
NFP PIONEERS: Human Life and NFP Foundation

Larry Kane

Although the original Human Life Foundation (hereafter "Foundation") created by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in 1969, took its mission directly from the encyclical letter *Humanae vitae*, its scientific and educational roots can be traced to a meeting held four years before the encyclical. A young priest from Fort Lee, New Jersey, present at the 1964 meeting in Washington, D.C., was later to carry the impetus of that meeting into a wide range of international activities. His activities included counsel to the Foundation throughout its 13 years in the nation's capital. That priest was James T. McHugh, today Bishop of Camden. He continues as an ambassador for Natural Family Planning in his own country, at the U.N., and World Health Organization, for the Vatican, and in crucial world population conclaves.

Bishop McHugh encouraged formation of the National Commission on Human Life, Reproduction, and Rhythm in 1967, when he was director of the Family Life Bureau of the United States Catholic Conference. It was out of this Commission, and that of the Catholic Physicians Guild, that the Foundation was to draw its medical-scientific leadership. This included founding board members William A. Lynch, M.D., Boston, and John G. "Jerry" Masterson, M.S., of Chicago. Dr. Claude A. Lanctot, who was experienced in Quebec's older NFP movement, and had been a participant in the 1964 meeting, also served as consultant to the Foundation. With financial and legal assistance from the Foundation, Dr. Lanctot later launched the International Federation for Family Life Promotion, now located in Arlington, VA. (see *NFP Diocesan Activity Report*, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 8ff, for a history of that organization.)

In 1969, on the same day that humanity landed its first man on the moon, telegrams were sent to a dozen individuals to interview for the role of the

Foundation's executive director. This followed seven months of intense planning led by His Eminence, Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle of Washington, D.C., then Bishop John Wright of Pittsburgh, Attorney William B. Ball of Harrisburg, PA., and physicians from the National Commission on Human Life, Reproduction, and Rhythm. Attorney Edward B. Hanify of Boston became the first board chair. He was succeeded after ten years by Dr. William Uricchio of Pittsburgh, current president of the International Federation for Family Life Promotion. Cardinal O'Boyle personally was responsible for raising more than a million dollars from the American dioceses to underwrite research and education programs of the new foundation. No other national group of bishops in the world acted as decisively after the publication of *Humanae vitae* than the bishops of the USA.

The main thrust of the new Foundation's mission was to answer an explicit Papal request in *Humanae vitae* for new scientific research into the viability of child spacing based on the natural rhythms of human fertility cycles. "Uninterested" accurately describes government, medical, and scientific reaction to the Foundation's arrival on the Washington scene. Doors were opened at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the then department of Health Education and Welfare through the ambassadorial role of Foundation board member Paul B. Cornely, M.D. Dr. Cornely, son of a Black doctor who broke Washington's medical color bias a generation earlier, was head of the national organization of Black physicians. He enjoyed the confidence of the government's medical and scientific research leadership.



The original foundation board is pictured in Washington in 1970. Attorney William Ball, Dr. Frank Ayd and Dr. Mary Ella Robertson were not pictured.

Board member and later chair, Dr. William A. Uricchio collaborated with Dr. Philip Corfman, director of Child and Maternal Health Care at NIH, to organize the first international symposium co-sponsored by the Foundation in 1972. Dr. Corfman had been a participant in the 1965 meeting organized by Bishop McHugh and Catholic physicians in Kansas City. It was Dr. Corfman who coined the term "NFP" as official government terminology. At this 1972 meeting the Drs. John and Evelyn Billings presented their Ovulation Method to physicians from five countries. Proceedings of this historic meeting were edited by Dr. Uricchio and Mary Kay Williams, assistant director of the Foundation. Hardcover copies were published by the Knights of Columbus and Distributed around the world.

Dr. Cornely was to head the Foundation's second international conference in Washington in 1973. This session convinced American and international funding agencies that NFP deserved more serious consideration. During this window of opportunity, Mary Catherine Martin, R.N., then a doctoral degree candidate at Catholic University, appeared on the scene. The foundation soon won federal funding for her to integrate curriculum development, training, statistical, and media resources of Catholic University with NFP pioneers. More than 200 men and women then developed the type of precise

teaching instruments needed to solidify the new interest of the family planning "experts." Her work set the stage for the release of more than 31 books, training materials, and a film sponsored by the Foundation. Most were published by the Knights of Columbus.

During the mid-seventies, Mary Kay Williams and other Foundation staffers bombarded the population and family planning pundits with accounts of field work being done around the world. The Drs. Billings, Thomas Hilgers, M.D., Mercedes Wilson, John Kippley, Hanna Klaus, M.D., and Dr. Lanctot, along with Canadian, Brotosh, and French investigators became household names at HEW, NIH, WHO, the UN, and Planned Parenthood. Changing attitudes led to an international flood of NFP publications. The Foundation was a partner in sponsorship of a benchmark publication *The Menstrual Cycle* by Dr. Vollman. This 1977 publication by the prestigious W.B. Saunders Company, with Emanuel A. Friedman, M.D., as consulting editor, was a major breakthrough in the scientific literature. Earlier doctors Uricchio and Corfman had earned space in the *Studies in Family Planning* series of the Population Council with their account of the 1972 symposium. Dr. Hanna Klaus was a frequent contributor to the bulletin of the National Clearing house for Family Planning Information and other medical publications during her Foundation board membership. By the end of the 1970s Planned Parenthood publications had moved NFP into a more favorable light. PP's London-published *Handbook for Doctors* noted that the primary resistance to natural methods came from family planning field worker "bias" rather than scientific fact. Even before *Humanae vitae* was published in 1968, Planned Parenthood's leading statistician, Christopher Tietze, M.D., had called "temperature rhythm" as effective as the pill in avoiding pregnancy. This was largely ignored until ten years later.

This era brought the Foundation into a World Health Organization consultancy role for a meeting of world experts in New York. The Population Reference bureau was carrying more accurate NFP reports. Dr. Mary Martin's curriculum gave the WHO a lead on development of materials for international use later published by WHO and the British Medical Association.

Japanese, Swedish, and Chinese organizations already had been given approval to use Foundation materials without cost for translation into their native languages. Foundation materials were produced in the United States in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The Foundation's resources co-sponsored meetings in South America and Europe. Its international newsletter appeared in English, French, and Spanish. At one point more than 18,000 persons and organizations received this newsletter worldwide. Writers including Dr. Mary Ella Robertson of the Foundation board, Mary Shivanandan, and Nona Aquilar brought NFP into the popular media and commercial book publishing.

Msgr. John J. Seli, a Pittsburgh diocesan pioneer with NFP, joined the Foundation team when his NFP Federation of America merged with the Foundation to form the "Human Life and Natural Family Planning Foundation." Federation physicians John Brennan of Milwaukee and John McCarthy of Pittsburgh, became officials of the new organization.

Foundation lobbying for international attention to the research component of NFP led to a project underwritten by a multi-million dollar grant from NIH and conducted in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles at Cedars Sinai Hospital. Msgr. Robert Deegan, an early associated of the Drs. Billings, was an architect of this study. Subsequently, additional millions of dollars had been invested in follow-up studies at the Georgetown University School of Medicine.

In the foundation's fifth year, the Department of Medical and Public Affairs, George Washington University Medical Center, published a survey paper on "Birth Control Without Contraceptives." The bibliography of the 20-page paper contained 126 citations of medical research. Seven years later, then at Johns Hopkins

University, the same author released "Periodic Abstinence: How Well do New Approaches Work?" Dr. Phyllis T. Piotrow now included 578 citations in this 70 page document. Almost three quarters of the authors had enjoyed foundation funding or had appeared in its scientific meetings. Veteran NFP educator/writer Robert Kambic cut new ground by taking his research into Johns Hopkins program in pursuit of a graduate degree. Dr. Sheldon Segal, director of the Population Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, writing to Board Chairman Edward B. Hanify, Esq.,

at the Foundation attributed much of the progress cited above to the "consciousness raising" of the Foundation. Although the Foundation was not formally organizing delivery services, documented programs in the U.S. grew from 12 to more than 1,200 during the life of the Foundation. One of the final acts of the Foundation was to prepare a model plan with recommendations for the American Catholic bishops

as a basis for the organization of a Church-related network of diocesan NFP delivery services.

The Foundation directors approved a resolution to dissolve the corporation in May 1982, during a meeting at an international seminar that it had convened at Carlow College, Pittsburgh, PA. The directors agreed that the Foundation had realized many of its original goals and that continued operation would not achieve the expensive research targets still ahead. In addition, further publishing and training activities might even duplicate the work of other agencies growing stronger in the field. ■

Larry Kane, was the Executive Director of the Human Life and NFP Foundation for thirteen years. He and his wife Isabel reside in Pennsylvania.



Mary Kay Williams was a key international ambassador for the Foundation representing the organization across the nation and overseas.