

Diocesan Activity Report - NFP

Diocesan Development Program

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POPE JOHN PAUL II ON RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

On March 1, 1984, Pope John Paul II spoke to a seminar on the Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Responsible Parenthood. The Holy Father spoke "from an especially pastoral point of view" in regard to reconciling conscience with the law of God. The Pope said that the conscience is only reconciled when it is in the truth, that is, when behavior is in conformity with the dignity of the person and the objective moral order. Pope John Paul II told the priests that in upholding the teaching of the magisterium, they did not teach something which couples cannot understand, because the truth was already in their hearts, and the magisterial teaching gave light and meaning to their own intuition. The Holy Father reminded those participating that "fidelity on the part of priests...must often be paid for at a high price. One is often laughed at, accused of lack of understanding and of severity, and of other things besides....With simple and humble firmness, be faithful to the Church's magisterium on a point of such decisive importance for man's destiny." Married couples, said the Holy Father, must perceive the truth and put it into practice. But they are often distracted by selfishness or concupiscence and tempted not to consent to the full demands of conjugal love. But the truth of the Redemption is that we are able to conquer weakness and to live the truth--"Our freedom consists in being servants of the truth."

On March 22, 1984, in a meeting with the clergy of Rome, the Holy Father emphasized again the continuity of the Church's teaching in Gaudium et spes, Humanae vitae and Familiaris consortio on responsible parenthood, respect for life and the dignity of the spouses. This continuous teaching "says 'yes' to responsible motherhood and fatherhood; it says 'no' to what is contrary to God's plan for conjugal love, and therefore to the dignity of the person of the spouses; in particular it says 'no' to everything that is artificial contraception. And it says 'no' decisively and clearly."

These addresses emphasize the Holy Father's concern for Christian spouses, and his awareness of the need on the part of priests for reassurance and encouragement in regard to the teaching of Humanae vitae.

REGIONAL/DIOCESAN MEETINGS

The national office decided against sponsoring a national meeting this year in hopes of encouraging more regional and diocesan meetings, and with the intention of running some smaller meetings in the Fall on specific topics. To date, Illinois and New York have had successful state meetings, bringing together representatives of the dioceses. Work is underway for a New Jersey/downstate New York meeting in October, and an Ohio/Michigan meeting in September. The national office will be involved in both meetings. The Ohio meeting will focus on NFP instruction in pre-marriage programs, bringing together those dioceses with successful experiences (contact Mary Ann Stanton, Cleveland, Ohio). The New Jersey/New York meeting is still in the planning stage; more information later. Los Angeles is also holding a September meeting.

TEACHER TRAINING WORKSHOP

A teacher training workshop in fertility awareness for high school students will be held in Louisville, August 10-15, 1984. Sponsored by the Archdiocese of Louisville's Office of Catholic Schools and the Natural Family Planning Office; conducted by Hanna Klaus, M.D., Mary Lou Bryant, M.Ed., and Rev. Joseph T. Merkt, M.A.T., STD. (1): Introductory Reporting Session (August 10, 1-3:30 p.m., Catholic Chancery, Louisville). Results of the Fertility Education Programs in Louisville and elsewhere, as monitored by Dr. Hanna Klaus; presentation of curriculum outline, along with student/school responses indicating assets and difficulties of such a program. (2): Basic Teacher Training Course (August 13-15, Office of Catholic Schools, Louisville). How to present basic concepts of male/female fertility to students; how to teach female students to monitor their own unique fertility cycles; how to explain to adolescents the values of NFP in marriage as taught by the Church. For additional information: Mary Lou Bryant (502/491-1981) or Father Joseph Merkt (502/585-4158).

BREAST FEEDING

A number of articles on breast feeding have recently appeared in the New York Times, in select United Nations documents and in Scientific American. The article in Scientific American is very comprehensive. The author, R.V. Short, states that "the steady decline of breast feeding is a major human tragedy. At one and the same time it has caused an excessive stimulation of maternal fertility and an enormous increase in infant mortality." Short describes how breast feeding works in inhibiting fertility, but also emphasizes the benefits for the child. However, to some degree he weakens his argument when he argues for the use of Depro-Provera to lengthen the period of sterility and lactation. He claims that this constitutes no

danger to the infant, but he tends to gloss over the possible harm to the woman. The argument would be stronger if it concentrated more on supporting the natural fertility inhibiting effect of breast feeding, along with NFP. In any case, the article is highly informative. ("Breast Feeding," R.V. Short, Scientific American, April 1984)

TWELFTH ANNUAL REPORT, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (November 1983), Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 54-55.

The World Health Organization (WHO) conducted a five-country study of the ovulation (Billings) method. Ninety three percent (93%) of 869 women with proven fertility were able to record an interpretable pattern of cervical mucus in the first of three menstrual cycles. This study of five countries and a number of women with typical cycles using the ovulation method indicates the relative ease of observation of the cervical mucus pattern. The pregnancy rate is consistent with other studies of natural methods using the cervical mucus symptom exclusively. The study points out that the primary reason for pregnancy was a conscious departure from the rules of the method.

REAUTHORIZATION OF TITLE X

Hearings have recently been held in the Senate on Title X. Dr. Hanna Klaus testified on the need for increased and separate funding of NFP programs, without a series of referral requirements. Congressman Waxman, who is managing the House bill, has introduced amendments that make the House version objectionable for NFP programs, but some of the problems may be worked out in a Senate-House Conference.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

Dr. Rotzer is now available on video tape for use in NFP instructional programs. More information on distribution as soon as possible....The FIDAF monograph on NFP programs which resulted from the November 1983 Hong Kong meeting should be published in July. More information on distribution later....A Symposium on Responsible Parenthood and NFP will be held June 3-8, 1984, at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Rome. Reports forthcoming....The American Academy on Natural Family Planning will meet in late August in New Mexico. More later.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION

The final documents for the August 6-13, 1984, International Conference on Population are now being sent to member nations of the U.N. The meeting will take place in Mexico City, but is limited to member states and select non-governmental

organizations. The Recommendations urge nations to make family planning information and services--"including natural family planning"--available to all individuals and couples. They also call for increased research into the fertility cycle. Nonetheless, there is a strong population control tone to the document, and particularly, emphasis on decreasing fertility. The Mexico City meeting provides a forum to debate some of these issues and perhaps redirect the focus of the document. For additional information, write to Msgr. James T. McHugh, 89 Ridge St., Newark, NJ 07104.

STERILIZATION STATISTICS

A September 1983 U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (Centers for Disease Control) study provides the following data on tubal sterilization and hysterectomy:

1. During 1979-80, an estimated 1,290,000 women 15-44 years of age had tubal sterilizations in the U.S., and the rates were 12.7 (1979) and 12.4 (1980) per 1,000 women.
2. Rates were highest among women 25-34, but no information was provided on parity.
3. More than 50% of tubal sterilizations were done on women who were in hospitals for a birth or an abortion. No estimates of private clinics.
4. The rates of sterilization were highest among black women, commencing at an earlier age than for white women. The highest rates geographically were in the South, and the report explains this on the grounds of a higher black population in the southern states.
5. On the basis of this study, it is difficult to determine whether sterilization rates are holding steady or increasing in the U.S.