. The Diocese of Peoria's annual Respect Life Dinner featuring Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D. Dr. Morse will speak on love, marriage, sexuality and the family. *Contact: Lynn Grandon, Respect Life Director; 309-671-1550, ext. 267; Website, http://www.cdop.org/diocesan_offices/respectlife.cfm.*

October 2 - 6, 2006. Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction's "Love & Life Unlim-

ited Conference," Omaha, NE. These conferences are tailored made for priests, deacons, religious and lay ministers. *Contact: Education Programs; 6901 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE 68106; 1-402-390-6600; Fax, 1-402-390-9851; Website: www.popepaulvi.com; E-mail, education@popepaulvi.com.*

October 6-7, 2006. The Billings Ovulation Method Association-USA's international Conference in Minneapolis, MN. Teacher trainings will be offered before the conference, Oct. 2-5. *Contact: boma-usa@msn.com.*

RESOURCES

First Comes Love. Formatted as a "tabloid," this marriage preparation resource is written for young people, engaged couples, and married spouses. Content includes: articles, quotes, and testimonies on the Catholic Church's teaching regarding marriage, the procreative and unitive aspects of the conjugal act, Natural Family Planning, chastity, sterilization reversals, infertility, the blessings of children, and much more! *Contact: One More Soul; 1846 North Main Street, Dayton, OH 45405; 1-800-307-7685; OMSoul@OMSoul.com*

Diocese of Memphis-Chastity Materials are now available on-line. Materials include: prayer cards, stickers and clothes with slogans such as "I'm headed for Heaven," or "Chastity, that's REAL love" *Contact: <http://www.cdom.org/departments/nfp/nfpcatalog.htm>.*

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Life is a Miracle: Lullabies for You and Your Baby.

The Diocese of Saint Cloud has available a CD of lullabies that can be used for evangelization and NFP Promotion. This CD has been created to promote NFP specifically among couples preparing for the baptism of their child. It is also ideal for evangelizing couples.

The soothing lullabies of the CD provide a wonderful way to recognize and celebrate the gift of new life. If used with a packet of NFP materials, it can be used to welcome new members into the Church and invite parents to explore God's plan for them through the practice of NFP. Text on the inside of the CD jacket promotes NFP as a beautiful way to value fertility and self-giving love, while allowing couples to effectively plan future pregnancies.

As an example of how the CD can be programmed for NFP promotion, St. Cloud Diocesan NFP Coordinator Sheila Reineke, provided free CDs to all parishes. She encouraged the pastor to have his priests and deacons affirm or recommend the use of NFP to couples when giving them a CD packet at the time of the child's baptism. The packet included:

- Lullaby CD
- NFP brochure (to facilitate a discussion of the benefits of NFP and Church teaching)
- List of local certified NFP Instructors, class schedule, and local NFP-only physicians
- Story from two witness couples

Sheila reported that the distribution of the CDs "has been tremendous!" She said that "over 1,000 CDs have been given to parishes and new parents in our diocese since October 2005." In addition, "525 copies were sent to the US Bishops, the USCCB, and to Rome." Sheila also reported that many dioceses have ordered the CDs customized with their local information and are now distributing them in their own dioceses.

Contact: Sheila Reineke, Diocesan Coordinator, Diocese of Saint Cloud; 1-800-624-9019; e-mail, sreineke@gw.stcdio.org.

To receive an electronic copy of this publication please send your e-mail address to nfp@usccb.org or download a copy from our Web Site at: <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/newsletter.htm>

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Woman Calendar by BEIKS LLC is a software program for PCs and PDAs to help a couple chart menstrual cycles. Any Windows-based desktop or laptop computer can use the PC version of Woman Calendar. Couples can record fertility signs as well as keep personal notes. The Windows version of the software retails for \$19.95, while the handheld versions retail for \$14.95. See: <http://www.beiks.com/woman>.

California NFP Association has an on-line "Ask the Experts" section on their web site. Posted are over 400 questions and responses. See: <http://www.canfp.org/artman/publish/>.

"Sassy Maternity Clothes." Believe it or not, the following web-site has clothing for mothers-to-be that have saying on the shirts which could be worn by a Pro-Life/Pro-NFP woman. Some of the sayings include: "Birth Control is for Sissies," "Body

by Baby," "Coming Soon to a Hospital Near You," and "I Can Grow People." Baby shirts are sold too. Included in the available slogans are: "I have arrived" and "Gift." These shirts, including the "Birth Control is for Sissies" slogan, are actually advertised in mainstream pregnancy magazines. See <http://mollyanna.com/?fuseaction=products.info&productid=44&PHPSESSID=f70d46b6f9b285d3996c72870f669728>

Please Note:

To reach a receptionist at the DDP/NFP office, call 202-541-3070. If you prefer to leave a message contact our voice mail system at 202-541-3240.

Your DDP/ NFP orders can be placed at:
1-866-582-0943; Order fax: 301-779-8596 or
customerservice@ifcweb.com



NFP Forum

(Diocesan Activity Report)

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Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning.

A program of the USCCB Committee for Pro-Life Activities.

Theresa Notare, Editor

The NFP Forum is published biannually. Its purpose is to serve the Roman Catholic diocesan NFP programs of the United States through offering: national and international news of NFP activity; articles on significant Church teachings, NFP methodology and related topics; and providing a forum for sharing strategies in program development. Contributions are welcomed. All articles may be reproduced unless otherwise noted. For more information contact the editor.

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