

## **“Requiring A Course of Natural Family Planning in Marriage Preparation”** *Diocese of Wichita*

Prior to the current Marriage Preparation Policy for the Diocese of Wichita, there was a common policy for the four dioceses in Kansas. In recent years, the concern over the decline in marriages and the increase of couples living together without the benefit of the Sacrament of Marriage prompted a response and increased efforts from our local church, the Catholic Diocese of Wichita.

### *Development of the Marriage Preparation Policy Task Force*

In 2013, recognizing the need for an updated Marriage Preparation Policy, then Wichita Bishop, Most Rev. Michael Jackels, tasked Jake Samour, the recently hired director of the newly formed Office of Marriage and Family Life, to assist with the development of a Marriage Preparation Policy for the Diocese of Wichita. As part of this development, Jake then formed the Marriage Preparation Policy Task Force which included various members of the diocese with a special interest in marriage preparation. This included teachers of Natural Family Planning (NFP), Engaged Encounter couples, and couples who had specifically responded when asked for input. This Task Force met for the next year on a regular basis to develop and discern the components of a great marriage preparation program.

Part of the components discerned and agreed upon by Task Force members was that engaged couples need more than just an introduction to NFP if they are to incorporate the values of Church teaching on responsible parenthood into their marriages. If NFP is to become a “way of life,” then couples would need training and solid education. Since the Diocese of Wichita offers both the Sympto-Thermal Method through the Couple to Couple League (CCL) and cervical mucus methods through Family of the Americas, Billings Ovulation Method™, and the Creighton Model FertilityCare System™, it was determined that an NFP Task Force should be created to develop a brochure that would be used throughout the diocese to promote NFP and to contribute to the language of the marriage preparation policy.

The NFP Task force met for several months in 2014 and 2015. The following text represents their work:

#### *Natural Family Planning*

“Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?” I will. (*Rite of Marriage*; Questions of Intention)

An in-depth instruction of Natural Family Planning (NFP) is one of the most practical ways the Church can help and encourage couples to conform their married love to the will of God. Married couples who experience the benefits of NFP can convey to other couples an enthusiasm and understanding of conjugal life, procreation, and education of their own children in the area of human sexuality.

It is ideal for every parish to have its own certified NFP instructors. With a united effort on the part of priests and the lay faithful to promote NFP at the parish level, this is an achievable goal.

Presentation of the different methods available, specific instruction and/or leadership formation can be sought through the Office of Marriage and Family Life.

Fulfilling the Natural Family Planning Component Instruction of an approved NFP Method through designated and trained instructors, approved by the Office of Marriage and Family Life:

- Each approved method has a specific teaching schedule and methodology.
- Meeting regularly with a trained NFP instructor provides each couple with a foundational understanding of NFP Timeline Recommendation: Engaged couples should begin their chosen method of NFP instruction 3 to 6 months prior to the wedding, ideally after the “Evangelization” and “Instruction on the Sacrament of Marriage” components are completed.

Note: The marriage preparation policy can be read in full at: <http://catholicdioceseofwichita.org/cr-resources/policiesforms> (scroll down to the Office of Marriage and Family Life to view it).

On the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 2015, current Bishop, Most Reverend Carl Kemme promulgated the Marriage Preparation Policy, “Becoming One in Christ.” Since then, we have had several meetings with our priests to implement the program. The Clergy Conference this last October had a full day dedicated to the explanation of the policy for our priests to see it in action. The main question that still seems to arise is, “Is it required and what does that entail?” Because we offer different providers and because their teaching schedules are different, we also provided a chart that explains the methods. In addition, since the Diocese of Wichita offers a variety of NFP methods, a sliding fee scale is used. There is a standing policy that no one is turned away due to financial concerns.

For many of our priests, the NFP requirement is not unusual. We have a very supportive clergy. They are our “#1 resource” for NFP referrals! That said, it has been a bit of a learning curve to institutionalize this commitment. Our office assists the clergy with a deeper understanding of the rationale behind a full course of NFP as part of marriage preparation. We have found that with this preparation, the policy makes sense. Our clergy are happy that we are in this together, working toward fostering better marriages that reflect God’s vision for married love!

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