

FORUM

Diocesan Activity Report

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The Continuing Importance of *Humanae vitae*

Some things are just classic, like the following article written by the late Bishop James T. McHugh, founding director of the bishops' NFP program. In this thirty-fifth anniversary year of *Humanae vitae* it is useful to ask ourselves just what is important about this landmark encyclical. Bishop McHugh's answer is worth reprinting.

In order to understand *Humanae vitae* itself, it is useful to recall its immediate history. In the aftermath of World War II, the late 1940s and the 1950s, family size was relatively large. The stereotype was the family of six to ten children, one year apart, but the average size was closer to three or four. In the 1960s there was new emphasis given to spacing births and to decreasing overall family size. Furthermore, as Paul VI acknowledged in his introductory paragraphs of *Humanae vitae*, there was a new concern about world population growth and, in the 1960s, the discovery of the birth control pill. Paul VI also noted the emerging recognition of women as persons of equal dignity and value and the importance of conjugal love, that is, the mutual interpersonal love of the spouses and the special meaning of their sexual relationship.

These issues received considerable attention within the Church, as theologians and other scholars began to question the relevance of the Church's

teaching on birth control. The Second Vatican Council had not directly addressed the topic, and Paul VI appointed a special commission to study the matter. While this international commission was conducting its study over a period of years, pressure was mounting for some new pronouncement from the Church. Paul VI recognized this in some of his addresses during the 1960s and there is little doubt that the time was ripe for the Pope to speak.

The issuance of *Humanae vitae* in 1968 was a world-shaking event. Why? Because the encyclical did not say what the world wanted to hear and what much of the anticipated buildup had prepared people for. As a result, the encyclical ran into a firestorm of rejection, criticism and dissent, and its carefully reasoned message was virtually lost in the confusion of the moment. *Humanae vitae* has been treated as something of an anomaly and has been blamed for many other problems that have confronted the Church.

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In this issue

we celebrate the 35th anniversary year of the encyclical Humanae vitae. This document is a virtual landmark of theological truth and pastoral insight.

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It is important to realize that *Humanae vitae* is a relatively short summary statement and reaffirmation of the Church's traditional teaching on marriage, family life, human sexuality and responsible parenthood. It was situated in the context of the Second Vatican Council and drew upon the Council's deliberations and teachings. It took a contemporary approach to the family, to progress and development in modern societies and, despite all the scientific investigations and studies, to the fact that there were still many unanswered questions in the fields of demography, biology and



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biochemistry. Facing an absence of conclusive data in many of these fields, the Church was in no position to render final and detailed moral conclusions. Perhaps one example may illustrate what I mean. Paul VI recognized the growth of world population during the 1950s as one of the issues that prompted consideration of the Church's prohibition of artificial methods of birth control. We refer to this growth as the "Baby Boom" because of the prominence of large families. Yet, it was only in the 1970s that the demographers had sufficiently developed and validated the theory of demographic transition. This theory stated that population growth results from a decline in mortality rates and concurrent high birth rates, which then tend to decline and the growth tapers off. At the same time, the demographers were able to see that the Baby Boom had resulted from a larger over-

all proportion of families with three to four children, not from the families with six to ten. So too with the Pill. It was originally looked on as a sterilizing agent; later data showed its abortifacient aspects, as well as the serious dangers to a woman's health inherent in its use.

One might think that by the 1970s, the hostile reaction to *Humanae vitae* would have subsided and we would have reexamined the teaching and perceived its truth and value. Such was not the case. The encyclical remained isolated and, to a larger extent, rejected. Paul VI reaffirmed the teaching on a number of occasions, perhaps most notably on his last major public appearance before his death (1978).

More recently there has been scholarly and thoughtful reexamination and John Paul II has constantly reaffirmed and explained in detail the teaching of *Humanae vitae*. It is highly important to study John Paul II's teaching on marriage and family life to gain fresh insight into *Humanae vitae*.

Let us turn now to the document itself. The teaching of the encyclical is based on four basic points of Catholic doctrine: a total vision of the human person, the sacrament of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, and the Church's moral teaching on sexuality.

A total vision of the human person

Paul VI clearly stated that the birth of each human person must be looked at in the light of a total or integral vision of the human person and of his or her vocation, not only the natural and earthly, but also the spiritual and eternal vocation. Each human person is created by God, redeemed by Jesus Christ and called to eternal union and glory with the Holy Trinity. That is our fundamental vocation, and all of our activity must be consistent with that vocation and directed toward its achievement. This vocation, or call from God, is also the source of our human

dignity. Each of us is an individual person gifted with intellect and free will. We can make free and conscious decisions about our actions, and we must weigh each decision in terms of its consistency with God's plan and God's law. Our union with God begins here on earth in the life of grace and reaches its fulfillment after death when the life of grace becomes eternal glory.

The sacrament of marriage

Within the overall vocation to union with God, we fulfill other vocations during our earthly lives. God calls us not only to eternal union with Him, but He calls us to share His life here on earth. God is love and we are called to love one another as God loves us. For most people, the call to love is lived out and perfected in marriage and family life. As Pope Paul VI told us, "Marriage is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love." But marriage exists in the order of grace: it is a Christian sacrament. As the Vatican Council reminded us, each sacrament, like the Church itself, is a sign and instrument of union with God and with one another. The sacramental grace of marriage empowers the couple to carry God's grace to their children, their families and friends and to the entire world.

Conjugal love and responsible parenthood

Following closely the lines of Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI spoke of conjugal love, that special and unique love of husband and wife "that binds them together for life in a relationship so close and so intimate that it profoundly influences their whole lives" (from the Marriage Ritual). The intimacy of marriage and marital love cannot be adequately measured by anyone but the couple. Pope Paul VI went on to explain the Council's description of conjugal love:

it has its origin in "God, who is love." As John Paul II further explained, "God is love. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being." (*Familiaris consortio*)

Paul VI went on to speak of conjugal love as "fully human," that is to say, a very special form of personal friendship, "faithful and exclusive," and "fecund," directed toward the begetting and educating of children. Again, John Paul II, in describing the plan of God for marriage and the family in *Familiaris consortio*, expanded on these concepts and emphasized that conjugal love includes and gives meaning to sexuality. Sexuality itself is not something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such.

This is all very difficult to understand in a world that sees sexuality primarily as a means of self-gratification and legitimates every type of sexual behavior. Adultery, out-of-wedlock intercourse, homosexual activity, pornography all separate sexual activity from love and marriage. The Church calls us to take a different and more ennobling view of conjugal love and of the sexual expression of that love reserved to married couples.

Conjugal love demands and fosters a deep, personal intimacy. Intimacy requires communication, self-disclosure and a willingness to forego some personal privacy. At the same time it satisfies the human need for companionship and community and gives each partner a heightened sense of self-worth and security.

Conjugal love is an all-encompassing, interpersonal dynamic that constantly grows and becomes stronger and more binding. It requires of each spouse openness and generosity and a willingness to risk something of self

in the interest of the conjugal relationship. At the same time, it creates a special unity and fidelity between the spouses that is able to withstand the tendency to selfishness or the attraction of power, material goods or personal advancement that might otherwise erode their relationship. In effect, as the dynamic element in their relationship, conjugal love gives an unbreakable quality to their union and their partnership.

The expressions of conjugal love are myriad and to some degree particular to each couple. But virtually all married couples will acknowledge that consideration of the other person, communication, mutual patience, understanding and encouragement are indications of and powerful sustainers of conjugal love. So too is sexual love, in which the couple engage in a deep and specially reserved interpersonal sharing and through which they become co-creators with God by bringing children into the world and building their own family.

The companion principle that Pope Paul VI drew from Vatican II and affirmed in *Humanae vitae* is responsible parenthood. Unfortunately, this term has often been misinterpreted and seen primarily as a justification for avoiding or rejecting childbearing. At a World Summit on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro, a family planning expert said that responsible parenthood and access to all methods of family planning mean the same thing—the avoidance of births. However, as described by Paul VI, by the Second Vatican Council and by John Paul II, the concept of responsible parenthood involves the following elements: a free, informed, mutual decision by the couple regarding the frequency of births and size of the family, based on their conscientious assessment of their responsibilities to God, themselves, their children and family and the society of which they are a part, and enlightened by the authentic teaching of

the Church's Magisterium regarding the objective moral order and the licit methods of spacing or limiting pregnancies.

Decisions regarding child-bearing and child-rearing are certainly in the forefront of the fundamental choices that couples make in marriage. But it is a mistake to think that such decisions are fraught with tension, lacking in mutual agreement, or threatening to conjugal love and family well-being. More realistically and more commonly, such decisions reflect the couple's values and attitudes and are reached in relative calm. When couples are secure in their love, when they



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value parenting and enjoy their children, when they are convinced that material advantages are but one aspect of family life, and when they see childbearing as a special sharing in God's plan of creation and redemption, there is an openness to life and a genuine willingness to share their life and love with others, particularly their own offspring.

An important aspect of *Humanae vitae* is the positive emphasis on children. Paul VI noted that marriage is important because it takes the couple beyond themselves and it reaches out to the bearing and educating of children. Referring again to Vatican II, Pope Paul emphasized that "children

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are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents." The Council teaching to which he referred is one that treats child-bearing as a privilege and gift and as a participation in the creative plan of God. It intended to counter the mind set that sees children as a burden or interference in the private lives of their parents. Thus, it gives special mention to those couples "who with a gallant heart and with wise and common deliberation, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively large family" (*Gaudium et spes*).

Responsible parenthood then, involves mutual decision making by the couple and a shared commitment to family values and goals. It goes far beyond access to contraceptive technology and is far more important in enabling couples to understand their duties and make the appropriate sacrifices to realize their commitment. As described above, responsible parenthood respects the couple as persons who can make decisions that benefit themselves and society without losing their sense of dignity and worth or their appreciation of sexual love.

The Church's moral teaching on sexuality

Having reviewed the Church's teaching, particularly as set forth by the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI then applied the principles to the act of marital intercourse and to the means of family planning. Paul VI affirmed as the authentic and oft-repeated teaching of the Magisterium that the act of sexual intercourse has two meanings, the unitive and the procreative. There is an "inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings." Consequently, "each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life." This is the central teaching of *Humanae vitae* and it is the precise point of confronta-

tion for the encyclical. But the important advance made by Paul VI was that he did not limit his teaching simply to the inherent biological capabilities of the marriage act. Instead, he spoke of the meanings of the act, that is, building marital unity and transmitting life. There is an inseparable connection, willed by God, between these two meanings, a connection that human persons can perceive and understand but which they are not free to reject or contravene. It is contrary to God's law to have intercourse solely to procreate, as is the case, for instance, in those societies where frequent reproduction is seen as a proof of virility. It is also wrong to totally reject childbearing and to have intercourse solely as a means for achieving sexual pleasure, as is often the case in societies where sexual pleasure is seen as the dominant reason for intercourse. The unitive and procreative elements are meant by God to be balanced.

Paul VI recognized that not every act of intercourse would be a reproductive act and that couples could and in some cases should, limit their marital embrace to those times when the woman is not fertile. In effect, Paul VI gave strong endorsement to Natural Family Planning, not as an escape hatch, but as part of the responsible dynamic of marriage and family life.

Pope Paul recognized that his teachings would appear difficult to many people and incapable of ready acceptance by some. But he reminded us that it was possible if we called on God for His assistance and made every effort to see the spacing and limiting of births in the overall context of married life and love. Indeed, Paul VI noted that "the honest practice of regulation of birth demands first of all that husband and wife acquire and possess solid convictions concerning the true values of life and of the family and that they tend towards secur-

ing perfect self-mastery." Achieving solid conviction and self-restraint is extremely difficult in a society that is premised on individualism, sexual permissiveness, lack of personal responsibility for one's actions, material comfort and hedonism. Such is the prevailing atmosphere of the Western world. That is why Paul VI urged efforts to create an atmosphere favorable to chaste living.

At the same time, Pope Paul was very much the pastor who understood the difficulties facing married couples and their failures in achieving moral ideals. He urged prayer, reception of the sacraments and encouraged couples, even when failing, not to lose heart, but to call on the mercy of God in the sacrament of Penance. Correspondingly, Paul VI urged priests to present the Church's teaching clearly and convincingly, to support and encourage couples and to ensure that those facing difficulties find, "in the words and in the heart of a priest, the echo of the voice and the love of the Redeemer."

In his final major public appearance before his death, at a Mass on June 29, 1978 (the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul), commemorating the 15th anniversary of his election as pope, Paul VI reviewed what he considered the high points of his pontificate. The two dominant themes of the homily were the fulfillment of the Petrine office of proclaiming and preserving the faith and his efforts in defense of human life. In this regard, Pope Paul spoke of his encyclical on the development of peoples as promoting the sustenance of life for developing nations. He pointed to other addresses and encyclicals that opposed abortion and divorce. He said that he was encouraged by the response of young people, whom he saw as the victims of the materialism and permissiveness of modern society. But his central concern and source of peace was *Humanae vitae*. His own

words best sum up his final recollections on the importance of the encyclical:

This document was inspired by the immutable teaching of the Bible and the Gospel, which confirms the norms of the natural law and the irrepensible dictates of conscience regarding respect for life and its transmission by fathers and mothers who practice a responsible parenthood. The document has acquired new and urgent relevance in view of the wounds now being inflicted by civil laws on the holiness of the indissoluble marriage bond and the sacredness of human life even in the maternal womb. We have opened Our heart to you in a panoramic view, rapid though it has been, of the important aspects of Our pontifical magisterium in regard to human life, so that the hearts of us all may cry from their depths to the Redeemer. In face of the dangers We have outlined, as in the face of saddening defections in the Church and society, We, like Peter, feel compelled to go to Him as the only source of salvation and cry out to Him: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." He alone is the truth, He alone is our strength, He alone is our salvation.

There is no doubt that the reactions to *Humanae vitae* startled and in some ways saddened Paul VI. Certainly the organized dissent was unexpected, as was the continuing rejection of the encyclical. Paul VI, however, never lost his compassion, his pastoral concern for the family or his conviction that he fulfilled his responsibility as teacher and successor of St. Peter.

The late Bishop James T. McHugh was Bishop of Rockville Centre.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

AN IMPORTANT PART OF

RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

Victoria Hanaka, M.A.

Some have asked why we shouldn't just accept the number of children God gives us, why we need Natural Family Planning (NFP) at all. The answer to these questions lies in the notion of responsible parenthood, as expressed in paragraph 10 of *Humanae vitae* and at least implied in older formulations of the Church's teaching on marriage. There are four aspects to a correct understanding of responsible parenthood:

Knowledge of and respect for our fertility and the laws which govern it

The dominion of our reason and will over our drives or passions

Various conditions or factors to be considered when deciding whether to achieve or avoid pregnancy

A right relationship to the moral order

Knowledge of and respect for our fertility and the laws which govern it

In order to exercise responsible parenthood, we must learn about and respect the biological laws which govern our fertility. They are an important part of the human person, of what makes us male and female. References to these laws or rhythms in *Humanae vitae* are not simply or even primarily references to the rhythm method, but rather they refer to NFP. Paul VI was aware of research going on in this area and took it into account when writing this encyclical. In other words, NFP is to be used in the service of *Humanae vitae*, and *Humanae vitae* makes the most sense in the light of NFP. There is no theoretical separation between the two.

Unfortunately, there was a time gap between the issuing of the encyclical (1968) and when NFP began to be available in the early to mid 1970s. This resulted in a practical separation of the two, which, no doubt, added fuel to the fire of those dissenting from *Humanae vitae*. We, as Church, have the twofold task of making the theoretical connection clear, while closing the practical gap.

NFP provides us with the best knowledge we have about the laws which govern our fertility, about the signs of fertility and infertility. To the extent that we can know these laws and signs, and because they have such a bearing on marriage and family life, ignoring them is, in fact, vincible ignorance.

Dominion of our reason and will over our drives or passions

The second aspect of responsible parenthood has to do with the dominion of our reason and will over our drives. This need has long been recognized and is part of what distinguishes us from mere animals. In this sense, responsible parenthood is a very old concept, and it relates to the idea of self-mastery (*HV*, 21). Here, Pope

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NFP

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Paul VI assumes that there will be periods of abstinence from intercourse within marriage. If we were simply to have whatever children came along, his call to Christian asceticism would make no sense. We shouldn't blame God for either our lack of self-control or our selfishness. This self-mastery, this practice of Christian asceticism, helps us to avoid both pitfalls: the lack of self-control which results in reckless procreation, on the one hand, and the selfishness which leads to unreasonable avoidance of pregnancy and perhaps even contraception, on the other. This aspect of responsible parenthood is not a matter of not accepting what comes from God. Rather, it is a matter of accepting more fully the responsibility God gives us with regard to procreation.

In an older formulation of the Church's teaching on marriage, the procreation and education of children was said to be the primary end of marriage. This formulation, too, implied responsible parenthood, since parents are responsible not only for bringing children into the world but also for their upbringing. This formulation was based on the blessing of Genesis 1:28: "Be fertile and multiply."

Note the context of this blessing, beginning with verse 26. Man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God, that is, with intelligence and free will. They are given dominion or stewardship, not absolute freedom over the earth and its creatures. This dominion or responsibility, in order to be exercised correctly, presupposes a certain degree of self-knowledge and understanding, as well as a proper ordering of all of one's drives. We are given similar dominion over our bodies. We are to love ourselves, to take care of our bodies. Sin makes this difficult, but redemption by Christ makes it possible. Again, this is not absolute freedom, but it is real freedom and real responsibility. Cooperation in procreation is an important part of this stewardship, and it is enhanced (not diminished) by an understanding of the laws at work in our fertility and our ability to make responsible choices concerning that fertility, that is, by responsible parenthood.

If responsible parenthood was implied in older formulations of the Church's teaching on marriage, what (besides a better understanding of human fertility) is new, and why is it necessary? *Gaudium et spes*, no. 50, began to address legitimate concerns about the relationship of the love of the spouses to procreation and to marriage itself. While procreation was still rightly stressed and the term "ends" was retained, the terms "primary" and "secondary" were not given prominence and only referred to in a footnote. *Humanae vitae* took full account of the unitive aspect of the marital act, and the term "ends" was dropped altogether, in favor of the term "meanings," as if to answer the question: What is the meaning of the marital act and of marriage itself? The an-

swer is that marriage and the marital act have two meanings, the unitive and the procreative. These two meanings are inseparable (*HV*, 12). This is as it should be. The only proper context for procreation is the act which fully expresses the love of the spouses, and this marital love cannot be fully expressed when the laws of fertility are violated, as with contraception.

When deciding whether to achieve or avoid pregnancy

The third aspect of responsible parenthood has to do with consideration of the factors or conditions which have a bearing on family size. Physical and economic factors may be the most obvious, but Pope Paul VI also recognized psychological and sociological conditions. When all of these conditions are considered, having another child or a large family may be the responsible thing to do. In paragraph 50 of *Gaudium et spes*, mention is made of those married couples who bring up a large number of children. Note that this should be done "after prudent reflection and common decision," in other words, responsibly. However, when considering physical, economic, psychological and sociological factors, there may be legitimate reasons for avoiding pregnancy, either temporarily or indefinitely. Of course, this decision must be made for grave reasons and with "due respect for the moral law," that is, responsibly.

No matter which way responsible parenthood is exercised, Natural Family Planning should not be ignored, because it, like responsible parenthood and unlike contraception, can be used to achieve pregnancy, as well as to avoid it. When

being used to achieve pregnancy, it allows couples to know they are conceiving. Since Paul VI recognized the licitness of the use of infertile periods (*HV*, 16), that NFP is a moral means to avoid pregnancy should no longer be in doubt.

Let's look at one of these factors. Economic factors, as they pertain to the virtue of justice, affect many people throughout the world. Beginning with Leo XIII, popes have supported a just wage, a family wage, a living wage. Modern wages are not such that a large family can be easily supported, and, to the extent that they do not meet the needs of a family, they are unjust. Instead of fairer wages, contraception is often proposed as the solution to this problem, but this only perpetuates the injustice and adds to it. NFP at least helps people to live more justly in an often unjust world. This is especially true in underdeveloped countries, where couples are often under enormous pressure to contracept, be sterilized or abort. In addition, they frequently have to deal with infant mortality. In contrast to all of this, NFP empowers couples to space their children as they see fit, giving them the knowledge and means to do so. It does no violence to persons, is respectful of the dignity of married couples, and, in the face of the tragedy of infant mortality, at least provides for the possibility of more children. NFP is virtually no cost, low-tech, and therefore, at least in principle, available to all, like the Gospel from which it springs.

A right relationship to the moral order

Finally, responsible parenthood, whether it means avoiding or achieving pregnancy, must be exercised in relation to the objective moral order. To do this, married couples must form their consciences correctly. Husbands and wives must understand that they

are responsible to God, to themselves, to their families, and to society, in that order. Here they have considerable freedom, together with a corresponding responsibility, but again, that freedom is not absolute. Right intentions alone are not enough. Couples may have good reasons for spacing children or even for not conceiving another child, but they are not free to achieve this end by contraception (which would close the marriage act to life), let alone by abortion or permanent sterilization. Similarly, conception must not be achieved by a wrong means, such as through sperm or egg donation, in-vitro fertilization, etc., but it must occur within the loving context of the marital act. Further, the decision of whether or not to conceive must be made within the broader context of the marital and familial relationship. Spouses must treat each other and their children as free subjects, not as objects or property. Human beings are not robots or baby-making machines. The welfare of the children already born must be considered, as well as the parents' ability to provide for the child to be conceived.

The Church recognizes that there are legitimate reasons for avoiding pregnancy, that births may be regulated, but what is necessary is a moral means for doing this. Contraception, because it violates the nature of the marital act, is an immoral means. However, Natural Family Planning, because it respects the unique fertility of each couple, because it can be used to achieve or avoid pregnancy, is such a moral means, allowing couples to live more fully the Church's teachings found in *Humanae vitae*.

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Diocesan NFP Coordinators National Conference

2003 Theme:

**The Continuing
Importance of
Humanae vitae
on its Thirty-fifth
Anniversary**

**Phoenix, Arizona
July 9-12, 2003**

The conference will blend time for continuing education, opportunities for program sharing and spiritual refreshment.

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Optional trip on Sunday, July 13 to the Grand Canyon.

For more information call
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A New Language

Mary Shivanandan, S.T.D.

"As someone who has just recently returned to the Church after an absence of 37 years, this has been a wonderful eye-opener. I thought I knew (and consequently had rejected) all the Church had to say about us as sexual beings. I was wrong. What I have discovered through our readings and discussions is the Holy Father's recognition of the sanctity of human relationships, and how marriage and family love are our way of participating in the boundless love that God has for us all. Learning [this] has made returning to my childhood faith a wonderful homecoming."

Natural family planning educators know so well the great obstacles to and incredible joys of communicating the Church's teaching on love and marriage. How many would call it a life-long accomplishment to elicit a five-star rave review like the one above? More importantly, you might ask, how can we offer the same kind of program that so radically opens minds and hearts to God's plan for human sexuality?

The answer is occurring with increasing frequency in parishes, adult education programs, and NFP groups across the country. Its name is *A New Language*. Its format is a group study series on Pope John Paul II's "theology of the body." What it is and how it came to be is a story of a unique labor of love involving seemingly disparate women from several states and varied backgrounds.

The genesis of the study series began with an apparent failure. Members of the Southern Maine chapter of Women Affirming Life invited Professor Mary Shivanandan of the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C. to present a program on parent/child sexuality education at a local college campus. Except for the organizers and a couple of friends, no one attended. Rather than cancel the program, the organizers asked Prof. Shivanandan to tell them what they had hoped others would hear. She spoke about the Holy Father's "theology of the body"

and the radically new and beautiful language it offers our culture to explain and affirm God's gift of sexuality and the true meaning of marital chastity. One of the participants was so enthralled by the talk, she arranged for the diocesan newspaper to print it. She then sent it to the Women Affirming Life office in Boston and soon a series of conversations were begun on how to bring the Holy Father's much needed message to our Church and culture.

The consensus grew about the need for a study series that would engage ordinary Catholics in study, prayer, and discussion. Working with students from the John Paul II Institute, Professor Shivanandan developed the first draft and piloted it with a group of women in the Washington, D.C. area. The results were extraordinary. Two of first 12 participants decided to stop using contraceptives soon after completing the study series!

Nearly three years later, *A New Language* is a four-season group study series, each consisting of six weekly two-hour sessions. Using Shivanandan's book *Crossing the Threshold of Love* as the core text, participants explore the Holy Father's teachings on the theology of the body, prayerfully reflect on the experience of self-giving love in their own lives, and consider relevant Scripture passages. All sessions include cross-references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and excerpts from the

Pope's own text of the theology of the body. Study groups are facilitated by a trained member of Women Affirming Life.

A New Language study groups have spread across the country including Maine (in a weekend retreat format), Boston, Washington, Tulsa, Wyoming, Seattle and New York. A national retreat for facilitators is planned for this June in Washington, D.C. Reactions to the study groups have been routinely positive and life changing. NFP teachers have been in the forefront of these efforts because they have seen how the study groups offer participants the power of conversion based on knowledge, experience, prayer and openness to God's will.

Most Catholics have never heard of the "theology of the body." It is seldom preached from the pulpit or discussed at adult education classes. The depth of its philosophical, theological and Scriptural insights can appear intimidating. But those who have come to know and appreciate its teaching are overwhelmed by its beauty, its common sense, and the potential it holds for changing public discourse in both our Church and society about the meaning of human sexuality. Simply stated, those who know it love it. They want to live it and to communicate it with others.

A New Language offers a clear, theologically sound, and intellectually challenging tool for ordinary Catholics to help begin a mini-revolution in thinking and living in Catholic hearts, homes and marriages based on John Paul II's incredibly rich teaching in his "theology of the body." As veteran Maine NFP teacher Meg Yates, RN said after completing the series, "Personally this study guide has confirmed the immutable foundations of marriage and the real design for sexual love. Renewing my understanding of Church teaching and my own concept of marriage has been worth the effort of wading through philosophy and theology to

get there. I think this will eventually reshape marriage preparation."

Other participants are equally enthusiastic about the study series. "It's really an extraordinary vision — very powerful, joyful, positive, dynamic," commented one Washington D.C. area participant. Another said, "It will be the intellectual underpinning for building the culture of life." Angela Maupin, Associate Director of the Family Life Office in the Diocese of Tulsa and a facilitator of several study groups, writes: "As a facilitator, there is nothing that compares to seeing hearts set aflame by the truth proclaimed in the theology of the body, especially when both husband and wife are equally committed to the study."

These enthusiastic responses point to the spiritual and intellectual hunger by Catholics to better understand Church teaching on marriage and sexuality. They also underscore the need for evangelization. At this time of such great heartache in the Church caused by past violations of God's plan for sexuality, now more than ever, the truth and beauty of Church teaching needs to be proclaimed and lived. John Paul II's theology of the body offers the fullness of that much-needed vision. *A New Language* study series offers a practical and proven tool for communicating it to ordinary Catholics.

Additional information about the study series and John Paul II's theology of the body are available on the Women Affirming Life website at www.AffirmLife.com. Women Affirming Life hopes soon to have a national coordinator for the study group efforts. In the interim, for information about starting or joining a study group, contact WAL Advisory Board Member Marianne Rea Luthin at the Archdiocese of Boston Pro-Life Office (159 Washington St, Brighton, MA 02135, 617-783-5410 or by e-mail at prolifebos@aol.com)

BISHOPS TEACH

Excerpts from the pastoral "Life-giving Love of Husband and Wife in Light of the Teaching of the Church on Marriage and the Family"

Most Rev. John T. Steinbock

The love of husband and wife, in the Sacrament of Marriage, speaks to us of God's great love. True marriage requires the reciprocal gift of exclusive, unending and fruitful love. In the Sacrament of Marriage God pledges the graces necessary for a couple to persevere in this total self-giving love. But a couple must have the humility to realize their need for the Lord, the faith to put the Lord first in their lives, and the will to follow the example of the total self-giving love of Jesus in their relationship with each other.

We live in a society with a totally different vision for marriage and in a

ing conjugal love to our young people and couples, and to better articulate that teaching. For this purpose I present various themes explaining this teaching. Couples seeking to be guided by the teaching of Christ and the Church in their marriage bond will also find this pastoral helpful.

I ask that we pray very much for those in our parish communities who have been divorced. Our hearts go out to them and we support them with the love of Christ, encouraging them to stay close to the sacraments if they are able. I encourage anyone who is divorced, and remarried, to speak privately to a priest to seek his guidance.

We live in a society with a totally different vision for marriage and in a culture in which it is increasingly more difficult for couples to persevere in their marriage commitment.

culture in which it is increasingly more difficult for couples to persevere in their marriage commitment. The Christian teaching on conjugal love is even difficult for many of our own Catholic people to accept, being influenced so strongly by the individualism, utilitarianism, and self-centeredness of our culture. We need to proclaim it loud and clear.

I write this pastoral mainly for our priests and deacons, as well as those involved in teaching roles in the Diocese, to encourage them to bring the clear teaching of the Church regard-

Divorce Rate in the United States

It is a sad commentary that there are over a million divorces each year in the United States, and though Catholics have a lower rate of divorce than Protestants, hundreds of thousands of these divorces each year are amongst Catholics.¹ One fourth of the children in the U.S. live with only one parent.² Divorce has touched almost every family in our parishes in one way or another. It brings great suffer-

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ing not only to the immediate family but to the Christian family and society as well.

The modern world has separated love from bringing forth life, and this influences our young people very much. To help young couples persevere in their marriage bond, it is essential for them to understand conjugal love in the light of the Church's teaching on the Sacrament of Marriage and the Christian family, towards which marriage is directed.

The divorce rate of those using Natural Family Planning is miniscule compared to the high divorce rate. Informal studies have placed the divorce rate from 1.3% to less than 5%.³ This is certainly a strong motivation to take a good look at the teaching of the Church regarding conjugal love. What is it that keeps these couples together?

Whenever Church teaching speaks of not using artificial means to prevent conception, it is always presented in light of the truth and beauty of conjugal love, in light of the theology of the body in its masculinity and femininity, the Sacrament of Marriage, and the sharing in the creative power of God in bringing forth new life to form the family. Natural Family Planning is a means for married couples to live this spirituality. Responsible parenthood is not simply limiting children. In fact, NFP has nothing to do with contraception. The practice of NFP is an expression of conjugal love that preserves the dignity of the human person and that cooperates with God in His creative power.

Our Holy Father states: "We call that fatherhood and that motherhood responsible which correspond to the personal dignity of the couple as parents, to the truth of their person and of the conjugal act. Hence arises the close and direct relationship that links this dimension with the whole spirituality of marriage."⁴ He also identifies the word "natural," not as a biological

term, but as a term that signifies "morally correct."⁵

Modern Natural Family Planning

Prior to and at the time *Humanae vitae* was promulgated in 1968, the only method for spacing children in accord with the teaching of the Church was the rhythm method. Because of its unreliability, it was very difficult for couples to be faithful to the teaching of the Church.

A lot has changed over the last thirty years in the medical and scientific world, including the perfection of Natural Family Planning (NFP). With NFP a couple can accurately identify the times of fertility and infertility in the cycle, and use this information to achieve or avoid a pregnancy. . . .

Christian marriage demands chastity, continence and self-sacrifice. Couples must be led to appreciate these virtues, which are essential for a good marriage to last, especially in a culture that would lead them to instant gratification. Our Holy Father, speaking of these virtues in relation to conjugal love says

The role of conjugal chastity, and still more precisely that of continence, lies not only in protecting the importance and the dignity of the conjugal act in relation to its procreative meaning, but also in safeguarding the importance and the dignity proper to the conjugal act as expressive of interpersonal union, revealing to the awareness and the experience of the couple all the other possible "manifestations of affection" that can express this profound communion of theirs.⁸

It is important to emphasize that Natural Family Planning is not contraception. It allows a couple to have a fertility awareness and appreciation

of their bodily functions, as created by God. When a couple does not have intercourse during the natural periods of fertility . . . they are simply respecting the cycle of fertility of which God Himself is the author. Couples can also use this method to conceive a child.

Clear Teaching of the Church Rooted in Authentic Love

The teaching of the Church on conjugal love cannot be separated from the teaching of the Church on marriage, the family, the theology of the body in its masculinity and femininity and the dignity of the human person. This teaching is full of joy and hope and calls man and woman to a true respect for each other, above all finding their Christian and human identity in the gift of self, as Jesus has given of himself as gift to us. The teaching of the Church offers the truth of God's love, and brings hope to married couples to have a lasting and joy filled union.

Our Holy Father in his Encyclical, *Familiaris consortio*, written in 1981, roots the teaching of the Church on conjugal love in love itself

God created man in his own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, he called him at the same time for love. God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (FC, 11).

Pope Paul VI in *Humanae vitae* also rooted the teaching of the Church on conjugal love in the vocation to love.

Conjugal love reveals its true nature and nobility when it is considered in its supreme origin, God, Who is love, the Father, from Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. Marriage is not, then the effect of chance or the product of evolution or unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the creator to realize in mankind His design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings in view of mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives (*HV*, 8).

The teaching of the Church has consistently affirmed that marriage and conjugal love are ordered to the procreation and education of children. But, *Humanae vitae* states

If therefore there are reasonable grounds for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that then married people may take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and use their marriage at precisely those times that are infertile, and in this way control birth, a way which does not in the least offend moral principles (*HV*, 16).

We live in a society where children are often seen as a burden and sex is reduced to the pursuit of pleasure. Though each couple must ultimately decide on the number of their children, we must remind our people that children are not a burden to be endured but a gift to be joyfully received. Children are the supreme gift of married life. Christian parents are called in the midst of a self-indulgent world

to be generous in accepting children with joy and love.

A couple must constantly examine their consciences seriously whether they are simply being led by materialistic and selfish values in making a decision to limit their children. Those same materialistic and selfish values can slowly enter into other aspects of their relationship. A couple must keep an openness to life, putting trust also in God's providence, as they decide the reasonable grounds for spacing or limiting their children.

The Inseparability of the Unitive and Procreative Aspects of the Conjugal Act

The Church ... teaches that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life (*HV*, 11). That teaching, often set forth by the Magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning (*HV*, 12).

Humanae vitae does not say that a couple must intend to have a child in each and every marriage act, but that should intercourse take place when conception is possible, the couple must have a respect for this possibility and must not frustrate it through contraceptive means. Natural Family Planning maintains the interrelatedness of the unitive and the procreative aspects of the conjugal act. NFP allows this openness to the transmission of life, while contraception does not. By an act of intercourse, a couple is saying "yes" to life; by an act of contraceptive intercourse, a couple is saying "no" to life. NFP keeps the openness to the child even when a child will not be conceived; contraception separates

the unitive and the procreative aspects of the marriage act.

The Conjugal Bond Shares in God's Creative Power

Pope John Paul II stated in 1984 in a seminar on responsible parenthood:

At the origin of every human person there is a creative act of God. . . . From this fundamental truth of faith and reason it follows that the procreative capacity, inscribed in human sexuality, is – in its deepest truth – a cooperation with God's creative power. And it also follows that man and woman are not the arbiters, are not the masters of this same capacity, called as they are, in it and through it, to be participants in God's creative decision. When, therefore, through contraception, married couples remove from the exercise of their conjugal sexuality its potential procreative capacity, they claim a power which belongs solely to God: the power to decide in the final analysis the coming into existence of a human person.⁹

These words of the Holy Father basically say that contraception is intrinsically evil because a couple in using contraception are making themselves equal to God. Contraception excludes the God-given creative dimension from human sexuality.

It is also important to state that *Humanae vitae*, dismissed so readily by many, simply expands on what is taught explicitly as Divine Law by the Second Vatican Council (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 51-52).

The teaching of the Church presents a vision that sexuality is not merely biological and genital, but is the very means by which a couple give of themselves totally and completely, including every aspect of their being, in mutual self-giving love. Very much what is

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part of each spouse is his or her fertility; in fact, this is at the root of their beings, enabling them to be cooperators with God in bringing new life into this world.

When spouses give themselves to each other in the marriage act, and exclude this most intimate part of their beings, the act denies their total self-giving to each other and they reject the creative power given to them by God. Contraception separates their love from God's eternal plan. This can have a devastating effect on the marriage, as a couple can begin to treat each other as objects for manipulation, holding back the total self-giving of themselves. The individual can take on a greater importance than the union of the two. Self-love can begin to replace self-giving love.

Not a Popular Teaching in our Society

This teaching is not a popular teaching in our day and age. The concept of recreational sex and sex solely for pleasure that pervades our culture, the hedonistic pull of the popular media, the individualism and permissiveness of our culture make it difficult to see children as a gift, to see that sexuality is directed to procreation as well as for permanent unity, and difficult to exercise self-discipline and self-restraint. It is exactly that popular culture that destroys fidelity and marriage.

When sexuality is separated from procreation, anything goes. And this is exactly what we are seeing in our society today: abortion, sterilization, cohabitation, multiple divorces, homosexual marriage, surrogate motherhood, therapeutic and reproductive cloning, abandonment and killing of new born babies, sexual exploitation of children, disrespect and degradation of women, and sexual perversion of every kind. The contraceptive mentality of separating sex from procreation is one of the root causes of our

"Culture of Death," as it leads one not to respect the human dignity of another person, but to see another as an object to be manipulated for one's own ends.

In 1968, Pope Paul VI, a true prophet in *Humanae vitae* cautioned the world against four consequences of separating the procreative and unitive aspects of marriage: conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality, sexual exploitation and loss of respect for women, governmental control over people's lives, and human beings thinking they had unlimited dominion over their own bodies, turning the human person into an object. It is interesting that Mahatma Gandhi, though not Christian, understanding the Natural Law, insightfully stated: "There is hope for a decent life only so long as the sexual act is definitely related to the conception of precious life. This rules out perverted sexuality and, to a lesser degree, promiscuity and to condoning if not endorsing natural vice."¹⁰

Natural Family Planning and Spirituality

Natural Family Planning is not simply an effective and medically healthy means for the spacing of children. It is a way of life that enables husband and wife to base their relationship on the truth of God's life-giving love. NFP demands good communication between husband and wife, so essential for successful relationship. Communication in the most intimate part of their lives in their conjugal bond, which many couples never experience, encourages communication about every other aspect of their lives.

NFP is not mainly about spacing children. It is about authentic Christian discipleship, putting Jesus at the center of the marriage relationship. NFP helps a couple to struggle against the daily influence in society of a materialistic and individualistic under-

standing of sexuality, which can erode a couple's relationship.

The practice of NFP prevents a couple from looking at each other as an object to satisfy their sexual wants. Personal love, not sexual satisfaction, becomes the emphasis for their conjugal bond and for their ongoing relationship. NFP emphasizes the personal qualities of love in a marriage relationship and the practice of the virtue of chastity within the marriage. NFP demands openness, trust, mutual understanding, patience, putting the other before self, authentic personal love. It is said that people must work at love to remain in love. NFP becomes a means for working at that love every day of their lives.

Add to all of this, faith in a loving and merciful God, the frequent use of the sacraments, prayer in the family, trust in the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, and the support of the Christian community, couples can find Jesus as The Way, to true, committed self-giving love in their marriage covenant.

The Church's Role

The Church must be at the forefront not only of proclaiming the dignity and permanence of marriage, but also of speaking about and explaining NFP. . . .

Respect and Reverence for Women as Persons

Contraception is an affront to women. Most artificial means place the burden for avoiding a child solely upon the woman, absolving the husband from any responsibility. It has strong adverse medical and psychological effects on the woman, even putting her in the danger of death with some contraceptive methods. Ideology and the profit motive move the contraceptive market, not respect or concern for women. . . .

Natural Family Planning respects the woman as a person. She is not

used as an object. NFP has no health risks or medical side effects for the woman. NFP is all natural, no drugs or devices are needed, and has no long term effect on the ability to have children. NFP relies on a couple having true love and respect for each other, patience, understanding, knowledge of self and of bodily functions, the spirit of chastity and self denial in the marriage relationship, honest and ongoing communication, and the mutual acceptance of the responsibility for spacing children. The world really isn't interested in promoting these basic qualities that promote a loving and lasting relationship and has nothing to do with economic profit.

This is not the message that our movies, radio talk shows, TV sit-coms, give to people, or the message sex education classes give to children in our public schools. In fact, they give the opposite message of endorsing sex apart from love and apart from marriage. These messages are affecting our Catholic young people and couples.

It is the Church that must proclaim clearly God's design for conjugal love, of the procreative and unitive meaning of the marriage act. People will not hear these things anywhere else. This means it is the responsibility of the priest in each parish to take a leadership role in teaching the people entrusted to his care this teaching of the Church, which can enable couples to be faithful till death. . . .

Certified Trained Teachers

Thanks be to God we now have a good number of trained, certified teachers of Natural Family Planning in our Diocese. I want to thank those that have become certified, trained teachers of NFP and are engaged in this ministry. I encourage others, both English and Spanish speaking, to learn to be certified teachers of NFP to be at the service of couples to help them

live out the spirituality of true conjugal love.

An ideal would be to have trained teachers in every parish to hand on the richness of the teaching of the Church to engaged couples, to support them to enter into relationships of true, total self-giving love, which alone can overcome the influence of a culture that leads people to manipulate others, even spouses, in the name of love. These classes will only be effective if priests encourage married and engaged couples to take advantage of them. It is the pastor's responsibility to see that the people who prepare for marriage in their parishes are taught the clear Magisterium of the Church regarding conjugal love and are given the opportunity to learn more in depth of NFP.

Priests are also the ones who have to encourage with pastoral care and love couples as they struggle to live by the teaching of the Church regarding true conjugal love in the midst of a society that scorns any vision of sexuality apart from an unrestrained and autonomous understanding. Couples need the help of all the sacraments, especially the need of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to help them to continue to persevere in seeking to put Christ at the center of their marriage relationship.

Truth and Conscience

The teaching of the Church tells us clearly that contraception in the marriage act is intrinsically evil and a serious sin as it subverts the total self-giving love, which is by its nature life-giving. The Church in its authentic Magisterium brings us the truth of God's law to guide us through this life in order to guide us to eternal life. The teaching of the Church also tells us that people must follow their conscience and will be judged on their conscience. The Second Vatican Council in *The Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*) clearly states in rela-

tion to a couple's decision on how many children to have

The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love. . . .(GS 50).

The Bishops of the United States in their Pastoral letter, *Human Life in our Day*, written in November of 1968, reflect on conscience

Humanae vitae does not discuss the question of good faith of those who make practical decisions in conscience against what the Church considers a divine law and the Will of God. The encyclical does not undertake to judge the consciences of individuals but to set forth the authentic teaching of the Church which Catholics believe interprets the divine law to which conscience should be conformed.

The Bishops also state in that same Pastoral letter

We feel bound to remind Catholic married couples, when they are subjected to the pressures which prompt the Holy Father's concern, that however circumstances may reduce moral guilt, no one following the teaching of the Church can deny the objective evil of artificial contraception itself.

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The role of conjugal chastity, . . . lies not only in protecting the importance and the dignity of the conjugal act in relation to its procreative meaning, but also in safeguarding the importance and the dignity proper to the conjugal act as expressive of interpersonal union...

To simply tell a couple to follow their conscience in relation to spacing of children without presenting the clear teaching of the Church to inform their conscience, is to leave a couple prey to the influence of the materialistic approach to sexuality, which can destroy a good relationship. Only after a couple has been explained well

the teaching of the Church on the love of husband and wife, can they make an informed decision in their consciences. Even though persons may be in a good, but erroneous, conscience, they will still experience suffering in their lives because of actions objectively immoral. Good intentions or a good conscience will not prevent the consequences of selfishness entering into the life of a couple, if they commit acts objectively against God's will. A fact of life is: following God's law leads to happiness; disobeying God's law leads to suffering. . . .

CHRIST IS THE ONLY HOPE FOR THIS WORLD

In ending *Familiaris consortio*, Our Holy Father tells us very succinctly how important this teaching on marriage and the family is for all of us: "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (FC, 86).

May we who teach in the name of Christ and the Church never fear to present clearly this teaching of the Church on love and marriage in a culture that leads people to be totally

consumed in self. The only hope for the world is the teaching of Christ's total self-giving love. It is this love that we are called to witness and to teach to the people entrusted to our care. The power and love of the Lord is with us through his Spirit. Let us go forward in hope and courage in bearing witness to the love of the Lord, who alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Let us entrust our efforts to promote good Christian marriages to the intercession of Our Blessed Mother. May Mary be our example and model for always seeking to be faithful to God's will. Through her intercession may our Christian families, like the Holy Family, have the presence, joy, comfort and strength of Christ, to be a light and example for the world of authentic self-giving love.

Most Rev. John T. Steinbock is the Bishop of the Diocese of Fresno. This pastoral was written on the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, January 1, 2002. It is reprinted here with permission

Endnotes

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 9. "Christian Vocation of Spouses May Demand Even Heroism," Study Seminar on Responsible Parenthood, to Priest Participants, Pope John Paul II, Rome, 1986.
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NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

The Best Choice for Couples

Alejandro and Lilia Morelos

We were introduced to the Billings method of natural family planning (NFP) when we began our marriage preparation classes just like the many other engaged couples at our parish. We purchased the instruction book authored by Drs. Billings as well as Dionisio Santa Maria's books and we began to study. At this time, there were no organized NFP classes like there are today. Fortunately, my wife Lilia picked up on the material quickly.

We have been using the Billings method exclusively throughout our twenty-two year marriage. In 1985, after realizing how much of a blessing NFP had been to our marriage, we decided that one way we could thank God for such a wonderful gift was to share our knowledge about the Billings method with other couples.

Engaged Couples, Married Couples, NFP for Everyone

Our Billings Center now reaches out to about 100 couples annually by means of teaching NFP classes. We estimate that nearly 40% of those who attend our classes are engaged couples preparing for the Sacrament of Matrimony. Typically, they are young, practicing Catholics, who under the guidance of a priest, have been recommended to learn NFP. We have noticed that these couples tend to learn NFP quickly and with greater ease than most couples. The other 60% of our clients are already married. This group can be further divided into two smaller subgroups: half of them see NFP as a "last resort" because the wife

is suffering from the harmful side effects of artificial birth control and the other half have been pressured by their own doctors to undergo sterilization as a way to prevent further pregnancies. We have come across couples who want to begin living in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Finally, we have also met couples in our classes who are learning for the first time about the Church's teaching on the immorality of birth control!

While we have noticed that approximately 80% of couples who attend our courses want to postpone pregnancy, the couples who are most attentive are those who are hoping to achieve pregnancy after two, three, five or more years of infertility.

The Transcending Apostolate

In the courses we teach, we focus on topics that pertain directly to NFP, but, as an "aside," we also are able to effectively channel various couples' needs towards the ministries within the Church that are best suited to help them. Our goal is to build a relationship based on trust with the couples that take our courses because they then can become more open in sharing their needs with us. In return, we do a better job in locating the right ministry group to fulfill their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Throughout the years, we have been able to put couples in touch with groups that are devoted to helping them and their families. From the educational needs of their children to parenting issues and marriage counseling, we have been able to make the



We have also been blessed by many of our local priests who have shown their support of our program.

appropriate referrals. Additionally, we have maintained strong contacts with the Christian Family Movement, Marriage Encounter and Retrouvaille as well as with the archdiocesan offices of Los Angeles and Orange counties.

We have also been blessed by many of our local priests who have shown their support of our program. They refer many couples our way. Likewise, we are able to put couples in touch with those priests for confession and/or spiritual guidance. Our pastor Rev. Peter Irving and his associate Rev. Roberto Pirrone as well as Rev. Lawrence Darnell and Rev. Edward Broom from St. Peter Chanel have advocated our work. We are also very grateful for the encouragement we receive from Rev. Jerome Karcher and Auxiliary Bishop Jaime Soto of the Diocese of Orange.

We strive to make sure that our work is in accord with the ideals of Monsignor Charles Fortier, who founded the Billings Center in Los Angeles. He believed that all teaching couples should not only demonstrate a sound ability to teach the Billings method accurately, but that they too should actively promote the well-being of the couples who attend the courses.

An Apostolate for Couples – Guaranteed!

During our tenure as instructors, we have emphasized that NFP is an apostolate for motivated couples. From what we have witnessed, these

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couples are married in the Catholic Church and have a strong sense of family life. Typically, their children do well academically — many attend Catholic schools. These couples also demonstrate a relatively high level of education (academically and religiously speaking) and often have a close relationship with one or more of their local priests. They attend Sunday Mass as well as frequent the sacraments.

Although most of the couples are fully bilingual (English and Spanish), they continue to maintain strong ties with the cultural and religious customs as well as with their family members who still live in their mother countries. A large percentage of our course attendees come from middle class Catholic families from Jalisco, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, and Michoacán located in Mexico.

The Destructive Effect of the Culture of Death

Unfortunately, in the Hispanic community, as everywhere, we have seen how a large majority of couples have fallen prey to the culture of death by resorting to the use of contraception. While most of this blame can be traced directly to the medical profession, we have learned that many couples shared in such decision-making.

The Hispanic culture, which traditionally had deep ties to the Catholic Church, views marriage as a holy sacrament uniting both man and woman until “death do us part.” Children are God’s gift to married couples. They represent a physical symbol of the couples’ love for one another. Their love surpasses all other material possessions as the couple sacrifices for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of their offspring. As parents, their role is to raise them in the Catholic Church, preparing their souls for entering into heaven. Today, we see more and more couples abandoning these fundamental aspects of their cultural identity.

The medical profession has also seen the effects of the culture of death. Both doctors and nurses seem to have lost touch with the long-standing values embodied by the Hippocratic Oath. They widely prescribe contraception for both sexually active singles and married couples. Often they pressure couples to use contraception because they, like most of mainstream society, view a woman’s natural fertility cycles as nothing more than a disease that can be cured medicinally. This automatically distorts the view of bringing babies into the world — they are no longer a God-given gift but rather — using a term we all too often hear — a liability.

If couples ask their doctors about NFP, often they are laughed at and told that the Rhythm Method is not a reliable form of birth control. The prevalence of this contraceptive mentality is further reinforced on television and in our children’s schools where they are taught that being sexually active outside of marriage is normal. After all, “everyone is doing it.” But the media is quick to add that young people need to be responsible and have “safe sex” to reduce the chances of pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.

Tragically, the culture of death has even infiltrated into sectors of society that should be upholding high moral standards. In California, it has become commonplace to hear women say: “well, my priest gave me permission to have a tubal ligation” or “since my doctor told me not to have any more children, my priest told me it was OK to use the birth control pills prescribed by my doctor.” We would certainly like to believe this is not true. Such priests would be neglecting their responsibility to help form the souls of their flock so that they are better prepared for heaven. If a priest gives Catholic couples permission to contracept, however, it shows the priest’s lack of understanding regarding Church teachings and modern methods of NFP. We must therefore educate them. This is espe-

cially important because in the Hispanic community the priest is still revered.

NFP Teachers Help Couples Achieve their Goals

Our course consists of eight weekly classes with a ninth class following one month later. Each couple is taught how to postpone pregnancy as well as how to achieve pregnancy using the Billings Method. Throughout the course, couples repeatedly marvel at how their bodies work while they gain a better understanding of the Church’s moral stance on contraception. They even learn why NFP is considered an integral part of a married couple’s daily life.

In the seventh class, we talk about artificial contraceptives and their harmful side effects. Often couples come to the realization during this part of the course that they have been deceived by the medical profession — namely, that instead of looking out for the health of their patients, doctors and nurses have promoted artificial contraception, along with their many side effects, as the “only alternative” in preventing pregnancy.

Why the Medical Profession Should Support NFP

While our work is strictly voluntary, there are professionals, i.e. doctors and nurses, who should promote NFP among their patients.

Many Hispanic women, unfortunately, suffer from poor nutrition, which in turn can affect the signs of fertility. Ms. Lilia Stephenson, a nurse practitioner, has volunteered her time so generously by attending the classes we teach to share information about fertility from a medical point of view. A devout Catholic, she does not prescribe any artificial contraception in her practice.

We have also been fortunate to count

COORDINATORS' CORNER

Marriage Preparation and NFP in the Diocese of San Diego

Chris Mattson

on the help of Dr. Paddy Jim Baggot, who, like Ms. Stephenson, voluntarily attends our classes and offers medical advice to many of the couples that we teach. He is a Catholic obstetrician and gynecologist and does not prescribe artificial birth control for his patients. In addition to being appointed to the US Commission on Gynecology, Dr. Baggot is an infertility specialist and one of the few surgeons who can reverse both male and female sterilizations. Many couples who have attended our courses have directly benefitted from Dr. Baggot's generosity. For example, when Dr. Baggot goes over a woman's fertility chart, he can detect any irregularities within her cycle, which, in turn, aids him in treating a woman before the problem worsens. Dr. Baggot has found that the majority of cycle irregularities in our clients are related to nutritional deficiencies. By improving one's diet and taking vitamins, the woman's body will naturally correct itself and its cycle.

One Last Word . . .

We have witnessed that the most dedicated couples will live their lives according to the teachings of the Church, embracing fully the joys and challenges of Christian marriage. One couple, Herminia and Valentin, who were only able to attend our first class, learned the Billings Method by way of home study. After postponing pregnancy for four or five years, they decided that God was calling them to have their third child, and nine months later, they brought a beautiful baby into this world. In a world where the culture of death has become so mainstream, we feel ever more privileged to be able to help the couples that have attended our classes. We also like to thank the Good Lord and all His marvelous blessings.

Alejandro and Lilia Morelos are the directors of the Centro Billings de Los Angeles.

Every five years diocesan bishops are required to make an Ad Limina visit to the Holy See. These visits are a time of spiritual renewal as well as an opportunity for a bishop to meet with the Pope and other Holy See officials. Months before a bishop's arrival in Rome, he is required to send a detailed written report (Relatio) to the Pope on the state of the diocese in his charge.

San Diego Bishop Robert Brom's most recent report included an alarming account of the increasing acceptance of contraception and in vitro fertilization in the diocese. It was therefore not surprising to him when he heard the Holy Father's address to the bishops of Region XI during their Ad Limina visit. The Holy Father's remarks are inspiring and worth quoting at length:

The Second Vatican Council was quite aware of the forces shaping contemporary society when it spoke out clearly in defense of human life against the many threats facing it. The Council also made a priceless contribution to the culture of life by its eloquent presentation of the full meaning of married love. Following the lead of the council and expounding its teaching, Pope Paul VI wrote the prophetic Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, in which he addressed the moral implications of the power to cooperate with the Creator in bringing new life into the world. The Creator has made man and woman to complement one another in love, and their union is no less than a sharing in the creative power of God himself. Conjugal love serves life not only insofar as it generates new life but also because, rightly understood as the total gift of spouses to one another, it shapes the loving and caring context in which new life is wholeheartedly welcomed as a gift of incomparable value.

Thirty years after *Humanae vitae*, we see that mistaken ideas about the individual's moral autonomy continue to inflict wounds on the consciences of many people and on the life of society. Paul VI pointed out some of the consequences of separating the unitive aspect of conjugal love from its procreative dimension: a gradual weakening of moral discipline; a trivialization of human sexuality; the demeaning of women; marital infidelity, often leading to broken families; state-sponsored programs of population control based on imposed contraception and sterilization. The introduction of legalized abortion and euthanasia, ever increasing recourse to in vitro fertilization, and certain forms of genetic manipulation and embryo experimentation are also closely related in law and public policy, as well as in contemporary culture, to the idea of unlimited dominion over one's body and life.

The teaching of *Humanae vitae* honors married love, promotes the dignity of women, and helps couples grow in understanding the truth of their particular path to holiness. It is also a response to contemporary

(Continued on p. 18)



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culture's temptation to reduce life to a commodity. As Bishops, together with your priests, deacons, seminarians, and other pastoral personnel, you must find the right language and imagery to present this teaching in a comprehensible and compelling way. Marriage preparation programs should include an honest and complete presentation of the Church's teaching on responsible procreation, and should explain the natural methods of regulating fertility, the legitimacy of which is based on respect for the human meaning of sexual intimacy. Couples who have embraced the teaching of Pope Paul VI have discovered that it is truly a source of profound unity and joy, nourished by their increased mutual understanding and respect; they should be invited to share their experience with engaged couples taking part in marriage preparation programs.

Soon after Bishop Brom returned from his *Ad Limina* visit, he approved a new marriage preparation program proposed by the diocesan Of-

fice for Marriage and Family Life titled "Introduction to Natural Family Planning." This two-hour program includes a presentation on human sexuality and love, a personal witness by a married couple who uses NFP, and a talk by a physician who explains the benefits of NFP and why he does not prescribe contraception. Each engaged couple is also given an extensive packet of information, including Janet Smith's tape "Contraception Why Not," to take home with them to review/listen to at their leisure. Also included is the most recent roster of diocesan NFP classes. Couples who complete the introductory course and then wish to take instruction in NFP have the \$20.00 introductory fee deducted from the cost of instruction. Physicians who attend the introductory course are given a complimentary copy of *Physicians Healed*, a book published by One More Soul compiled of stories of physicians who do not prescribe contraception.

Four introductory programs are offered each year in different areas of the diocese. Evaluations by engaged couples of the program are overwhelmingly positive. It took a few sessions, however, to "get it right." Most of the attendees are cohabiting and contracepting, and stressing the truth and beauty about God's plan for marriage and the benefits of NFP, rather than "preaching" the evils of contraception, is of paramount importance. Recently, a young woman who attended the program told me that it had changed her and her fiancé's entire outlook on marriage.

The success of "Introduction to NFP" depends not only upon the content and professionalism of the program, but also the recommendations of the engaged couples who

have attended it, and the support of the clergy whose responsibility it is to help prepare couples for the Sacrament of Matrimony. However, importantly, I believe, with regard to every endeavor which promotes the Culture of Life, we need to recall and put into practice the exhortation of Pope John Paul II as he outlined in the *Gospel of Life* (article 100)

A great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God, the Creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family and from the heart of every believer. Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. Mt 4:1-11). As he taught his disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. Mk 9:29). Let us therefore discover anew the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that power from on high will break down the walls of lies and deceit: the walls which conceal from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil of practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love.

Chris Mattson is the NFP Coordinator for the Diocese of San Diego.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

National NFP Week will be celebrated on July 20 – 26, 2003. A new poster is in the works. Mark your calendars and plan to spread the word! Watch for further announcements!

The **Diocese of Richmond** has successfully completed the requirements for Endorsement according to the *Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry*. Congratulations to Michael Stone, Director, Office of Justice & Peace and Cheryl Pressl, Diocesan NFP Coordinator.

Both the **Diocese of Amarillo** and the **Archdiocese of Santa Fe** have applied for Endorsement according to the *Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry*.

The **Diocese of LaCrosse** successfully completed the requirements for Renewal of Endorsement for the diocesan NFP program. Congratulations to Jeff and Alice Heinzen, NFP Coordinators!

Northwest Family Services has received a grant from Our Sunday Visitor to develop three online courses: NFP client education, NFP teacher training, and educating for chastity.

In Memorium

Please pray for the repose of the soul of John David Gray-Lewis.

His parents, NFP teacher Gerry and husband, Vic, recently requested prayers from "our NFP friends."

May the Lord bless John David and comfort his family.

The NFP teacher training and chastity education will be available as college courses. NWFS will also develop a workbook which will be available to other NFP organizations documenting the process necessary to publish online courses.



EVENTS

February 24-28, 2003. Northwest Family Services is offering a teacher training course in Portland, OR. Contact: Rose Fuller, NWFS, (503) 215-6377.

March 22-25, 2003. Family of the Americas Foundation announces a teacher training course to be held at the One More Soul Center in Dayton, OH. Contact: Steve Koob, One More Soul, 1-800-307-7685.

March 29, 2003. The Detroit Guild of the Catholic Medical Association is offering a one day session entitled *Human Sexuality Revisited (Integrating Faith and Science)*. Topics include the physiology, psychology, theology and spirituality of human sexuality. Contact: Milagros C. Flores, M.D., Conference Chairperson, (248) 857-3529 or email at: mcflores@pol.net.

April 7-11, 2003. The Pope Paul VI Institute announces a Catholic leadership conference in Omaha, NE. This is a total NFP immersion course that merges the science of the Creighton Model FertilityCare™ System with the theology and philosophy that grounds it. Contact: Mary Korbe, (402) 390-6600, ext. 39.

Dr. Josef Roetzer was awarded the Papal Order of St. Gregory with Star. This recognition came about as a result of his years of work in Natural Family Planning. Many have been touched over the years through the work of Dr. Roetzer and we wish him continued success and God's abundant blessings!

Donna Dausman, Director, Office for Family and Youth Ministry, Diocese of Springfield, IL was awarded the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontificia Cross* for her years of service to families and in particular for promoting Natural Family Planning. Congratulations Donna!

Northwest Family Services celebrates their 25th anniversary on January 10, 2003. NWFS provides not only NFP education and instructor training, but also value based sexuality education in both public and parochial sectors. Our deepest congratulations are extended to Executive Director, **Rose Fuller** and her "top notch" staff!

The Diocese of St. Cloud's NFP Ministry celebrates its 30th anniversary on February 8, 2003. St. Cloud is an exemplary diocesan program. Its spectacular history can be attributed to a strong working relationship between its bishops, clergy and laity. Accolades to director, **Kay Ek**, who has been with the program from infancy to full maturity.

May the Lord God continue to bless these great NFP pioneers!

The Couple to Couple League announces the following schedule for 2003 clergy and physician seminars:

Clergy

April 22-24
November 4-6

Physicians

March 14-16
September 19-21

CCL also announces the following dates for teacher training courses:

February 1-2, Atlanta, GA

February 15-16, Kansas City, KS

February 22-23, Fargo, ND

February 22-23, Fresno, CA

February 22-23, Houston, TX

February 22-23, Tallahassee, FL

March 1-2, Cleveland, OH

March 22-23, Houston, TX

April 5-6, Raleigh, NC

June 7-8, Indianapolis, IN

August 2-3, 2003, Philadelphia, PA

Interested couples must contact the Couple to Couple League six months in advance to register for the training. Contact: Couple to Couple League, (513) 471-2000.



RESOURCES

Marquette University Press announces upcoming publication of the proceedings of the National Conference on Natural Family Planning, *Integrating Faith and Science through Natural Family Planning*, co-sponsored by Marquette University and the Diocesan Development Program for NFP. Contact: Marquette University Press, 800-247-6553; website: www.mu.edu/mupress.

The Medical Institute has prepared a monograph entitled "Sex, Condoms and STDs: What We Now Know," that provides the facts about condoms' limited ability to protect sexually active individuals from STDs. The findings were compiled from the most recent studies to date and explain the facts in clear language. For a free copy, Contact: Medical Institute, (800) 892-9484 or check: www.medinstitute.org.



Erratum

In our last issue, we incorrectly spelled Dr. Lester Ruppertsberger's name as well as his credentials. He is an osteopathic (D.O.) physician, not an M.D. as stated. "Mea culpa!"



*In Thanksgiving to
the Lord God for the inspiring
life of
Sr. Ursula Fagan*

*Please pray for the repose
of the soul of
Sr. Mary Ursula Fagan, M.M.S.
Sr. Ursula died on March 1,
she was a Medical
Missionary Sister.*

*Many of you know
Sr. Ursula through her
work at the NFP Center
of Washington, D.C. with
Hanna Klaus, MD. True
tireless servant of God,
we will miss her. May God bless
her kind and generous soul
abundantly!*

Do you need to renew?

Endorsement of diocesan NFP programs is valid for only five years. For those diocesan NFP programs which have reached the end of their Endorsement term, the DDP/NFP has sent renewal forms. Don't delay. Complete your forms today!



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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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