

# Diocesan Activity Report - NFP

Diocesan Development Program

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REPORT ON THE NATIONAL MEETING OF DIOCESAN NFP COORDINATORS,  
HELD AT CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 17-21, 1983

"Our view of the family is not based only on the social sciences. It is a viewpoint informed by faith...Thus natural family planning should be seen primarily in the context of the dignity of the persons as spouses and their conjugal love. It is not simply another method of birth control." These words from the address of His Eminence Terence Cardinal Cooke set the tone of the first National Meeting and Working Conference on Natural Family Planning at the Catholic University of America, July 17-21. Seventy out of 183 dioceses sent representatives to the meeting sponsored by the Diocesan Development Program for NFP and the National Center for Family Studies, the Catholic University of America. Cardinal Cooke spoke at the Dinner on July 18, which was attended by the participants and many friends of the NFP movement from the Washington, D.C. area.

It was the first conference, said Msgr. James McHugh, Director of the Diocesan Development Program, to focus on NFP in the context of Church tradition on family life and research on family dynamics and development. To achieve this focus on the family, the Center for Family Studies co-sponsored the meeting, and made their resources available to the participants. The objectives of the meeting were fourfold: (1) to provide a framework of family life theory and practice as related to diocesan program development (2) to explore some theological themes related to NFP (3) to provide a national forum for diocesan coordinators to meet and share experiences and (4) to explore the role of the Catholic hospital in a diocesan NFP program.

## Family Theory

Rev. Steven Preister, Director of the Center for Family Studies at Catholic University, outlined key concepts in family systems theory and detailed the developmental stages a family passes through over the life cycle. He described Familiaris Consortio as "too radical for the United States," which is pro-individual and pro-institutional. The marital bond is critical for healthy family development and NFP can help couples define and negotiate the boundaries of this relationship. Fr. Preister provided outlines and bibliography pertinent to his presentation.

## Theological Perspectives

In the opening address Rev. Donald McCarthy, Pope John XXIII Medical Moral Research and Education Center, stressed the cultural undermining of marriage in American society and the substitution of



erotic for agapeic or divine love. The erotic is not to be rejected, but should be caught up in agapeic love. To reflect Christ's total self-giving love sexual intercourse must be open to life. Only NFP reflects this covenant sign. "A person cannot truly find himself unless he gives a disinterested gift of himself," was the central thesis of Rev. Terence Brinkman's reflection on John Paul II's thought in relation to NFP and responsible parenthood. Fr. Brinkman's presentation reviewed the Holy Father's writings, including his book Love and Responsibility, written while Archbishop of Crakow. The pope's present writings, Familiaris Consortio and his many pastoral messages, reflect his philosophic studies and his pastoral experience. It is important to understand the philosophic and theological backdrop for the personalist emphasis in Pope John's Paul II's writings, and this in turn leads to an understanding of interpersonal communion and community. In fact, one of the major roles of the family described in Familiaris Consortio is developing a communion of persons.

Rev. John L. Thomas pointed up the challenge to Catholics of being a minority in a secular society. When widespread acceptance of sexual permissiveness, abortion, divorce, and an anti-child bias become the norm it is very difficult for Catholics to maintain family values. They need both education in evaluating majority values and support for living their own. Providing supportive structures must be a primary goal of Catholic family life ministry, and this applies especially to the NFP apostolate.

#### Diocesan Programs

With well developed marriage and family programs in place and growing grassroots and clergy interest in NFP, the Diocese of Cleveland was ready to implement the national diocesan plan on NFP, said NFP coordinator, Mary Ann Stanton. The NFP Advisory Committee included a volunteer management expert, whose skill in bringing disparate groups together proved invaluable. Focusing on policies agreed on by all aided the plan in Portland, Oregon, where the emphasis has been on developing parish-based programs.

A wealth of experience in starting and running NFP programs in hospitals and Church settings was provided by other panel speakers, Kay Ek of St. Cloud, MN, Wilma Stevenson, Washington, D.C., Stephen Burke, Rhode Island, and Walter and Kathleen Sweeney of New York. In addition four small group workshops surfaced problems and many solutions. The need for priest support and involvement was stressed. It can be achieved through clergy days, prepared homilies, the personal touch as in luncheons for priests with NFP couples. The witness of NFP user couples was considered of prime importance, especially in working with seminarians and the engaged.

General advice was to avoid the heavy-handed moral approach in bringing information of NFP to engaged and married couples. Make NFP available, said Fr. Salemi of Newark, N.J., and persuade people of its positive value in their lives. People too shy to attend classes in their own parish will go to a neighboring parish. Illinois is an example of a statewide organization with a published list of all NFP teachers. Regional and statewide organizations



exist in other parts of the country.

### Role of the Hospital

The panel and workshops on hospitals and NFP cited advantages of reaching the medical community and lending credibility to NFP as an effective method but at the possible expense of losing the marriage and family component. To work effectively in a hospital it is vital to get to know key administrators. Some hospitals offer facilities such as space, phone, and supplies, but, as the national survey indicated, a significant number wish to expand their programs. This is a challenge to many dioceses to provide information and advice to hospital administration. It involves finding physicians and other health care personnel who will promote and carry out NFP work from the hospital base, as in Boston.

Fr. Ronald Lawlor of St. John's University in New York described a one day symposium held in Houston in 1982. The symposium was co-sponsored by the Houston Medical Schools (Baylor and University of Texas School) along with three catholic institutions. The purpose was to invite as speakers competent and highly regarded scientists who are specialists in NFP, along with faculty members from the Houston Medical Schools whose areas of specialization are pertinent to NFP (OB-GYN, genetics, urology) and to provide a positive image of NFP to professors and students in a non-sectarian medical center. Planning took almost one year, and great patience was necessary. The scientists were ultimately persuaded by the professional competence of their colleagues interested in NFP, and the ethicists discussed ethical questions pertinent to family planning. The program was highly successful, and is worthy of consideration by dioceses with major secular medical schools. It is also adaptable for a large non-sectarian medical center. More information is available from the Washington office.

### Other Highlights

Four panelists described Fertility Awareness programs for adolescents, Sr. Kathleen McCafferty in Cleveland, Sr. Anna Walsh in Baltimore, Hanna Klaus, M.D. in several U.S. cities and the Virgin Islands and Dr. Ruth Taylor in Wichita, Kansas. John Kippley, Couple to Couple League, Mercedes Wilson, Family of the Americas Foundation, Dr. Thomas Hilgers, Creighton University, and Rita and John Marker, Human Life Center, outlined programs and resources available to assist diocesan coordinators and NFP teachers.

Reactions to the meeting were overwhelmingly positive with a request for a similar meeting next year. Requests for a wider exchange of information among dioceses were also voiced. Msgr. McHugh said that follow-up to this meeting is enormously important and challenging for the national office.

Prepared by Mary Shivanandan



### ARCHBISHOP GAGNON NEW PRO-PRESIDENT OF PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY

Following the death of Cardinal James Knox in June, 1983, Pope John Paul II appointed Bishop Edouard Gagnon of Canada the new Pro-President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, promoting him at the same time to the rank of Archbishop. Archbishop Gagnon had been Vice-President of the previous Committee for the Family, and brings to the new post a keen pastoral concern for family life. He understands and appreciates the natural family planning movement, was chairman of the Vatican delegation to the 1974 U.N. Population Conference, and in recent years has been involved in questions related to aging.

### UNITED NATIONS 1984 INTERNATIONAL POPULATION CONFERENCE

The U.N. will hold an International Population Conference in Mexico City on August 6-13, 1984. The main agenda will be a review of the World Population Plan of Action formulated at the 1974 World Population Conference held in Bucharest. Rafael Salas (Executive Director of the U.N. Fund for Population Activities) is Secretary-General of the Conference and Leon Tabah (Executive Director of the U.N. Population Division) is Deputy Secretary-General.

During the past six months four expert groups have met and forwarded their reports to the Preparatory Committee for the 1984 Conference, which will meet in New York in February, 1984. The Preparatory Committee will draw up a final agenda and a list of recommendations and proposed resolutions. The four topic areas covered by the expert groups are 1) family and fertility; 2) population distribution, migration and development; 3) population resources, environment and development; 4) mortality and health policy. The reports of each group will be sent to U.N. member states for their review prior to the February, 1984 meeting of the Preparatory Committee.

In a recent report, The State of World Population-1983, Rafael Salas gives some hints as to what might be expected. Recognizing that birth rates are declining in almost all nations of the world, they still remain the dominant concern of those who are committed to worldwide population stabilization (a balance between births and deaths). However, population stabilization may not be the best policy for every nation, and it must allow for periodic fluctuations. Many developed nations, particularly the U.S., argue that the developing nations must drastically reduce population growth and birth rates to achieve population stabilization and socio-economic development. Hence the importance of massive family planning programs. Many developing nations insist that a new world economic system and a greater sharing of economic and technological resources are fundamental to the development process, after which birth rates and population growth will begin to fall, though not necessarily to zero.

The Holy See has followed these issues and the population debates at the United Nations since 1974, and is already preparing for the 1984 Conference. Primarily responsible is the Pontifical Council for the Family in Vatican City.