

## What is NFP?

**Natural Family Planning (NFP)** is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle.

NFP is not "Rhythm." The Rhythm (or *Calendar*) method was developed in the 1930s. It was based on the scientific theory that ovulation could be predicted by calculating previous menstrual cycles. This method was often inaccurate because it did not take account of the unique nature of a woman's menstrual cycle. Today's methods of NFP do take account of such variations. Based on observable signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle, NFP methods track the changes associated with ovulation and not only treat each woman as unique, but each cycle as well. The accuracy of women's observations has been validated by scientific research.\*

NFP teachers in the Diocese of Erie use two distinct NFP methods based on the science of the woman's body: Creighton Model FertilityCare system uses mucus signs only and the Sympto-Thermal method combines two primary signs - mucus and basal body temperature. Effectiveness ratings of 98- 99% can be achieved when couples follow the guidelines correctly. Both methods address such topics as church teaching, living a chaste married life, and children as the supreme gift of marriage.

NFP is a holistic approach to family planning. Both husband and wife understand their fertility, emotions, and family planning intention (*whether to have a baby or not*). Its successful use to avoid pregnancy relies upon a couple's following what they know about the method and one another. Successful use of NFP requires a couple to communicate. In the daily charting of their fertility signs, couples quickly appreciate their shared responsibility for family planning. Husbands are encouraged to "tune

into" their wives' cycles, and both spouses are encouraged to speak openly to each other about their sexual desires and their ideas on family size.

Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact when the woman is fertile and can conceive. The total days of abstinence will vary from woman to woman and even from cycle to cycle. Whatever the length of the fertile phase, no barriers or chemicals are used at any time to avoid pregnancy.

To achieve pregnancy couples have intercourse during the fertile time of the cycle. NFP is not a contraceptive. It does nothing to suppress or block conception. Instead, couples adjust their behavior according to their family planning intention using the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of a woman's cycle. NFP promotes openness to the transmission of human life and recognizes the value of children. Sexual relations are understood as love-giving as well as life-giving. It is true family planning. Because NFP respects the twofold nature of sexual intercourse, it can enrich the bond between husband and wife. Indeed, it can be said that NFP promotes the understanding of "self donation" between spouses. For these reasons it is an acceptable form of family planning for people of various religious and philosophical beliefs.

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\*See Richard Fehring, DNSc, RN & Robert Kambic, MSH, *Natural Family Planning Bibliography*. (Washington, DC: Diocesan Development Program for NFP, 1995).

# Why Natural Family Planning Differs from Contraception

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Pope John Paul II

*In 1998 Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to Dr. Anna Cappella, director of the Center for Research and Study on the Natural Regulation of Fertility at Rome's Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. The occasion was a convention commemorating Humanae vitae, Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical. Excerpts are reprinted below.*

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I hope that everyone will benefit from a closer study of the Church's teaching on the truth of the act of love in which spouses become sharers in God's creative action.

The truth of this act stems from its being an expression of the spouses' reciprocal personal giving, a giving that can only be total since the person is one and indivisible. In the act that expresses their love, spouses are called to make a reciprocal gift of themselves to each other in the totality of their person: nothing that is part of their being can be excluded from this gift. This is the reason for the intrinsic unlawfulness of contraception: it introduces a substantial limitation into this reciprocal giving, breaking that "inseparable connection" between the two meanings of the conjugal act, the unitive and the procreative, which, as Pope Paul VI pointed out, are written by God himself into the nature of the human being (*HV*, no. 12).

Continuing in this vein, the great pontiff rightly emphasized the "essential difference" between contraception and the use of natural methods in exercising "responsible procreation." It is an anthropological difference because in the final analysis it involves two irreconcilable concepts of the person and of human sexuality (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, no. 32).

It is not uncommon in current thinking for the natural methods of fertility regulation to be separated from their proper ethical dimension and to be considered in their merely functional aspect. It is not surprising then that people no longer perceive the profound difference between these and the artificial methods. As a result, they go so far as to speak of them as if they were another form of contraception. But this is certainly not the way they should be viewed or applied.

On the contrary, it is only in the logic of the reciprocal gift between man and women that the natural regulation of fertility can be correctly understood and authentically lived as the proper expression of a real and mutual communion of love and life. It is worth repeating here that "the person can never be considered as a means to an end, above all never a means of 'pleasure.' The person is and must be nothing other than the end of every act. Only then does the action correspond to the true dignity of the person." (cf. *Letter to Families*, no. 12).

The Church is aware of the various difficulties married couples can encounter, especially in the present social context, not only in following but also in the very understanding of the moral norm that concerns them. Like a mother, the Church draws close to couples in difficulty to help them; but she does so by reminding them that the way to finding a solution to their problems must come through full respect for the truth of their love. "It is an outstanding manifestation of charity toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ," Paul VI admonished (*HV*, no. 29).

The Church makes available to spouses the means of grace which Christ offers in redemption and invites them to have recourse to them with ever renewed confidence. She exhorts them in particular to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is poured out in their hearts through the efficacy of their distinctive sacrament: this grace is the source of the interior energy they need to fulfill the many duties of their state, starting with that of being consistent with the truth of conjugal love. At the same time, the Church urgently requests the commitment of scientists, doctors, health-care personnel and pastoral workers to make available to married couples all those aids which prove an effective support for helping them fully to live their vocation (cf. *HV*, no. 23-27).

# “Redeemed Sexuality”

by Theresa Notare

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As Christians we should be grateful beyond words for the gift of our redemption. We believe that Christ’s action on the cross has changed all things, for all time. We should seek to relate every aspect of our lives to how Christ has redeemed us and our world. When we consider the mystery and contemporary confusion — of human sexuality, it is even more urgent for Christians to ask, “How has Christ redeemed human sexuality?”

Today our media features topics that not long ago would have been labeled science fiction, or pornography. Cloning, casual sex, getting pregnant by means of reproductive technologies, frozen embryos, adultery — the list goes on. Does anyone in the public square relate these issues to the spiritual? When those of us try to bring God into the equation, we are often told that individual morality must not be imposed on the public. But that should not deter the Christian.

Christ’s work on the cross has restored all of human life, even human sexuality. That means that human sexuality is not tinged with sin, nor is it morally neutral. Although we can misuse even the best of Gods gifts, that does not change the fact that sex is God’s gift of life and love to us. Specifically, sexual intercourse was never meant to be directed to the individual. It’s not a sport or game to be enjoyed on its own. Sexual intercourse is a powerful event of interpersonal communion — it is a sacramental event.

This makes more sense when we realize that Christian marriage is a sign of Christ’s presence in the world. As Christians we accept on faith that human sexuality is caught up in Christ, uniting a man and woman in a union which reflects Gods love in the world and is directed to others. With that starting point, it makes excellent sense to keep sex in marriage.

The redeemed nature of marriage was understood by the Church from our earliest history. Following up on Jesus own words on the indissolubility of marriage, St. Paul likened Christian marriage to Christ’s relationship with His Church. As Christ loved the Church . . . so the husband should love and cherish his wife as he cherishes his own body; for husband and wife are one body, as Christ and the Church are one body. This is a great mystery (Ephesians 5:21-33). St. John Chrysostom (347-407) taught that the one flesh of the spouses is not an empty symbol. They have not become the image of anything on earth, but of God Himself (Homily 12).

The love of spouses, says the Catechism, requires of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses community of persons, which embraces their entire life (#1644). The root of this indissolubility is found in God Himself, who taught us of His fidelity through His covenant with Abraham. It is found finally in Christ, who united Himself with His Church.

In this age of continuous assaults on God’s design for life and love, it would do the world good if Christians reclaimed our rich heritage. Before we can do this we need to return to the mystery of our faith and meditate on who Jesus is, what He did for us, and how this has changed all life for all ages.

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# A Boost for NFP

by

Rev. Charles Goraieb

As a seminarian, I became aware that God's plan for human sexual love was not an arbitrary list of "do's" and "don'ts" but an integrated tapestry that must be seen as a whole. At the center of God's plan is the teaching expressed so well in the papal encyclical, *Humanae vitae* (1968), regarding the nature of sexual intercourse as unitive and procreative. This nature must never be separated. In order to preserve the dignity of the spouses and their sexual expression, each and every act of sexual love must both foster their unity as husband and wife and be open to the possibility of new life. This simple yet profound teaching is what most people do not understand, yet it is what most people need in order to live a fuller life.

Through God's grace, at the beginning of my priesthood I began to see that if I was to offer real assistance to the People of God, it would be essential that I teach the Church's faith about the unitive and procreative nature of sexual intercourse. Beginning with my first parish, I insisted that couples seeking to marry would have to take an *entire* NFP course. With few exceptions, couples have accepted this requirement and most have expressed appreciation for their exposure to the course. I am not naïve enough to think they all have put it into practice, but at least their horizons had been expanded and I have planted good seed. Through my experience with counseling engaged couples, I began to think of how to "plant better seed." I found my answer when I began to study the Holy Father's teachings known as the Theology of the Body. This approach to Church teachings offers a comprehensive and inspiring way to see God's plan for human love. It can give both Church teachings and NFP a real boost!

The Theology of the Body is based not on the Natural Law but on Scripture and on every person's experience. The Holy Father starts his work with the dialogue Jesus has with the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3ff regarding the indissolubility of marriage. On two occasions in this dialogue Jesus refers to God's original plan for man and woman, the plan revealed "in the beginning" (see Genesis 1 & 2). Before sin disrupted their unity, our first parents lived their union in awe and gratitude for the gift each one was to the other. This gift was freely given and joyfully received. They had no fear of being reduced to objects of sexual pleasure or being rejected by the other. It would not have occurred to them to use their sexual love to manipulate or seek to dominate the other. Adam wasn't concerned about losing his independence and Eve seldom experienced "headaches."

The respect, mutuality, trust and openness in the sexual relationship before the Fall is summed up in Genesis 2:25: "the man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame." We know that these qualities changed as soon as they both fell into sin. But because of the redeeming work of Jesus, there is hope for us all. As the Holy Father points out, the nature of our first parents, who were made in God's image and likeness, remained unchanged. God's plan for each human being remains the same even though we must contend with sin in order to achieve it. This plan is summarized in the Vatican II document called the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in*

*the Modern World (Gaudium et spes):*

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, “that all may be one. . . as we are one” (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself. (#24)

We can highlight three basic points from this passage. First, the love between spouses is intended to be a mirror, an icon of the love which exists between the three persons of the Godhead. More specifically, the Pope argues that it is in their sexual union that spouses reflect to each other, as much as is possible in this life, the perfect union of love in the communion of persons of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secondly, human beings are created to freely donate themselves in love to another. In fact, we can not fully realize our human dignity unless we do so. Finally, inscribed in our very bodies as male and female, is our complementary need for another. Man is incomplete in his maleness without woman and visa-versa. This is the *nuptial meaning of the body*.

As a pastor who works constantly with married couples, I am deeply indebted to John Paul II for giving us a new and inspiring way to get couples’ attention and take a closer look at NFP. In his biography, *Witness to Hope*, George Weigel says that the Theology of the Body is a ticking time bomb set to go off sometime in this century. What the Holy Father has given us is a profound treasure that will take some time for the Church to assimilate. Once that process is in motion, we can expect many people of all faiths to be listening very carefully as the Church’s voice rises above the din to proclaim the truth. In the meantime, we all can set about the process of learning and enriching ourselves with these teachings. The Theology of the Body is a breath of fresh air for all of us who want to serve God’s people and turn their hearts towards the Author of Love. May it be a boost to all of you!

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## My Slogan: “Practice Saved Sex!”

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by Fletcher Doyle

I am a journalist and a convert. That sounds like an oxymoron.

Two years after joining the Catholic Church, my wife and I began practicing Natural Family Planning (NFP). I found that the chastity required to get through the periods of abstinence caused profound changes in me. I stopped daydreaming of swimsuit models, wealth and fame. I became grateful for all God had given me, most of all for my wife. My appreciation for her and all that she gives me grew, improving an already good 20-year marriage.

I was curious to find out if other people had been so affected. This is where the journalist and the covert converged. I interview NFP couples and read thousands of words on conjugal union and the effects of contraception on the relationship between men and women. So for five years I thought about nothing but sex, except during the hockey playoffs. This was a challenge to chastity, but the result was a book, *Natural Family Planning Blessed Our Marriage: 19 True Stories* (Servant Books).

Here is what I learned. When women took control of fertility with the pill and the IUD in the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, men said “cool.” Men's behavior changed, as they no longer felt responsible for their sexual partners. (This can be seen in the disappearance of shotgun marriages.)

There was an accompanying drop in commitment between men and women. Trust between the sexes fell because men no longer acted in expected patterns.

When you add in the increase in women's wages and the decrease in men's wages, you created couples who are neither financially nor sexually interdependent. This is why, social scientists say, the divorce rate doubled in that time frame.

NFP can repair the damage. Men acknowledge responsibility to their wives. Commitment increases because the couples know when pregnancy is likely before they make love. Their trust increases: she trusts he will fulfill his obligations when he assents to sex; he trusts she is making accurate observations of her fertility and is keeping him informed.

He develops a sense of awe in the way God made her, and she develops a sense of gratitude that he is willing to sacrifice his own pleasure for her sake. And both grow in their love and trust in God when they see the plan for sex and marriage that He built into their bodies. I have seen and experienced how using Natural Family Planning can make a difference in marriage. That should come as no surprise because it's God's way to practice responsible parenthood – it's His design for life and love!

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Fletcher Doyle is the author of *Natural Family Planning Blessed Our Marriage*, (Servant Books). He and his wife live in the Diocese of Buffalo.

## Celebrating the Richness of Church Teaching

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by Janet E. Smith

The Church's teaching on contraception is not just a doctrine that states what not to do. Many people would benefit from knowing that it is a doctrine that explains how extraordinarily important is the act of having children. One reason that modern culture has trouble understanding the truth of *Humanae vitae* is that it fails to appreciate what a profound good children are. It is true that most parents love their children beyond belief and frequently even acknowledge that they are great gifts from God. Many parents will testify that when they held their baby for the first time, they experience a rush of love matched by little else.

But they do not always realize that in having children they are “co-creators” with God. This is not a term used by *Humanae vitae*; it is a term used by John Paul II in his writing. *Humanae vitae* does speak of the “extremely important mission of transmitting human life” that God has entrusted to spouses. A human life is of inestimable value; a human soul is destined to share a blissful eternity with God, the angels and saints. Only God can create a new human soul but he needs the help of human beings to bring forth a new person. When engaging in sexual intercourse spouses are inviting God to perform his creative act of bringing a new human soul into existence: they supply the sperm and egg; God provides the soul. He then entrusts that soul to the parents to guide and educate and ultimately to help get them to heaven.

Our culture does not really focus on helping people to realize that some day they will likely be parents and how tremendously important a task that is. We do not often think that we should be spending much of our youth preparing for the responsibilities of being parents. Contraception enables us to think of sexual intercourse as a casual and to some extent as an insignificant act rather than an act that can change the universe – for the coming to be of a new human being truly changes the universe. Someone who did not exist before comes into existence and will remain in existence forever.

If people were conscious of the extreme significance of the sexual act, they could not possibly be as cavalier about it as they now are. They would choose their spouses very, very carefully – and use as a foremost criterion the suitability of that person to be a parent. Those who succeed in marrying someone who will be a good parent – someone who is patient, generous, responsible, kind, other directed, and reliable also are nearly guaranteed to get a terrific spouse – for who wouldn't want a spouse with those virtues? Our sexually out of control culture and divorce culture has led 68% of children born in the U.S. to being born out of wedlock or born into households that will fragment through divorce. One out of four pregnancies is aborted.

Those who understand the Church's teaching on sexuality know that to a great extent it is shaped by a concern for the well-being of any children who may result from acts of sexual intercourse. Children born into families where their parents are sexually self controlled, where they are faithful, stable, and desirous of children are predictably much better off than those born to single parents, to the unfaithful, to those open to divorce or divorced. The Church's teaching is also shaped by a knowledge that those who become parents generally become much better people; they need to develop quite a set of virtues in order to be good parents. Those virtues also help them be good spouses, good co-workers, good citizens. Those who use natural family planning to plan their family size develop the virtues needed to be good parents; they develop sexual self-control and patience and generosity – and they almost never divorce.

Catholics who have not heard a defense of the Church's teaching on contraception might be surprised how rich and full of common sense it is.

# Marriage: The Gift of Love and Life

by Most Rev. Victor Galeone

C.S. Lewis once wisely observed: “When everyone is rushing headlong towards the precipice, anyone going in the opposite direction would appear to be mad.”

In July of 1968, the world at large thought Pope Paul VI had lost his mind. For in that month he issued his long-awaited encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which reiterated the Church’s age-old ban on every form of contraception. A tidal wave of angry dissent erupted over the pope’s decision. Catholic and non-Catholic alike berated “the celibate old man in the Vatican” for hindering the Church’s full entry into the modern era.

As we approach the fortieth anniversary of that historic document, I wish to emphasize its importance for our times. As a backdrop for my remarks, I would like to place it in the context of its time. In the same year that Pope Paul issued *Humanae Vitae*, another Paul—Paul Ehrlich—published a book entitled, *The Population Bomb*. In that 1968 bestseller, Ehrlich made some stark predictions. For example:

- “The battle to feed humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines ... hundreds of millions of people (including Americans) are going to starve to death...” **Fact:** *Food production worldwide is well ahead of population growth, and obesity now kills 300,000 Americans a year.*
- “India couldn’t possibly feed two hundred million more people by 1980.” **Fact:** *Since 1968 India has doubled its population by half a billion, and is still self-sufficient in food.*
- Comparing population explosion to a cancerous tumor, Ehrlich prescribed “cutting out the cancer [too many people]” as the only remedy to save humanity. **Fact:** *Today Europe is dying, with most countries fluctuating around the 60% replacement level.*

Against this foreboding background, the reaction to Pope Paul’s encyclical came as no surprise, even though it only restated what the Church has taught for 2,000 years. Namely:

“There is an **inseparable** link between the two meanings of the marriage act: the **unitive** meaning [*making love*] and the **procreative** meaning [*making babies*]. This connection was established by God himself, and man is not permitted to break it on his own initiative.” (*H.V.*, no. 12)

In Deuteronomy 18:21 we learn how to tell an authentic prophet from a false one: Has the prophecy materialized or not? Judged by that benchmark, Paul Ehrlich is a false prophet. What about Paul VI?

Pope Paul predicted four dire consequences if the use of contraception escalated: 1) increased marital infidelity; 2) a general lowering of morality, especially among the young; 3) husbands viewing their wives as mere sex objects; and 4) governments forcing massive birth control programs on their people.

Forty years later the moral landscape is strewn with the following stark reality: 1) The divorce rate has more than tripled. 2) Sexually transmitted diseases have increased from six to fifty. 3) Pornography—especially on the Internet—is a plague, addicting millions annually. 4) Sterilization is forced on women in third world countries, with China’s one-child policy in the vanguard.

In the waning years of his life, St. Augustine wrote his mammoth work, *The City of God*. According to Augustine, the whole world is comprised of two communities: the City of God and the City of Man. Citizens of each city are determined not by one’s birthplace or residence, but rather by the object of one’s love: placing the love of *God* above self, or the love of *self* above *God*.

The two cities are still with us. Paul Ehrlich and Paul VI could well serve as icons of each city. In one case, death and darkness prevail—in the other, life and light. Death or life? The choice is ours!