

***DIOCESAN NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING MINISTRY
NATIONAL
2010 PROFILE REPORT***

**APPENDIX
TRENDS IN NFP SERVICES IN THE CATHOLIC DIOCESES OF THE UNITED STATES
AN OVERVIEW OF DATA 2000-2009
FROM THE
NATIONAL SURVEY OF DIOCESAN NFP PROGRAMS (PROFILE)
Rev. Robert R. Cannon, MA, MEd, MTh, JCL**

**NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM
Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
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OVERVIEW

In January 2011, 197 dioceses were invited to participate in the annual *Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry National Profile (Profile)* survey. Ninety dioceses returned the *Profile* questionnaire, which provides broad data trends from 2010 diocesan NFP program efforts.

The *Profile* data serves several functions. It provides individual portraits of diocesan NFP ministry. This enables the staff of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' NFP Program to tailor assistance to the needs of individual dioceses. The *Profile* provides broad programmatic information that enables the NFP staff to identify trends across the United States and to help guide long-range national planning efforts. Finally, it helps individual diocesan bishops and staffs to compare their NFP programs with national trends.

As in previous years, the following 2010 data indicates that NFP programs continue to fluctuate from robust to weak. There is no significant change from the composite trends from 2000-2009. The most dramatic improvements occur in individual diocesan NFP programs where the bishop provides visible public support (which includes funding) and spiritual encouragement to the NFP staff and their efforts.

Some dioceses have made great strides to integrate NFP into all educational efforts on human sexuality, marriage and family life. At the same time, there exists a wide disparity in NFP efforts across the country. As one diocese improves its NFP program, another diocesan program is impacted adversely due to teacher loss, budget cuts, and/or diocesan restructuring.

2010 SUMMARY

- The majority of dioceses include NFP in their marriage preparation guidelines (98%). Despite this good effort, in reality most newly married couples fail to take full advantage of Natural Family Planning in their conjugal life. This assumption is strongly suggested when the number of marriages in the Church (170,172¹) are compared with the number of individuals (13,832²) that took a class/instruction in NFP. In a culture wherein the two-fold meaning of the conjugal act, love and life, has been ruptured by a contraceptive culture, much more effort is needed to inspire couples to fully understand and embrace the Church's beautiful teaching on human sexuality within marriage.

¹*U. S. Catholic Directory* (2011).

²See, *2010 Profile Report*, Q.22.

- Five dioceses reported requiring engaged couples to take a complete NFP course of instruction before marriage. Other dioceses are exploring requiring NFP before marriage. It is still too early to tell if this is a national trend. Based on *Profile* respondent comments and inquiries to the NFP Program of the Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, more dioceses are requiring an introduction as part of their marriage preparation policies.³
- The majority of diocesan marriage preparation programs make some effort to provide basic NFP information to various groups, with special attention directed toward couples preparing for marriage, e.g., booklets, fact-sheets, witness couple talks and NFP course instruction.
- Sufficient funding remains a major stumbling block to successful diocesan NFP programs. Nationally, diocesan NFP programs remain terribly underfunded. Fifty-two percent of dioceses surveyed directly budgeted less than \$5,000 for NFP programs. Fifty-eight percent of all NFP diocesan programs operate on less than \$10,000 per year. Only a few diocesan budgets (17%) exceed \$30,000.
- In most dioceses, NFP programs share funding, materials, and staff support of an umbrella department, e.g., Marriage and Family Life Office. Most dioceses rely on part time paid staffs. A few dioceses have full time paid NFP coordinators. The majority of diocesan NFP programs depend on volunteer NFP teachers to sustain their programs (80%). Of these, less than a third (28%) of the dioceses give modest stipends to teachers to cover personal costs, e.g., transportation, baby sitters, materials, etc.
- In most dioceses, NFP programs are institutionally invisible. Less than half (44%) of diocesan NFP programs are asked to submit an annual report of their activities. Rarely is NFP funding identified as a specific line item in diocesan budgets.
- Only a handful of diocesan NFP programs (22%) have meet the *Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry*.

When evaluating any diocesan NFP program, the most important pastoral leadership question is summed up with this simple “yes” or “no” question: *Can couples who wish to be faithful to Church teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood readily get the NFP support they need?* The answer to this basic question will determine how best to plan and support local diocesan NFP ministry.

³See, *Requiring a Full Course of NFP Instruction in Marriage Preparation—a Report* (September 2008) available at: http://www.old.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/report_requiring_%20NFP_%2008.pdf.

I PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

1) The diocesan NFP Program is: (*check one*)

- 72% Part of the office of Marriage and Family Life
- 3% A service of one of our Catholic hospital(s)
- 2% Part of Catholic Charities
- 2% Its own department
- 21% Other N=89

2) Who is responsible for coordinating NFP Ministry? (*e.g., Family Life Director, NFP Coordinator, Respect Life Director, etc.*)

- 39% Diocesan NFP Coordinator
- 32% Family Life Director
- 7% Respect Life Director
- 3% No person designated
- 19% Other N=90

How long have you been the NFP coordinator?

The range of experience is from 1 month to over 35 years. The majority of coordinators have held the position less than 10 years.

N=43

3) For this position, NFP work is: (*check one*)

- 47% Part of full-time responsibilities
- 9% Full-time, paid
- 0% Full-time, volunteer
- 31% Part-time, paid
- 13% Part-time, volunteer N=87

4) Is the NFP coordinator trained in NFP methodology? (*Check one*)

- 80% Yes 20% No N=84

- 5) If the answer to question (4) is “Yes,” for which of the following roles was the NFP coordinator trained? (*Check all that apply*)

(*Frequency*)

31 Teacher 53 User 50 Promoter

- 6) If you answered question (5), please indicate which school(s) of NFP trained the coordinator? (*Check all that apply*)

(*Frequency*)

18 Billings Ovulation Method Association (BOMA)
 25 Couple to Couple League (CCL)
 14 Creighton Model FertilityCare™ Center
 5 Family of the Americas Foundation
 8 Northwest Family Services
 20 Smaller teaching programs or diocesan/regional programs

- 7) How many NFP teachers are part of the diocesan program? (*Count teaching couples as two*)

Total number of teachers: 953

N=64

- 8) Which statement best describes the NFP program policy regarding remuneration of its teachers? (*Check one*)

53% Most of our NFP instructors are volunteers. We do not give them a stipend.

28% Most of our NFP instructors are volunteers. We give them a stipend to cover expenses.

7% We pay our NFP instructors (*part and/or full time*).

12% Salaries/stipends for instructors are provided by other sources (*e.g., Catholic Hospital, Knights of Columbus, etc.*).

N=87

- 9) Which organization trains the diocesan teachers? (*Check all that apply*)

(*Frequency*)

59 Billings Ovulation Method Association (BOMA)
 54 Couple to Couple League (CCL)
 21 Northwest Family Services
 17 Creighton Model Fertility Care™ Center
 13 Family of the Americas Foundation
 11 Diocesan Teacher Training program

10) Does the diocese have an NFP Advisory Committee?
 32% Yes 68% No N=89

11) Do you prepare an annual diocesan report on NFP ministry?
 44% Yes 56% No N=89

II PROGRAM BUDGET

12) What was the total operating budget for NFP ministry last year? (*Estimate should include salaries, stipends, postage, materials, etc.*)

11%	\$0	
19%	\$1 - 999	
22%	\$1,000 - 4,999	
6%	\$5 - 9,999	
25%	\$10 - 29,999	
9%	\$30 - 49,999	
9%	\$50>	N=81

13) Of the total operating budget for NFP ministry, how much was directly funded by the diocese last year?

13%	\$0	
21%	\$1 - 999	
23%	\$1,000 - 4,999	
11%	\$5 - 9,999	
20%	\$10 - 29,999	
7%	\$30 - 49,999	
37%	\$50>	N=86

14) How much additional money was generated by all NFP activities? (e.g., introductory sessions, class fees, seminars, materials, etc.).

38%	0	
17%	1 - 999	
20%	1,000 - 4,999	
10%	5,000 - 9,999	
14%	10,000>	N=86

15) Is there a separate fee for an introductory session? (*Check one*)

27% Yes 58% No 13% No Response *N=88*

Comment: The average fee for an introductory session is less than \$30.00. The amount charged varied from a low of \$5.00 to a high of \$50+ depending on materials and length of the introductory session(s). Most dioceses charge between \$11 and \$30.

16) Is there a charge a fee for a full course in NFP? (*Check one*)

83% Yes 17% No *N=86*

17) If the answer to question (16) is “Yes,” how is a separate fee determined for a full course in NFP? (*Check one*)

20% Diocesan NFP staff determines fees
 48% Individual NFP provider determines fees
 21% Combination of diocesan staff and individual NFP provider determine fees
 11% Other

N=75

18) How much is charged to clients/couples for a full course in NFP?

4% \$0
 3% \$1 - 25
 12% \$26 - 45
 10% \$46 - 65
 6% \$66 - 85
 15% \$86 - 99
 50% \$100>

N=68

Comment: Fees varied from \$25 to over \$100+, depending on materials, length of course, and the number of follow-up services required.

19) Is a separate fee charged for follow-up? (*Check one*)

31% Yes 69% No *N=81*

Comment: The average charge for a follow-up session was \$25. Ninety-six percent of clients were charged less than \$65.

N=24

III PROGRAM SERVICE

- 20) Which NFP method(s) is currently taught in the diocesan program? (*Check all that apply*)

(*Frequency*)

66 Sympto-Thermal Method

70 Cervical Mucus Method

- 21) How many individuals (couples count as two) in the diocese received an introductory/promotional talk on NFP during the last twelve months?

More than 83,491 individuals received some information/instruction on NFP.

N=84

- 22) How many individuals (couples count as two) in the diocese attended NFP class/instruction during the last twelve months?

More than 13,382 individuals attended a class/instruction on NFP.

N=84

- 23) Does the diocese have guidelines for marriage preparation?

98% Yes 2% No

N=87

- 24) If the answer to question (23) was "Yes" is NFP included in the guidelines for marriage preparation?

88% Yes 12% No

N=85

- 25) On average how much time is allowed for NFP education in marriage preparation programs? (*Give your best estimate*)

8% 0 minutes - 15 minutes

21% 16 minutes - 30 minutes

24% 31 minutes - 45 minutes

19% 46 minutes - 1 hour

28% 1 hour - 2 hours+

N=86

26) Does the (arch)diocese require an introductory session to NFP for the engaged? (*Check one*)

43% Yes 57% No *N=88*

27) If the answer to question (26) is “Yes,” how much time is allotted to the required NFP introductory session?

17% 30 minutes
 15% 45 minutes
 49% 1 hour - 2 hours
 19% Other: “One day NFP seminar,” etc. *N=41*

28) If the answer to question (26) is “Yes,” what is the content of the required NFP introductory session? (*Check all that apply*)

(*Frequency*)

41 The appropriate Church teachings
 32 Reproductive anatomy & physiology
 37 Basic NFP science (e.g., *all the signs of fertility discussed*)
 39 Basic NFP methodology (e.g., an overview of all the specific NFP systems offered in your diocese)
 43 Benefits of NFP
 32 Contraindications of various contraceptives
 37 NFP witness talk

29) Does the diocese require an NFP *course* for engaged couples? (*Check one*)

6% Yes 94% No *N=86*

30) Is the diocese moving toward mandating a full course of NFP instruction for engaged couples?

26% Yes 74% No *N=84*

**Gratitude is extended to the following dioceses
for participating in the *2010 Profile Report***

Albany, Allentown, Altoona-Johnstown, Arlington, Austin, Baltimore, Baton Rouge, Belleville, Bismarck, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Charleston, Charlotte, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Colorado Springs, Columbus, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Des Moines, Detroit, El Paso, Erie, Evansville, Fargo, Ft. Wayne-South Bend, Fort Worth, Galveston-Houston, Grand Island, Green Bay, Greensburg, Jefferson City, Joliet, Kalamazoo, La Crosse, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Lansing, Las Vegas, Lexington, Lincoln, Little Rock, Los Angeles, Louisville, Marquette, Memphis, Miami, Milwaukee, Nashville, New Ulm, Norwich, Oakland, Ogdensburg, Omaha, Orlando, Owensboro, Palm Beach, Patterson, Peoria, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburg, Pueblo, Rapid City, Richmond, Rockford, Rockville Centre, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Diego, San Jose, Santa Fe, Santa Rosa, Savannah, Seattle, Shreveport, Sioux City, Spokane, Springfield II, St. Cloud, St. Louis, St. Paul and Minneapolis, Superior, Toledo, Trenton, Victoria, Washington, Wichita, and Winona.

Program Resources

The following documents are useful in strengthening diocesan NFP programs.

Diocesan Plan for Natural Family Planning Program Development. Washington, DC: Diocesan Development Program for NFP, 1981. (Available online at <http://www.old.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/NFPDiocesanPlan—1981.pdf> and from the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities; Orders, 1-866-582-0943.)

Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 2000. (Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/diocesan-ministry/standards.cfm>)

*The USCCB Committee for *Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth* is grateful to Rev. Robert R. Cannon, MA, MEd, MTh, JCL of the Diocese of Venice, Florida, for preparing the *2010 Profile Report*.

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The following paper was prepared for the 2010 interdisciplinary conference, *Human Fertility, Where Faith and Science Meet*. The Bishops' Committee for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth has co-sponsored this academic event along with the NFP Institute, College of Nursing, Marquette University since 2006. Prior to 2006, the Bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities co-sponsored the first conference in 2002. Since 2002, other Catholic universities have joined the co-sponsorship. In 2010 they included:

The Catholic University of America
School of Theology and Religious Studies

The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the
Family at the Catholic University of America

Saint Louis University
School of Nursing
Nursing Center for Fertility Education

Co-Sponsor—Science Sessions
Georgetown University
Institute for Reproductive Health

This paper will be published along with the other conference papers by Marquette University Press in 2012.

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Background

The Catholic Church has a beautiful and rich theological understanding of human sexuality (including human fertility), marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children and the good of the family. Catholic belief regarding human sexuality is rooted in Sacred Scripture and Catholic Tradition. Conference speakers have delved into many of these Church teachings through the fine theological papers presented. This paper complements and builds upon those presentations from a programmatic perspective. It looks at the concrete institutional strengths and weaknesses of Natural Family Planning Ministry efforts in the Catholic dioceses within the United States.

The Catholic Church has developed a variety of educational and spiritual programs for engaged and married couples. Among the support programs for marriage are diocesan programs of Natural Family Planning (NFP). In the United States, it is possible to gain insights from trends in these Church sponsored NFP services based on the *Annual National Diocesan NFP Survey* (commonly called the *Profile*). The Natural Family Planning Program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) conducts the survey and produces the *Profile*.

The *Profile* was the idea of the late Bishop James McHugh. It was Bishop McHugh who designed and first directed the USCCB's NFP Program. He saw the necessity of gathering specific information on each diocesan NFP program in order to provide broad based support to

dioceses and to offer specific guidance to dioceses with particular pastoral circumstances. At the same time, Bishop McHugh understood that the data gathered by the *Profile* would enable the staff of the NFP Program to recognize national patterns of strengths and weaknesses and thus be better equipped to guide the dioceses in their NFP efforts. Similarly, Bishop McHugh thought that the insights gained from the *Profile* would prove useful to his fellow bishops, who have the ultimate pastoral responsibility for NFP services in their own dioceses.

The *Profile*'s design is focused on programmatic information. Its foundation is rooted in an earlier five-year nationwide study of diocesan NFP programs and couples who used NFP between 1988 and 1992. A debt of gratitude is owed to Robert Kambic, MSH, for this foundational and original NFP research (see Kambic and Notare 1994). Building upon the work of Kambic, the current NFP *Profile* survey questionnaire is divided into four areas:

1. General information (name of diocesan NFP coordinator, address, etc.)
2. Program management (how the ministry is structured, which department it falls under, number of teachers, NFP schools that train the teachers, etc.)
3. Budget (all funding sources)
4. Program service (what the program provides to the local church, NFP methods represented, introductory programs, NFP presence in marriage preparation programs, NFP classes, etc.)

The *Profile* provides a wealth of information on diocesan NFP services. The data gathered in this survey identifies the strengths and weaknesses of diocesan NFP ministry both locally and nationally. It is an important instrument for directing the development of national resources that facilitate the growth of NFP ministry in the U.S. Catholic dioceses. In anthropological terms, the *Profile* serves as an "ecclesiastical" ethnographic study. It examines the concrete efforts by the Catholic Church to assist the faithful, especially those who are

preparing for marriage and those already married, to live Church teaching on human sexuality, marriage, conjugal love, and responsible parenthood.

The variety of diocesan NFP ministry efforts affects the precision of the data reported in the *Profile*. The survey does not have strict control of many of the variables of similar sociological research. The USCCB's NFPP staff cannot require all diocesan NFP coordinators to consistently participate in the survey. The NFPP staff can only "invite" participation. The number of dioceses that participate in the survey changes from year to year. Some diocesan NFP coordinators fail to meet the survey deadline. Staffing changes or other administrative glitches result in dioceses not participating in the survey. Each year, the NFPP staff urges all diocesan NFP coordinators to complete the survey. Due to these efforts, about half of the diocesan NFP coordinators consistently submit their questionnaires.

In addition to the diocesan coordinator who submits the data to the national NFP office, the accessibility of precise numerical information available varies not only from diocese to diocese but even within a diocesan NFP program from year to year. In some dioceses for example, NFP teachers who are not officially affiliated with a particular diocese but who work within the geographic area of the diocese, may or may not submit their data on clients taught in a given year. The local NFP coordinator can only invite these NFP teachers to participate in the survey. They cannot require them to submit their data. This variable obviously affects the total number of clients taught in a diocese. Similarly, inconsistent diocesan infrastructure is visible when calculating diocesan NFP budgets. Although the majority of dioceses establish a fee scale, some dioceses encourage their NFP teachers to charge their own fees for NFP classes. Other teachers follow a fee scale suggested by national NFP providers. Still others dioceses allow a

national provider to be the sole agent to charge fees for NFP classes in a diocese.

Despite these survey reporting limitations, the design of the *Profile*'s questions reduce much of this respondent variability from year to year in order to reveal broad trends over time. The analysis of the cumulative data creates a picture, albeit, an imprecise one, of NFP activity in dioceses across the United States. When these annual snapshots are compared, a fairly clear picture of NFP diocesan ministry emerges.

As a survey, the *Profile* is not designed to answer NFP methodological questions, examine consistency of client use, critique individual providers, evaluate teacher competency, or answer the myriad of other such questions. The main intent of the *Profile* is to gather specific concrete information on how NFP ministry operates within the diocesan structure and delivers NFP services.

When the diocesan data is tabulated and examined, the *Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry National Profile Report* is generated. The *Profile* report serves as an educational tool for bishops and diocesan NFP coordinators. The *Profile* report allows bishops and their respective coordinators to compare their own diocesan NFP ministry efforts with that of the larger Church (for past reports see www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/surveyarchives.shtml).

What does the *Profile* reveal about Roman Catholic sponsored NFP services in the United States? This analysis covers the years 2000 to 2009. Four sections of the *Profile* will be discussed: (1) Program management; (2) Program budget; (3) Program service; and (4) Interpolation of the data and reflection on some anecdotal comments by respondents.

Program Management

Most dioceses have a person who serves as the designated NFP coordinator responsible

for NFP ministry. This is a significant improvement from the 1980s and 1990s. For most diocesan NFP coordinators this responsibility is only one of many jobs. For example, typically the marriage and family life director is responsible for NFP ministry. That same person may also be responsible for youth ministry, respect life activities, or other ministries as well. Nevertheless, it is significant that there is an NFP contact person in most dioceses. As a group, they represent an ecclesial network for giving and receiving NFP information and servicing from the USCCB Natural Family Planning Program. Almost all NFP coordinators are trained in an NFP methodology. This is a significant improvement. For many years, this was not true.

The bulk of NFP ministry provided in dioceses is done by committed laymen and women who volunteer their time as teachers to support NFP. Without this cadre of laity, most NFP diocesan programs would collapse without their generous sacrifices. The motivation for these teachers is the truth of Catholic teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood. They are the unsung heroes of NFP ministry.

A variety of organizations train diocesan NFP teachers. These include: Billings Ovulation Method Association (BOMA), Couple to Couple League (CCL), Northwest Family Services, Creighton Model Fertility*Care*TM, Family of the Americas Foundation, Marquette University Institute for NFP (Marquette Model), smaller diocesan programs (e.g., Dioceses of Cleveland, Phoenix, and Archdiocese of Boston), and non-diocesan programs (e.g., Southern Star NFP, etc.).

Although it may seem insignificant, about half of diocesan NFP programs are asked by their supervisors to prepare an annual diocesan report on NFP ministry. The symbolic implication is obvious. If the diocesan NFP coordinator is not asked to prepare a report on NFP

activities, it may imply a lack of concern about this pastoral area of Church life, indicate a poor system of internal accountability or both possibilities.

Program Budget

All dioceses are under financial constraints. Funding correlates with diocesan priorities. The funding of diocesan NFP programs is and remains, in most dioceses, problematic at best. Across the United States, diocesan NFP programs have remained underfunded. Only a handful of diocesan NFP programs are well funded. As mentioned previously, if not for lay volunteer teachers most dioceses would have no NFP program. The majority of the budgets are so small that NFP efforts do not warrant a line item within diocesan departmental budgets.

Over half of all diocesan NFP programs receive less than \$10,000 annually. Only a handful of dioceses spent more than \$50,000 annually. In these instances, the bulk of the funds are used to pay the salary for a full-time diocesan NFP coordinator. To supplant the shortfall in diocesan funding, many NFP programs rely on fees for materials used in introductory sessions, tuition for a full course of NFP instruction, donations from seminars to various groups, free use of facilities for NFP instruction, and donations from various organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus.

Program Service

From 2000 to 2009, the number of dioceses that included NFP as a component of their marriage preparation guidelines grew significantly. In almost all dioceses, a presentation on NFP is required. But with closer scrutiny, the length of time of the NFP presentations varies greatly. Typical NFP presentations last between fifteen minutes to an hour. Ideally, the hope is that couples will be inspired to take a full course of NFP instruction.

Today, one third of dioceses require an introduction to NFP. This is a huge improvement in conveying the beauty of NFP in relation to conjugal love and married life. There are seven dioceses that require a full course of NFP as part of their marriage preparation programs (for a report see, www.old.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/report_requiring_%20NFP_%2008.pdf). Both the Sympto-thermal Method and the Cervical Mucus Method are taught in most dioceses. The diversity of methods allows users to choose the method that best serves their needs. As mentioned previously, teachers have been trained by a variety of organization such as BOMA, CCL, Creighton Model FertilityCare™, and smaller diocesan/regional programs.

Interpolation of the Data

At the conclusion of the first decade of the 21st century, when viewed nationally, NFP programs fluctuate from robust to anemic. Some dioceses have very strong educational programs that integrate NFP into all educational efforts treating human sexuality, marriage, and family life. Through hard work and dedication, some dioceses have made tremendous strides improving the quality of their NFP programs in order to meet the USCCB's *Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry*. But, as one diocese improves its NFP program, another diocese experiences a retraction in its NFP program, either through teacher loss (individuals moving out of diocese), budget cuts, and or diocesan restructuring (over the last few years departments of marriage and family life have been reduced or merged with other departments). Despite the richness that NFP adds to the Church's teaching on human sexuality and conjugal life in a practical way, one has to conclude that NFP remains a fragile pastoral program in the majority of dioceses.

Even though the majority of dioceses include NFP in their marriage preparation guidelines, in reality, most newly married couples fail to take full advantage of Natural Family

Planning in their conjugal life. This observation is strongly suggested when the total number of marriages is compared with the total number of individuals that took a class/instruction in NFP (see Cannon 2009, question 22). In a culture where the twofold meaning of the conjugal act (unitive and procreative) has been severed by a contraceptive dominated mentality, much more must be done to inspire couples to fully understand the call “to embrace and reverence God’s vision of human sexuality” (Committee for Pro-Life Activities 1993).

Each year, respondents are asked to offer their personal observations on what is needed to promote the use of NFP. A few remarks appear with regular frequency. There is a hunger for bishops to support NFP efforts as a ministry within their respective dioceses. Where there is identifiable support by the local bishop, lay volunteers work tirelessly to enrich couples about God’s design of the human body and the nature of genuine spousal love. In our highly pragmatic culture, dollars speak louder than words. When scrutinizing the funding levels of NFP programs nationally, the funding is paltry, almost scandalous. But again, the cry of NFP providers and teachers is rarely for huge dollars to be directed to NFP efforts. The plea is for those charged with Church teaching to publicly, institutionally and educationally promote the efficacy of NFP as a morally sound approach to cooperating with the love and life-giving will of God in marriage.

Conclusion

Occasionally articles are published comparing various populations on contraceptive use. They typically reveal that Catholic couples use contraception at the same rates as the general public. This is not surprising given the overwhelming acceptance of contraception as a modern means to manage human fertility. What most people do not realize is that acceptance of

contraception is also indicative of a devaluation of the awe inspiring power of procreation. In fact, due to the preoccupation with sex for pleasure and as an end in itself, the current American culture is fostering a greatly impoverished and even false understanding of the nature of sexual intercourse. In this scheme, marriage itself is devalued.

To fight against this diminished approach to human sexuality, the Catholic Church must invest in providing reasonable support for its members to learn how to live the mystery and beauty of marital sexuality (in the Church this is also referred to as “marital chastity”). Otherwise, the power of the Church’s moral authority will continue to be dismissed as irrelevant and viewed as vacuous for modern life. It is often said by NFP teachers that NFP is a *hidden treasure* of the Church. If the national picture of NFP efforts drawn by the *Profile* over the last 10 years is any indication, an independent observer can certainly come to this same conclusion.

On a personal note, the heart-felt motivation that led me to offer my professional expertise to the USCCB’s NFP Program in developing and analyzing the *Profile* from its inception was the result of a counseling session years ago that I had with a wonderful young married couple. The couple had three small children. The last pregnancy was problematic. The wife’s gynecologist told her that another pregnancy would most likely be life threatening. He recommended a tubal ligation for her or a vasectomy for her husband. The couple decided to use a less drastic means. She went on a birth control regimen. On a marriage retreat the couple heard about NFP for the first time as a practical and reasonable method to steward their shared fertility. Inspired and motivated from what they heard, they asked me where they could go to learn about NFP. To my chagrin, the only teacher in the diocese was a two-hour drive away. Eventually, they took a correspondence course and had many long distance telephone calls to learn how to use

NFP correctly. The desire of this couple to be faithful to Church teaching given the limited resources available at the time, led me to do what I can in this area of Church life.

Finally, and regardless of the diocese, when examining any NFP program, the most important pastoral question is summed up with this simple “yes” or “no” question: Can Catholic couples who wish to be faithful to Church teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood readily get the NFP support they need? The answer to this basic question will determine how to best plan support for local diocesan NFP ministry (Cannon 2009).

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