

COORDINATORS' CORNER

We have spelled out several commonly asked questions and negative statements with regard to NFP and the Church's teachings on conjugal love and responsible parenthood, and we would like you to respond to them. The questions and statements are grouped into the categories of Church teachings (the moral and spiritual); and NFP as a method of family planning. We have tried to express the question or statement in a manner which is typical for the client. If you can say it better, or have other commonly asked questions not listed on page 8, please write them down, include your response, and send them to us.

There are no deadlines to this request. Simply send in your response when you have the time. Please type or print clearly and make sure to include your:

1. Name & address;
2. Day time telephone number;
3. Method of NFP you teach and school of NFP in which you were trained.

Responses will be printed in subsequent issues of the newsletter.

Depending upon the amount and type of responses we receive in a year's time, the DDP will try to choose the best and publish them in a format which you will be able to easily reproduce and use as a resource in the classroom. In essence, these future *NFP Talking Points*, will have been written by you, the NFP teachers. The DDP would see to their distribution to the dioceses (through the NFP coordinator) and to other appropriate groups within the Church.

Now is the time to share your wisdom! Please take a close look at the questions and statements on page 8. Choose two or three questions (or as many as you like) that either "hit home", or which you have had to answer many times. Try to write your response as succinctly as possible. You may get several NFP teachers together and write a joint response. We only ask you to make sure all authors include their names on the responses. We look forward to hearing from you! ■

NFP in Arlington: Striving for Responsible Parenthood

Robert E. Laird

Assistant Director for Family Life
Diocese of Arlington, Virginia

The Diocese of Arlington comprises Northern Virginia and has about 260,000 Catholics in a total population of about 2 million people. In the past three years Bishop John R. Keating has ordained 20 diocesan priests and currently has 50 seminarians for this 60-parish diocese. Last year the diocese had about 1,900 weddings and taught NFP to 277 couples. The NFP coordination is within the Office for Family Life. Currently, the sole provider of NFP in the diocese is the Couple to Couple League who has about 20 volunteer couples teaching in parishes around the diocese.

The diocesan NFP program was not created overnight. It began in 1975 when our former bishop asked the Couple to Couple League (CCL) to establish a program. In the early years, the number of teachers and the number of students rose and fell until 1986. Since then, there has been a steady rise. For example, in 1986, 136 couples were taught, and in 1992 that number has more than doubled. Because of our growth, we are often asked the question, "WHY?"

One of our answers to that question rests with our clergy. Our greatest promoters of NFP are our clergy! We are blessed with a tremendous number of vocations for a diocese of this size, and our young priests are well-grounded in our faith. The Arlington clergy understand the importance of married couples living as responsible parents. They see the impact that the NFP teachers and users make in their parishes in terms of role modeling Christian parenting, and they wish to pass that gift onto other couples!

This enthusiasm of our clergy is also supported by diocesan policy. For example, the diocesan marriage preparation manual highly encourages priests to recommend that each engaged couple takes a complete NFP course prior to marriage. We see the fruit of this policy working in the 70% or so, of engaged couples attending our classes.

There are other elements which make up the answer to our success. They are:

Keeping NFP Instruction Focused

Within this context, there have been several specific areas that this office focuses on to ensure a quality program.

1) NFP is taught only within the context of the teachings of the Catholic Church on Christian marriage.

We teach NFP as the "exception," not the "norm." By this we mean that the "norm" is children. Within the sacrament of marriage we know that the unitive and procreative aspects of conjugal relations cannot exist apart from each other. Only for important reasons should couples consciously avoid conception in a given month, then they may use NFP. All of our teachers understand and live this principle.

It is true that many of the couples taking our classes do so to avoid pregnancy. However, on a recent survey taken several months after a class, one of our NFP teaching couples found a substantial change in attitude among their students. Currently those clients who had wanted to avoid pregnancy were now saying that children were to be wanted. In fact, several of those couples were either expecting, recently had a child, or were trying to achieve pregnancy. Without exception they were all excited about it! This shift in attitude reaffirmed our belief that before we can teach couples NFP, they must first understand and believe what the Church

teaches regarding sexuality and children within the sacrament of marriage. Only then will they be able to prayerfully and unselfishly apply NFP.

2) We teach NFP in the parishes as part of the parish adult education programs.

In order for us to be consistent in our programming we do not teach NFP as a form of "Catholic birth control". We teach and preach it within the context of Christian marriage and with the truths as explained to us in *Humanae vitae* and *Familiaris consortio*. In bringing NFP to the people in the parishes, we strive to communicate this philosophy. It is therefore important for us to use couples who are living examples of this teaching.

We have a goal to place at least one NFP teaching couple in each parish working for the pastor. This means that the teachers may have to do more than NFP. Some of our teachers are also involved with CCD, RCIA, Baptism classes, youth ministry, and marriage preparation. This shows the parish priests that the NFP teaching couple understands the big picture of Christian marriage and, although competent to teach NFP, is not focused on a single issue.

3) The presenters in the diocesan marriage preparation program are also the role models of marital chastity.

We have a diocesan two-day Conference for the Engaged that is one element

of a couple's marriage preparation. Ten years ago, during this conference, an NFP teacher came in and gave a one-hour presentation on NFP. That was basically the only time during the weekend that the subject was discussed. Now, NFP is an integral part of the Conferences. How can we talk about communication without mentioning the most intimate form of communication of sexual intercourse? How can we talk about Christian decision making without discussing one of the ultimate decisions in marriage; i.e., to postpone trying to conceive a child? NFP teachers are now part of each of the weekend conferences routinely participating in several of the topics discussed by the Conference team.

A very important element of our program is that all of the presenting couples in the Conference for the Engaged Program (not just the NFP presenters) must be living out the teachings of the Church with regard to marital chastity. All presenters must be in a valid marriage recognized by the Church and agree that only NFP is the appropriate means for married couples to live out their parenthood responsibly.

We normally recruit teachers only from couples who have taken NFP classes or by the personal recommendation of a member of the clergy. We see these couples as holding the future of our diocese. By their example, both within the Conference for the Engaged classes, and in their visibility in their

parishes, they model Christian parenting. While they may not be NFP teachers, they are strong NFP witnesses within the faith community.

4) We meet with transitional deacons and the new priests.

To ensure the continued support of our clergy we meet with all new clergy in order to help them understand what is available with regard to the marriage preparation and enrichment programs in the diocese. NFP has a place in all of these discussions.

Prior to the ordination of new priests, and in coordination with the Diocesan Vocations Director, we meet with the transitional deacons to explain the marriage preparation program within the diocese and the role that NFP has in this program. We actively encourage the newer priests to participate in the diocesan Conference for the Engaged program. There they can see first hand how the Conference interfaces with the individual parish marriage preparation programs. This program has caused us to work well with new priests regarding this entire subject of chastity and Church teachings.

We have also found that whenever we have the opportunity to meet with large groups of priests on NFP, the number of students in our classes goes up.

Personal Holiness

While public speaking is an important attribute in identifying a potential NFP teacher, it is not so important as personal holiness. The ability to witness to the conviction by which our presenters live the truths of their vocation is central to effective communication. We know that we are not experts on marriage, but are all striving to glorify God through our families. We hope to intercept marriage problems before they become insurmountable. These can best be done by turning to Christ and His Church for guidance!

For further information on the NFP program of the Diocese of Arlington, VA, contact: Bob Laird, Assistant Director, Office for Family Life, 200 North Glebe Road, #700, Arlington, VA 22203; 703-841-2550. ■

ERRATUM—FALL 1992 NEWSLETTER

The article, *Friendly Collaboration and Fruitful Achievement*, by Dr. Zhang De-wei (Fall 1992) contained an error (second paragraph, p.3.) in the reported statistics on effectiveness. It was also missing an important part of the same sentence. The correct sentence should read as follows:

The effectiveness rate was 98.82% Woman Year and the continuation rate was 93.04% Woman Year at the end of the 12 months.

In addition to this error, you should know that in trying to serve the interests of brevity we omitted in the introduction to the report details of the history of NFP in China. Family of the Americas was gracious enough to indicate that Mercedes Wilson, Fr. Denis St. Marie, and Dr. Francisca Kearns were the originators of the work in China and initiated the whole teacher training programs, expanding it to six other regions, including Shanghai and Beijing. Family of the Americas was the sole sponsor of this study.

We apologize for these errors.