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# NFP PIONEERS: "The Story of Northwest Family Services"

Beth Wells

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The fundamental thing that strikes one in reviewing the roots and history of Northwest Family Services is the interplay of time, serendipity, and grace. The threads first began to draw together in a Lenten study group. That gathering brought Mike and Rose Fuller and Fr. Richard Huneger together in a meeting that was to change the lives and paths of both the Fullers and Fr. Huneger. Mike and Rose had been searching for answers to their questions about NFP and the Church's teachings on married love. The 1970s were times of upheaval and confusion and the Fullers, like so many other couples during those years, had been met with a great variety of conflicting responses to their questions. In the course of discussion, Fr. Huneger was asked to explain the Church's teaching on birth control. Rose remembers that "his answer was the first that seemed intelligent and comprehensive. It made sense." They were beginning to find some answers. Out of acquiring the skills and developing the structure to provide NFP services for their parish, St. John the Baptist in Milwaukie, Oregon, Rose and Mike helped to establish a parish team dedicated to learning more about NFP and the Church's teachings. Fr. Huneger, impressed by the commitment of these couples to the Church and to good scholarship, felt impelled to lend whatever support and assistance he could to their efforts.

The tracings that brought these people together actually began years earlier. Fr. Huneger had studied theology at Innsbruck, Austria. In 1968 he took a course titled "The Medical Foundations of Marital and Sexual Ethics," from Dr. Josef Roetzer. Of those years Fr. Huneger says, "We were arrogant, full of self-importance, sure that we were theologians, and what after all, could some layman tell us? We had never read

*Humanae vitae* and everything seemed open to debate. The significance of this teaching never really entered our consciousness. It all seemed terribly inconsequential and theoretical, not nearly as interesting as the theological fads of the times. I took notes copiously, but it was all water off a duck's back." It took many years for the significance of Dr. Roetzer's work to fully strike home.

As the parish team reviewed existing programs and materials they found Dr. Roetzer's research and methodology to be eminently clear and comprehensive, and his synthesis of the symptoms of fertility a breakthrough. Tutoring and collaboration began with the parish team when Dr. Roetzer visited Oregon in order to oversee Fr. Huneger's translation of his book, *Family Planning the Natural Way*. This collaboration is the foundation that Northwest Family Services is built upon.

In 1980, Mike and Rose completed the Human Life Foundation regional teacher training process. From the beginning, Northwest's philosophy was to create a learning environment that was open and invitational. They wished to teach all the signs of fertility in a positive manner, to uphold the dignity of married love, and to present the teaching of the Church in a way that people could hear and understand. The instructional approach was to be interactive, with couples applying the Sympto-Thermal principles to a variety of charting situations, including the provision of follow-up support. The instructional approach was reviewed and approved by a respected team evaluating theology, methodology, medical accuracy, and pedagogical approach. Throughout the process of development Dr. Roetzer reviewed and approved the methodology. This working relationship continues to this day.

In 1983 Northwest Natural Family

Planning Services incorporated and became an affiliate of Providence Hospital in Portland, Oregon. What had been envisioned originally as a parish program began to grow and began to offer classes in NFP for the entire community.

Simultaneously, increased requests for teacher education were made by people who wished to utilize Northwest's approach. This launched the second tier of services. Northwest developed a teacher education program that integrated lecture, diagnostic learning, and a supervised practicum with review of client files. In 1991 Northwest Family Services teacher education program was approved as a comprehensive NFP teacher training program through the Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning. Northwest has trained approximately 300 teachers in 22 states.

The movement into a second educational area, teen chastity, began in 1987. In doing NFP presentation to teens in schools and church groups, it became apparent that there was a tremendous need on the part of young people for formation in sexual ethics and morals. Development of "The Bob Squad" - a peer education program was enthusiastically received. The Squad are young people committed to abstinence, able and willing to talk with their peers about it. These are real flesh and blood teens from the front lines of the culture. They laugh and tell stories, fall in and out of love and crisis, listen to alternative rock, play Chopin and the drums, and know the monologues of Monty Python. They are living proof that chastity is possible in the lives of the average teenager.

In 1989, Northwest was awarded a Federal grant for a demonstration project to teach and evaluate a values based, family-centered abstinence education program. FACTS (*Family Accountability Communicating Teen Sexuality*) was born. FACTS is based on research findings in sexuality education, and particularly those of Stan Weed, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for Research and Evaluation. Dr. Weed's research provides a wealth of information about what works and what doesn't in the field of sexuality education. Now in its fourth year,

FACTS has reached over 6,000 parents and teens in Oregon. Curriculum and workbooks for junior and senior high students and parents, along with teaching aids are available nationally. NW Family Services also provides in-service presentations on teaching sexual abstinence to both public and private schools. In 1990, the name of the agency was changed from Northwest Natural Family Planning Services to Northwest Family Services to reflect the broader scope of services offered.

Northwest is currently piloting a new program, *Keys to Sexual Freedom*. This is a Catholic teen abstinence program that integrates the fruit of Dr. Weed's research with Catholic teaching in a positive setting that involves and empowers

parents and teens to live the gospel message.

The third educational effort began in 1991. Working with teens and married couples, it seemed only natural to complete the continuum by addressing the needs of adults preparing for marriage. Piloted in the Archdiocese of Portland, *Always Faithful* utilizes the Rite of Marriage to "unpack" both the theology of marriage and practical issues. In five sessions, couples become familiar with the Catholic theology of marriage, the wedding liturgy itself, and examine issues such as family of origin, communication styles, conflict resolution, financial realities, sexuality, and NFP. Over the course of the series, participants meet five couples who share strong faith, a deep commitment to the Church's

teaching on marriage and family life along with a great sense of humor. *Always Faithful* works in partnership with parishes and pastors.

Paul VI in *Humanae vitae* speaks of married couples and says,

*To them the Lord entrusts the task of making visible to men the holiness and sweetness of the law which unites the mutual love of the husband and wife with their cooperation with the love of God, the author of human life. (HV, #25)*

This is the mandate the staff of Northwest Family Services seek to live out and the truth they seek to illuminate.

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## NFP PIONEERS: "A Life Time of Service, Edward F. Keefe, M.D."

*Edward F. Keefe, M.D. with Theresa Notare*

Several months back DDP Special Assistant, Theresa Notare, gave me a call and asked if I would write on my years of teaching selective continence for fertility control. Something she said particularly struck me; she asked, "How did you become a pioneer in natural family planning?" My astonishment was not unlike the character who learned he had been speaking prose all his life when he thought it was just simple talk—a "pioneer?"—"me?" That said, I will try to give you an idea of how I became involved in the NFP movement.

My story goes back more than half a century; City College and Cornell Medical School. As a medical student I learned about Latz's *The Rhythm* (1933) and while interning in 1937, I coached a couple in "periodic continence" guided by Latz's book. But it wasn't only science which concerned me, I was also guided by the encyclical letter of Pius XI, *Casti connubii* (1931). A later Pope said the indications for responsible parenthood were indeed broad; and another said that he hoped scientists would improve our ability to spot the woman's fertile days. That was

what I wanted to do even then. Later, when the Pill came onto the scene, some began to question the Church, I never did.

On returning from service with the Armed Forces in WWII, and resuming my practice as a gynecologist, I read how the woman's waking temperatures rose 0.6F after ovulation and fell at menses. While most women could see if a fever-thermometer registered in the black or in the red part of the scale, to read it in numbers and to graph the daily reading was beyond some. So I designed a special open-scale thermometer graduated in tenths Fahrenheit (0.1F) instead of fifths (0.2F) and helped produce it in the industry. Thus was born the Ovulindex Thermometer. I described it in 1948 in the medical literature. I next designed (in 1951) a form on which a woman circled a number each day. On that form I emphasized that changes in the mucus from the cervix were to be observed to supplement the temperatures. Having studied a few less practical accompaniments of approaching ovulation, I had settled on rheology; i.e., the study of the properties of flow of the cervical

mucus as reported by A.F. Clift [*In Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 39:1 (1945)] as the most convenient guide. Their changes, along with the temperature and some other signs, indicated the days for continence to avoid pregnancy (or those on which to concentrate to assist pregnancy.)

At this point I would like to interject that it was never my intention to design a "method" of family planning. I had simply wanted to help Catholic couples live the Church's teachings. It was always my aim to conform to the teaching of the Church; and yet I did want to make things easier for couples. In my experience with practicing medicine, I had had many patients complain that the period of continence for postponing a pregnancy was "too long." I wanted to "cut" the number of days of continence. At that time I wasn't even interested in method successes. It was, and is my opinion, that a method which burdens the user excessively is soon sighted. In my practice I had also seen the extreme of continence; e.g., "We're going to live like brother and sister." (Yes, I used to hear that!) Such an approach to family planning while 100% effective in avoiding a pregnancy was subject to an eventual failure. And so, I attempted to teach what I called "timely continence" based upon the observation of a variety