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## NFP PIONEERS: History of the Billings Ovulation Method in the United States

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In the late 1960's, Msgr. Robert E. Deegan, Director of Health and Hospitals of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, invited the Drs. Billings to the United States. He facilitated the first American publication of the Drs. Billings' book *The Ovulation Method*.

It wasn't until the Airlie House Conference, convened by the Human Life Foundation in 1972, that the Billings became known more widely in the United States. Mercedes Wilson of Covington, Louisiana had introduced color stamp charting into the Billings Method after she learned the method in Australia and brought it back to her native Guatemala. She travelled extensively in the U.S. to introduce the method and offered teacher training in New Orleans. Many Billings teachers had their first training in 1972-74 there. Ms. Wilson came to St. Louis in May 1973 and met with those of us who had already read Dr. Billings' book and who had begun to form the teaching center which was later called the **Aware Center**. Kay and Dave Ek began to teach NFP for the St. Cloud, Minnesota Diocese in 1972. Marge Harrigan began to teach in Corpus Christi in 1973, and many of the other Centers began in 1974-5.

The St. Louis Aware Center was founded in May 1973 by Margaret McGauley, the late Mary Frances Reed, Hanna Klaus, M.D., and Sr. Natalie Elder, D.C., CNM. Some time later, Merrilee Underhill, Mary Gayle Doyle, the late Ann O'Donnell, and Sr. Ursula Fagan joined them. In 1973, Dr. Klaus was Assistant Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at St. Louis University Medical Center. Dr. Klaus was sent by her department to Sydney, Australia to attend a Congress on the Billings Method in July and August of that year. Following the Congress, she went to Melbourne to meet with the Drs. Billings, Dr. Brown, and Kathy Smythe. On return, she began to train the others to teach the Ovulation Method.

At the 1973 Meeting in Sydney between two and three hundred enthusiastic users of the Billings Method were present as "walking statistics." However, use effectiveness data were very thin, and the contribution of the US Centers was prospec-

tive record keeping of sufficiently high quality to permit evaluation of the use effectiveness of the method.

The first U.S. use effectiveness study of the Billings Method was presented at the International Congress for Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology in Tel Aviv in 1974. Two years later, a collaborative study was initiated with the B.O.M. Centers of St. Louis; Kansas City, Missouri; Wichita, Kansas; St. Cloud Minnesota; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Joliet, Illinois. This study was published in *Contraception* June 1979.

The St. Louis Center had begun to train teachers as early as autumn of 1973. Formal teacher training was begun in 1974, and included Joliet, Illinois; Lincoln, Nebraska; Kansas City, Missouri; and establishment of the Aware Center in Wichita, Kansas.

Msgr. John B. Seli, formerly director of the Family Life Center, Pittsburgh, PA came to Washington in 1974 to found the Natural Family Planning Federation. Kay Ek, John Brennan, M.D., and Hanna Klaus, M.D. were the OM providers on the Board who also joined the Human Life Foundation when it merged with the Natural Family Planning Federation. This group sought to serve the entire Natural Family Planning field with educational materials and program resources. By November 1974, the Human Life Foundation had embarked on a project of preparing teaching materials for the OM and STM. Mary Catherine Martin invited two of the Aware teachers to Washington and debriefed them. This was the basis of a series of booklets on NFP. A more sophisticated system of educating trainers was later developed by Mary Catherine Martin and adapted by Hanna Klaus for the Billings OM teachers at the

Meeting of WOOMB International in Los Angeles in 1983 hosted by Msgr. Deegan. At that time, a year-long trainer education program was initiated. Faculty included Kay Ek, Marge Harrigan, RN, Director of the Corpus Christi NFP Center, and Hanna Klaus. The Billings teachers had incorporated as WOOMB - USA and elected Mercedes Wilson as the first President in the late 1970's.

In the mid-1980's, Mrs. Wilson reformed her group into the Family of the Americas Foundation and extended her interest beyond Natural Family Planning. Two years ago, the U.S. Billings teachers felt the need for a stronger organization with regular access to Continuing Education and resource

materials, and formed the Billings Ovulation Method Association (BOMA). BOMA is currently incorporated and coordinated through the Natural Family Planning Center of Washington, D.C. A bi-monthly newsletter is provided, as well as the (sometimes) expanded *Science Notes*,

which are also prepared for the Diocesan Development Program.

BOMA has formulated criteria for certification and requires recertification every three years. To maintain active teaching status, teachers must either teach clients or supervise teachers and provide evidence of continuing education. Members of the Association must subscribe to the aims and objects of WOOMB International. Teachers may join as individual teachers at a cost of \$25.00 per year, while Agency fee is \$50.00 per year. Associate membership is \$35.00. All receive copies of: the Bulletin of the Natural Family Planning Council of Victoria four times a year; newsletters; *Science Notes*; and an annual Teachers' Directory with a six-month update. Mrs. Marjorie B. Harrigan, Texas chairs the Education and Certification Committee. More than 70 teachers have been recertified or are in process of recertification. Currently there are 386 active Billings teachers in the United States. ■



(Left to right) Dr. Hanna Klaus, the Drs. Billings, and Dr. Eric Odeblad.