



Life Issues Forum

Love, Naturally *By Theresa Notare*

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“Love, Naturally, is the theme of this years, *Natural Family Planning Awareness Week*. On July 23-29, Catholic dioceses in the U.S. will provide educational events designed to help people better understand human fertility as a gift from God and to see how NFP respects that gift. The slogan captures the fact that marital love is for the building up of the spouses and the family. Just a glance at recent news articles provides a glimpse at why NFP awareness is sorely needed.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved three new chemical contraceptives, and by the end of the year it expects to approve a new “under the skin” contraceptive implant. It is being reported that doctors consider these “advances” to be “less risky and more sophisticated” than the decades-old predecessors. There is an assumption “out there” that it is somehow good for women to suppress their natural, healthy fertility as if it were a disease. Little concern for women’s actual health is demonstrated. Pursuit of fertility suppression shows no appreciation for the relational aspect of sex, or for human fertility itself. Some look at advances in contraceptive drugs and devices as simply giving women “more choices” in regard to family planning. In fact, it would serve women and men well to question the healthiness of contraception—both for their own bodies and for their relationships.

In the world of family planning, only a handful of methods are unquestionably healthy, respect human fertility, and have the added benefit of enhancing the spousal relationship. Those methods fall under the name “Natural Family Planning.” These are methods that are based on a woman’s menstrual cycle, what her personal signs of fertility look and feel like, what conditions might affect these signs, and how these work together with a man’s fertility. And, by the way, Natural Family Planning is not “Rhythm.”

NFP methods help married couples achieve pregnancy by highlighting the optimum time of fertility. By identifying the phases of the infertile time of the woman's cycle, they are also effective for avoiding pregnancy. When a couple plans to postpone pregnancy, they abstain from sexual intercourse during the fertile time. Nothing is done to suppress, change, or damage the natural and healthy biological system of human fertility. In short, NFP methods effectively work with the nature of human fertility.

NFP methods have an added benefit: they often strengthen a couple's relationship. By focusing together on their combined fertility and the management of periodic abstinence, husband and wife have to talk about "where they are at" with regard to their fertility. They need to discuss whether or not they want to try to achieve a pregnancy or postpone one. Because of this, couples who practice NFP say their marriage is enhanced as they find "non-sexual" ways to show love and affection when they are abstaining from sexual relations.

Watch for *NFP Awareness Week* in your diocese. The good news about the methods of NFP is that they provide a viable means for married couples to love, naturally – as God intended.

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