

Diocesan Activity Report - NFP

Diocesan Development Program
1511 K St. N.W. Suite 337, Washington, D.C. 20005 (202) 737-1339

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REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING ON SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE COUPLE RELATIONSHIP

Thomasina Borkman, Sociology Professor at George Mason University and Mary Shivanandan reported on a survey of 50 NFP couples at an NFP Symposium in May, 1983. The survey included 25 teaching couples and 25 users, and the focus was on the benefits of NFP use for the total marriage relationship. Borkman and Shivanandan report:

- a) The use of NFP strengthened fertility awareness. Users reported better understanding of reproduction, appreciation of the naturalness of the methods, and deeper respect for the personhood of the other-particularly the woman. As Pope John Paul II said, "Sexuality....is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such." (F.C., 11)
- b) The use of NFP strengthened communication, both in regard to sex and NFP techniques, and on other matters pertinent to marriage and family life. This corroborates a standard finding - that good communication is essential to successful family planning behavior because it renews motivation and strengthens the mutuality of the responsibility.
- c) Couples using NFP reported positive attitudes toward their sexual relationship and in many cases indicated that it strengthened intimacy in marriage. The recent study, American Couples (Blumstein and Schwartz, N.Y., Wm. Morrow, 1983) indicates that sex strengthens the marriage bond. However, while it is important, it is not the only factor, and the quality of the marriage relationship is not dependent simply on the quantity or quality of sexual activity, but on the integration of sex into the total interpersonal relationship of the spouses.
- d) For the majority of those surveyed, NFP was positively associated with the religious/spiritual dimension of their lives. This ran from satisfaction with fulfillment of a moral norm to a more highly personalized and non-generalizable spiritual satisfaction. Recent demographic studies corroborate this finding. Specifically, Janssen and Hauser ("Religion, Socialization and Fertility," Demography, Nov. 1981) found that Catholic religious affiliation affects fertility primarily through an openness to the third or fourth birth, and that current religious practice is more influential than earlier religious socialization.

While the Borkman - Shivanandan sample is admittedly small and limited, the findings are supported by other studies, larger in scope and more specifically focused. Moreover, the findings support the Church's teaching and pastoral recommendations, especially as enunciated by John Paul II. For instance, in Familiaris consortio the Holy Father says that the choice of NFP involves "accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control." (F.C., 32) In his September 1983 Address to a Group of American Bishops he notes that NFP couples "often go through a certain conversion in becoming committed to the use of the natural methods, and they stand in need of competent instruction, encouragement and pastoral counseling and support." Carefully planned and extensively implemented NFP instructional programs are a basic necessity for pastoral care of the married.

BISHOPS WORKSHOP ON MORAL THEOLOGY

Pope John XXIII Center for Medical Moral Studies sponsored a four day workshop on The Bishops and Moral Theology in Dallas, Texas, February 6-10, 1984. Approximately 250 bishops from the U.S., Canada, Mexico and Latin America took part. The workshop is an annual event funded by the Knights of Columbus. Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Doctrine gave the keynote and concluding addresses. The final afternoon's program focused on NFP. Fr. Thomas Doyle, O.P. spoke on "The Moral Inseparability of the Procreative and Unitive Meanings of Marital Intercourse," followed by Msgr. James T. McHugh on "The Bishops and Natural Family Planning: Theological and Pastoral Implications" and Gerard Brunelle on "The Bishops and Natural Family Planning: Pedagogical and Pastoral Implications." The presentations covered a variety of topics and the follow up discussion allowed opportunity to emphasize the necessity of a well-defined and coordinated diocesan program. The papers and summaries of the discussions will be published in the spring by the Pope John XIII Center.

NFP AND PRE-MARRIAGE INSTRUCTION

Three dioceses report new approaches to the introduction of NFP to couples in pre-marriage programs. Familiaris consortio calls for a three - stage approach - remote, proximate and immediate, and urges that in the two last stages appropriate information related to sexuality and procreation be given. Speaking of pre-marriage catechesis Educational Guidance in Human Love specifies that "in order to live their sexuality and to carry out their responsibilities in accord with God's plan, it is important that spouses have knowledge of the natural methods of regulating their fertility." Given the increasing number of dioceses that require attendance at some type of pre-marriage program, the importance of this early introduction is heightened.

Portland, Oregon. Several parishes are testing a program which involves completion of the pre-marriage inventory and participation in an Engaged Encounter weekend. In addition, couples are expected to attend three out of four NFP classes prior to marriage.

Kansas City, Missouri. A number of leadership couples have been trained to carry out a four session pre-marriage program in their homes. The fifth session involves attendance at the first class of an NFP series at a hospital. Approximately 90% of the pre-married couples carry through and complete the NFP series.

Altoona-Johnstown, Pa. Six parishes are involved in a pilot program to introduce NFP in the pre-marriage courses and to encourage the engaged couples to begin charting prior to marriage.

In each of these programs the effort to make NFP instruction a normal part of premarriage preparation. A large number of dioceses make an effort to give engaged couples some information about NFP, but too often it is minimal and abstract. Actual participation in an NFP session or involvement in charting seems to heighten the interest of engaged couples.

REGIONAL AND STATE MEETINGS OF NFP GROUPS

State and regional meetings have increased in recent years, allowing for more couples to attend with greater economy. The following state and regional meetings are already scheduled:

- . Conference on the Family, March 23-25, 1984, Springfield, Illinois, Illinois State NFP Association.
- . NFP Workshop/Conference, April 13-14, 1984, Syracuse, New York, New York State Association for NFP.
- . NFP Conference, June University, South Orange, New Jersey, Dioceses of New Jersey, New York, Brooklyn and Rockville Center.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC DIOCESAN FAMILY LIFE MINISTERS, INC.

On January 10, 1984, Msgr. McHugh met with Fr. Tom Lynch USCC Family Life Representative and Frs. John Bishop and Peter Casey, President and President elect of NACDFLM, to discuss greater cooperation between diocesan family life leadership and those in the NFP apostolate. The majority of diocesan NFP programs fall under Family Life, but NFP has been a voluntary effort often distanced from other family life programs. Yet there is a mutual concern regarding sex education, pre-marriage programs and marriage enrichment. NACDFLM is growing into a national association for family life ministers - at the diocesan, parish and school levels. The Association holds an annual meeting and carries on its activities through special task forces which have a definite limited time and objective. Frs. Bishop and Casey acknowledged the growth of NFP, and believed that the Diocesan Development Plan and the national office had given those in NFP a sense of identity and some national coordination. Recognizing that NFP is essentially a part of marriage integration with their Board and Regional Representatives in their Spring meetings.

CONTRACEPTIVE RISKS - DISTORTION OF EVIDENCE ACCORDING TO A NEWS STORY IN THE NEW YORK TIMES (2/24/84)

Officials of the Center for Disease Control have published a report indicating that "there was no evidence that current use of IUD's, oral contraceptives, Depo-Provera or barrier methods of contraception was harmful to the women in the study." On the otherhand, a Department of Health and Human Services pamphlet, Contraception: Comparing the Options, lists a series of "Health Factors to Consider" for the Pill and IUD, and some long term effects on the ability to have children for each method. Moreover, advertisements for oral contraceptives carry a long list of contradictions and risk factors, especially in the professional literature. All this, not to mention the numerous studies in the professional literature pinpointing the morbidity factors associated with the pill or IUD.

The CDC study is quoted as stating that Depo-Provera "appears as safe as use of the other three methods of contraception" (i.e., pill, IUD and barriers). However, because Depo-Provera has been associated with tumors in animal tests, it has not been cleared for general use by the Food and Drug Administration. The study, reportedly involved more than 30,000 black women enrolled in an Atlanta family planning clinic. The group studied does not seem to be nationally representative, but a more serious question has to do with why a family planning clinic is using a questionable drug on its clients. One also wonders about CDC activities that seem directed to reversing negative criticisms of contraception or abortion.

PUBLIC INFORMATION ON NFP

Reader's Digest (11/83) carries an article entitled "Today's Contraceptives: What's New? What's Best?" Periodic abstinence, natural family planning and fertility awareness are considered as synonymous, and the judgement is that "most family planning specialists do not consider fertility awareness a highly effective method...." Consequently, the assessment of NFP is inaccurate and misleading.

The Department of Health and Human Services pamphlet, Contraception: Comparing the Options, while not distorted, exhibits a poor understanding of the various NFP methods, includes calendar rhythm as comparable to other NFP methods, and misses the point that for well-trained and motivated users, the disadvantages can be equalized.

NEW BOOKS

Shivanandan, M. CHALLENGE TO LOVE. KM Associates, 4711 Overbrook Road, Bethesda, Md. 20816. (1984). \$3.25 plus \$1.25 postage and handling. Quantity prices are available from KM Associates.

Kippley, J. THE ART OF NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING. Couple to Couple League, International, Inc., P.O. Box 11084, Cincinnati, Ohio. 45211-0084. (1984). \$6.95. This is an updated edition of Kippley's original book. Single copies available, prepaid, at \$5.00 from CCL, as well as information on the updated sections.