

“An Unexpected Journey”

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In 1995, I was first introduced to Natural Family Planning (NFP) via a parish bulletin insert from Priests for Life asking people to pray for the conversion of doctors who prescribed oral contraceptives (of which I was one.) After I caught my breath, I began a journey of slowly (and at many times very reluctantly) exploring and then embracing the Church teachings on marital sexuality. This journey has tested the patience of those around me for many years (family, friends, NFP professionals nationwide, and innumerable parish priests) as well as proven God’s faithfulness to me while I tried to find and live the Truth.

The path I took first began with my giving up prescribing or referring for contraception and sterilization in my family medicine practice. Then, when my family and I moved into a diocese that had very little NFP presence, I moved toward becoming an NFP instructor and soon after, an instructor-trainer in the Diocese of Harrisburg, PA (now Southern Star) STM method. The journey did not end there. I continued to be drawn more and more into diocesan NFP programming. I became involved in the start-up efforts for the Diocese of Richmond’s NFP program in 2000. I was a member of its first Advisory Board and now, I am the diocesan NFP coordinator.

In all honesty, I never wanted to be NFP coordinator for the Diocese of Richmond. I had been asked several times in the past if I would consider it, but had good reasons to decline. At the time I had a growing medical practice, my husband and four sons, and responsibility as my parish’s NFP coordinator (which gave me enough work since my pastor instituted a requirement of a full course of NFP for all couples in his marriage prep!). An important piece of this information is that my parish prepares 10% of the couples being married in our Diocese, so that was no small task to facilitate. Clearly, directing NFP for the entire Diocese was not part of my plan!

Despite my attempts to stay out of the diocesan lime-light, God’s many blessings continued to push me along. As part of growing our parish program, my pastor funded my attendance at the 2010 USCCB’s conference in Milwaukee called, *Human Fertility—Where Faith and Science Meet*. It was an amazing experience! I was able to socialize with, learn from, and pray with NFP colleagues from around the world, some of whom had been correspondence colleagues in the past—others were new to me. I came home with a greater working knowledge of NFP research and a variety of methods I had only heard about. And God had His plan—less than two weeks later at our parish NFP week ice cream social, the then diocesan coordinator drove up to greet me with a box of paperwork and told me that she was moving out of state. She believed that the box (and the job) needed to be at my parish because we were the busiest NFP presence in the Diocese!

Prayerful discernment showed me that it was my turn to take the reins, and that God had been preparing me well for this moment. To keep the program alive, I contacted our Bishop and asked him if I could serve as the new coordinator. It’s now been over two years. It has been an experience of growth for me as well as for our diocesan program. From three instructors in 1996

and two physicians, we've grown to include nineteen teaching units (couples or singles) and five physicians, covering a much wider expanse of our very large diocese than at any other point in our history. Our plans to increase NFP services continue to expand. In fact, our current diocesan NFP advisory board has had us looking at Hispanic outreach and "NFP fairs" in which we can expose all parishioners to the NFP methods offered in the diocese (currently four).

This NFP journey continued to gift me with personal growth. Of particular significance was a generous offer from my Bishop and my Dominican parish pastor. They agreed to split the expenses to send me (and a University of Virginia family medicine resident) to the Natural Procreative Technology Medical Consultant course in Omaha (2011-2012). I can't begin to explain how that has changed my life and medical practice!

After 15 years of my NFP only practice be marked by apologies for what I "couldn't do" for my patients, now my medical practice is focused on what I "can do" for my patients. In fact, I have patients who sought me from three hours away! I can offer them competent and ethical treatment in infertility, PMS, ovarian cysts, irregular cycles, chronic discharges and more. Telling my patients (NaPro or not) that I'm praying for them is a natural part of my day now, and it is well-received regardless of their faith background. In addition, I am fortunate to have a NaPro fellowship trained OBGYN surgeon just seventy miles away. We collaborate frequently and easily on patient care.

As diocesan NFP coordinator, it is important that I support instructors and couples seeking all NFP models. This I do despite my extensive background in NaPro/Creighton Model and Southern Star STM. Thanks to my exposure in Milwaukee, I've been able to successfully get a diocesan grant funded for our first Marquette Model instructors. I plan to continue to work to promote all NFP models since the beauty of NFP is that there is a method to meet each couple's needs. My job is to help them find it!

In looking back, has this journey always been joyful? Honestly? Not really. Embracing NFP has presented me with significant professional and personal challenges over the years—and continues to do so. My journey however, which also includes becoming a Lay Dominican, has always been towards discovering the Truth—whether I particularly liked it at that moment or not, and not always joyfully. Once when I was complaining about the burdens to my spiritual director, he asked me what my alternative was. With St. Peter in the Gospel, I had the answer, there is nothing else—I am convinced that there is nowhere else to go to find the answer for God's Truth about marriage and sexuality. It is that Truth which I have strived to share in the Diocese of Richmond with the assistance of our NFP Advisory Board and the Diocesan Center for Marriage, Family and Life. May God be praised for this unexpected but needed journey!

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