

DIOCESAN NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING MINISTRY
NATIONAL 2017 PROFILE REPORT

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM
Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth
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OVERVIEW

In January 2018, 197 dioceses were invited to participate in the annual *Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry National Profile (Profile)* survey. Seventy-eight questionnaires were returned for the 2017 *Profile* survey.

The *Profile* serves several important functions. The composite data provides information on broad Natural Family Planning (NFP) programmatic trends which enables the NFP Program staff of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to develop strategies and supportive resources that support local NFP efforts. Because the *Profile* provides individual portraits of diocesan NFP ministry, it is an excellent tool for diocesan staff to annually capture their own information/statistics to compare with national NFP trends.

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 unevenness in NFP efforts across the country. Given the range of pastoral circumstances from one diocese to another, NFP programs continue to vary in availability, viability, and effectiveness. The reasons for this unevenness are complex. In many cases, as one diocese improves its NFP program, another diocesan program is impacted adversely due to teacher loss, budget cuts, modest public ecclesial support and/or diocesan restructuring. It is notable that some smaller dioceses have much larger programs with more limited resources than dioceses of much greater size and resources. Also critical is the need for diocesan NFP staff to have a mature understanding of Church teaching on human sexuality, marriage, conjugal love, responsible parenthood and the science and methods of NFP. This ensures that diocesan NFP ministry is set within the context of Church teaching. When NFP services follow in concert with or after catechesis in Church teaching, married couples are more apt to see that NFP methods are a genuine way to embody those teachings. Repeatedly, nothing strengthens individual NFP diocesan programs than when the diocesan bishop gives visible support, regular encouragement, and funding to NFP efforts. When a bishop acknowledges NFP, as a vital element of marriage ministry, NFP efforts blossom in a diocese.

The following 2017 *Profile* summary of responses to key questions gives a snapshot of the current state of diocesan NFP ministry throughout the United States.

SUMMARY

1. Since the Profile began in 1990, almost all diocesan programs have included some level of NFP education in their marriage ministries. Many have increased steadily the length of time and quality of materials offered to couples preparing for marriage.

2. Limited funding remains the main stumbling block. Nationally, diocesan NFP programs remain severely underfunded. Fifty-three percent of dioceses surveyed budgeted less than \$5,000 for NFP programs. Sixty-four percent of all NFP diocesan funded programs operate on less than \$10,000 per year. A handful of diocesan budgets (21%) exceed \$30,000. Many programs rely on indirect funding collected from other sources, e.g., NFP materials, donations from parishes, fee for course instruction, and follow-up fees.
3. In the annual diocesan budget, most dioceses do not show dedicated funds for NFP ministry. Rarely is NFP funding identified as a specific line item.
4. In the 2017 survey, thirty-two percent of diocesan NFP programs submit an annual report of their activities to their bishop.
5. In most of the responding dioceses, NFP programs share funding, materials, and staff support of an umbrella department, e.g., Marriage and Family Life Office. Thirty percent rely on part time paid staff and volunteers to support NFP efforts. Only eight percent have a full-time paid NFP coordinator. Of the sample population, seven percent of the dioceses do not have a NFP coordinator.
6. The majority of dioceses include NFP in their marriage preparation guidelines (91%). In reality however, there is inconsistency in the quality and strength of NFP education. It can be argued that most newly married couples fail to take full advantage of NFP in their conjugal life. This assumption is supported by the total number of all marriages in the Church (148,634¹) as compared to the total number of individuals (17,385²) that took a full course in NFP in 2017 represented in the survey. In a culture where in the very nature of marriage and the two-fold meaning of the conjugal act, love and life, have been ruptured, a renewed national effort is needed to inspire couples to fully understand and embrace the Church's beautiful teaching on human sexuality within marriage.
7. Fifteen of the responding dioceses require couples to take a full NFP course of instruction before marriage. Just several years ago very few dioceses required a full course of NFP instruction as part of marriage preparation efforts.³ This number has increased four-fold in the last decade. A number of dioceses are considering adding a full course of NFP to their marriage preparation requirements. Anecdotally, it seems that more and more individual

¹ *The Official Catholic Directory 2017*. The total number of marriages is not meant to be understood as a direct comparison of NFP class attendance to the newly married in 2017, but rather to simply raise an important question about couples wanting to learn an NFP method in the year surveyed juxtaposed to the number of actual marriages. Common sense suggests that if a particular diocese has a large number of marriages in the year, that number ought to be somewhat reflected in the number of participants in the annual NFP classes. Unfortunately, and typically, NFP class attendance is underrepresented than the total number of marriages in a diocese.

² See, *2017 Profile Report*, Q.22.

³ See, *Profile Report*, Q.30 and *Requiring a Full Course of NFP Instruction in Marriage Preparation—a Report* (September 2008) available at: www.usccb.org/nfp/diocesan-ministry/nfp-topics-and-resources.cfm.

priests are encouraging couples to take a full course of NFP as part of marriage preparation, even if not required by their diocese.

8. The majority of diocesan marriage preparation programs make an 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). The amount of time devoted to the discussions of NFP varies greatly.

CONCLUSION

Since 1990, this *Diocesan NFP Profile Report* has identified some positive national advances—notably moving NFP education from the periphery into the heart of diocesan marriage preparation ministry. As stated previously, nationally, there is a great need to substantially integrate within all levels of catechesis a more sophisticated understanding of human sexuality and the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood among the faithful. This will enable men and women, when they marry, to more readily embrace God’s plan for their marriages. In this context, the methods of Natural Family Planning will then be understood as an instrument that can help husband and wife live God’s vision of married love. And because of this, NFP education can be the source of a blessing to husband and wife.

Currently, the majority of couples preparing for marriage, and married couples themselves, do not grasp the Church’s rich teachings on human sexuality and marriage (recall that most often the time spent in proximate marriage preparation is too late; remote education and formation is essential). In general, men and women do not understand why contraception is morally wrong or harmful to the marital union. For many couples, it is difficult to understand how the modern methods of NFP are different from contraception. This is a deep problem that begs for a solution. Although not represented in the following results, USCCB NFP staff have information on those dioceses that have addressed this difficulty by developing robust catechesis. The catechesis focuses on the human person as made in God’s image, the nature of human sexuality (especially using the Theology of the Body), and the nature of marriage, conjugal love, responsible parenthood, and the value of children. In such diocesan NFP programs, with the starting point as God’s plan for marriage, NFP education is then introduced as a support. When this approach is implemented, diocesan NFP staff report that more couples not only take NFP classes but embrace Church teaching.

Finally, when evaluating any diocesan NFP program, the most important pastoral leadership question can be summed up with a simple “yes” or “no”: *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 question will determine how best to plan and support local diocesan NFP ministry.

I. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

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

- 92% Part of the office of Marriage and Family Life
- 0% A service of one of our Catholic hospital(s)
- 4% Part of Catholic Charities
- 4% Its own department

N=68

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

- 54% Diocesan NFP Coordinator
- 38% Family Life Director
- 1% Respect Life Director
- 7% No person designated

N=75

How long have you been the NFP coordinator?

The range of experience is from a few months to over 30+ years. The majority of coordinators have held the position for 7 years with a combined total of 538 years of experience.

N=72

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

- 54% Part of full-time responsibilities
- 8% Full-time, paid
- 0% Full-time, volunteer
- 30% Part-time, paid
- 8% Part-time, volunteer

N=75

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

87% Yes 13% No

N=76

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*)

58 Teacher 85 User 45 Promoter

N=67

If a teacher, how long has the person been teaching?

The average teaching experience is 18 years.

N=39

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

(*Frequency*)

- 23 Billings Ovulation Method Association (BOMA)
- 43 Creighton Model *FertilityCare*TM Center
- 12 Family of the Americas Foundation
- 41 Couple to Couple League (CCL)
- 7 Northwest Family Services
- 10 Marquette University's Institute of NFP (Marquette Model)

N=61

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

Total number of teachers: 1,321

The average number of teachers: 19

N=71

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

- 55% Most of our NFP instructors are volunteers. We do not give them a stipend.
- 20% 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*).
- 18% Salaries/stipends for instructors are provided by other sources (*e.g., Catholic Hospital, Knights of Columbus, etc.*).

N=75

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

(*Frequency*)

- 59 Billings Ovulation Method Association (BOMA)
- 83 Couple to Couple League (CCL)
- 79 Creighton Model *FertilityCare*TM Center
- 17 Northwest Family Services
- 23 Family of the Americas Foundation
- 28 Marquette University's Institute of NFP (Marquette Model)

N=7

10) Does the diocese have an NFP Advisory Committee?
 23% Yes 77% No N=75

11) Do you prepare an annual diocesan report on NFP ministry?
 32% Yes 68% No N=77

II. PROGRAM BUDGET

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

13	\$0	
18	\$1 - 999	
20	\$1,000 - 4,999	
11	\$5,000 - 9,999	
14	\$10,000 - 29,999	
9	\$30,000 - 49,999	
7	\$50,000 - 69,999	
8	\$70,000+	N=76

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

17%	\$0	
17%	\$1 - 999	
19%	\$1,000 - 4,999	
11%	\$5,000 - 9,999	
15%	\$10,000 - 29,999	
11%	\$30,000 - 49,999	
5%	\$50,000 - 69,999	
5%	\$70,000+	N=75

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

56%	\$0	
17%	\$1- 999	
12%	\$1,000 - 4,999	
1%	\$5,000 - 9,999	
14%	\$10,000>	N=72

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

35% Yes 65% No

N=68

Comment: In over 60% of NFP programs, the average fee for an introductory session is less than \$40.00. The amount charged varied from nothing to a high of \$50+ depending on materials and length of the introductory session(s).

N=25

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

88% Yes 12% No

N=73

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

11% Diocesan NFP staff determines fees

69% Individual NFP provider determines fees

20% Combination of diocesan staff and individual NFP provider determine fees

N=66

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

3% \$0

3% \$1 - 25

6% \$26 - 45

5% \$46 - 65

3% \$66 - 85

10% \$86 - 99

69% \$100>

N=62

Comment: Most fees vary from \$46 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*)

41% Yes 59% No

N=64

Comment: The average charge for a follow-up session was less than \$65

N=27

III. PROGRAM SERVICE

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

(*Frequency*)

67 Cervical Mucus Method
63 Sympto-Thermal
26 Sympto-Hormonal Method
8 Other

N=73

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 125,152 individuals received some information/instruction on NFP.

N=64

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

More than 17,385 individuals attended a class/instruction on NFP.

N=60

23) Does the diocese have guidelines for marriage preparation?

96% Yes 4% No

N=75

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

91% Yes 9% No

N=74

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

11% 0 minutes - 15 minutes
14% 16 minutes - 30 minutes
25% 31 minutes - 45 minutes
13% 46 minutes - 1 hour
37% 1 hour - 2 hours+

N=76

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

45% Yes 55% No

N=75

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

8% 30 minutes
26% 45 minutes
66% 1 hour - 2 hours

N=35

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

(*Frequency*)

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

N=43

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

15 Yes 61 No

N=76

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

16 Yes 50 No

N=66

**Gratitude is extended to the following dioceses
for participating in the 2017 Profile Report**

Allentown, Anchorage, Arlington, Atlanta, Baltimore, Birmingham, Bismarck, Brooklyn, Camden, Charleston, Charlotte, Cheyenne, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Colorado Springs, Columbus, Crookston, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Erie, Evansville, Fargo, Ft. Worth, Galveston–Houston, Gary, Grand Island, Green Bay, Greensburg, Honolulu, Joliet, La Crosse, Lansing, Laredo, Lincoln, Little Rock, Los Angeles, Madison, Memphis, Miami, Milwaukee, New York, Norwich, Oklahoma City, Omaha, Orange, Palm Beach, Pensacola-Tallahassee, Peoria, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Portland (ME), Portland (OR), Reno, Richmond, Rochester, Rockford, Rockville Center, Sacramento, Salina, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Rosa, Spokane, Springfield (IL), St. Augustine, St. Cloud, St. Louis, St. Paul and Minneapolis, St. Petersburg, Steubenville, Trenton, Venice, Wichita, Winona, Worcester.

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 www.usccb.org/nfp/diocesan-ministry/upload/Diocesan-Plan.pdf; 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: www.usccb.org/nfp/diocesan-ministry/standards.cfm.)

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