

Diocesan Activity Report - NFP

Diocesan Development Program

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MARRIAGE PREPARATION AND NFP

On September 14-15, 1984, the diocese of Cleveland held a regional meeting of NFP Coordinators and teaching couples. Primary attention was given to the inclusion of NFP instruction in pre-marriage preparation. John Paul II clearly stated the pastoral responsibility in the Apostolic Exhortation on the Family: "Accordingly, every effort must be made to render such knowledge (i.e., of NFP) accessible to all married people and also to young adults before marriage through clear, timely and serious instruction and education in" (No. 33).

Educational Guidance in Human Love: Guidelines for the Teaching of Sexuality, the document of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education picks up on the Apostolic Exhortation on the Family and calls for a specific pre-marriage catechesis that will offer "the advantage of facing sexuality in the immediate prospect of marriage." This requires a real catechumenate, that is, a structured program to motivate engaged couples to live chastely and to see sexual love as one aspect of conjugal love. Thus, the only appropriate place for sexual intercourse is in marriage, where it enhances conjugal unity and responsible parenthood.

Three specific approaches were described and discussed in Cleveland. William F. Urbine described the Allentown program, still in the formative stage. At the urging of Bishop Welsh, instruction in NFP is to be included in all pre-marriage programs. Previously, one half-hour of a three hour Pre-Cana program was given to NFP; and a similar time block in Engaged Encounter. Plans now are to expand Pre-Cana to four sessions, two of which will be given to NFP instruction. The two sessions will provide instruction in all NFP methods; provision for charting and follow-up with individual NFP teaching couples; arrangement for a third session before or after the wedding to verify completion of the NFP instruction. The problems of the new approach include training new teaching couples with special awareness of marriage preparation; integrating the NFP instructors into what is already a satisfactory marriage preparation format; possibility of generating negative attitudes among the engaged who might see themselves as being indoctrinated. Since marriage preparation is already required and institutionalized in Allentown, including specific instruction in NFP requires many more NFP teachers. Both the existing Pre-Cana teams and the NFP couples

who will become members of the Pre-Cana teams will have to work within the overall level of faith commitment of the engaged. Where are these couples in their journey of faith? What do they know/think of the Church's teaching on marriage, conjugal love, responsible parenthood? What are their parenting intentions? How well can they internalize NFP instruction prior to the actual community life of marriage?

E.J. and Jeanne Coyle described the Baltimore module, which is a 40-50 minute presentation in the second hour of the sexuality section of Pre-Cana. The module has been assembled into 4 basic parts. The first section is a PERSONAL SHARING or witness by the presenter(s) concerning their initial introduction to the natural methods and their acceptance of NFP as a way of life. It is very important that the presenter(s) truly personalize Section I. Only an outline is provided because each person's story is unique. This is most likely the engaged couple's first awareness of NFP and by sharing the personal witness, we hope to capture their attention and go into more detail with the following sections.

Secondly, there is a FERTILITY AWARENESS section that addresses several basic principles. Fertility is compared to the life cycle and discussions include cycle length variation and mutual fertility. The desired goal here is to make the couple aware that there is a science involved in NFP and that past scientific principles lay the foundation for today's modern NFP.

Thirdly, there is a SEX IN MARRIAGE section. The effort is to dispel some confusion on the Church's teaching on birth regulation and also to help the engaged realize that the Church cares for the totality of their conjugal relationship. Steps to making any decision, and specifically the birth regulation decision, are emphasized.

Fourthly, the LOVE IN MARRIAGE section highlights the singular reason to make the NFP decision - LOVE. Putting NFP into terms of the day-in, day-out relationship is reinforced. After this section, the session would be an open forum so that couples might ask questions.

Slides and outlines have been prepared for the presenting couples. There is the problem that some Pre-Cana teams are not NFP users, or are not trained NFP teachers. Also, the module does not actually teach NFP, but is intended to generate interest and follow-up on the part of the engaged. The four parts of the presentation can be broken out and integrated into other parts of a Pre-Cana or Engaged Encounter format. Recruiting and training additional NFP couples is necessary to cover all pre-marriage programs.

Fr. Patrick Tobin described the Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri program. The program is based on the belief that it is not fair to provide pre-marriage preparation and allow couples

to move into marriage without having heard of NFP. The first session of NFP instruction is offered to all couples in Pre-Cana and Engaged Encounter, with the option of continuing the course thereafter. The couples are then referred to one of the diocesan hospitals where NFP is taught. There is no negative reaction from the engaged, and it is difficult to assess the measure of follow-up. However, increasing members seem to hear of NFP from other engaged couples and thus are going to the first NFP session early in marriage preparation. If couples have difficulty in attending the scheduled sessions, they are referred to an NFP teacher for private instruction.

The Kansas City-St. Joseph NFP program is hospital based, with 16 teachers trained at Creighton, as well as Fr. Tobin himself. Extension of the program, and particularly the marriage preparation effort, requires support from priests and doctors. Deanery sessions for priests and pre-marriage preparation teams have been carried out. While response has been limited, the sessions have created knowledge of and support for the NFP couples in the deaneries. A mailing was also sent to doctors offering information on NFP and a visit from one of the teaching couples. Almost 1/3 of the doctors responded favorably to the proposal.

Focusing on NFP in the context of marriage preparation at the Cleveland meeting provided an opportunity to look at some of the diocesan programs and to have an exchange of experiences. It seems quite clear that marriage preparation provides a "teachable moment" for NFP. It is an occasion for the engaged to look at sex in the context of the deeper and more lasting commitment of marriage. For couples who have lived together or have been sexually active prior to marriage, it is an appropriate time to emphasize that sex, fertility and mutual responsibility take on a new dimension or quality in marriage.

It is especially important to emphasize to the engaged that the realities of parenthood are more imminent. In marriage they take on the privilege and responsibility to share with God in the on-going work of creation. At the same time, there may be reasons for delaying the first birth and spacing or limiting subsequent births. Efforts must be made to arrive at mutual decisions, and to avoid being dissuaded from parenthood by what might be narrow-sighted or selfish concerns. Research on the transition to parenthood is of value to NFP teachers. This research has to do primarily with the timing of the first birth and the smoothness of the transition to parenthood affects the timing and number of subsequent births. We know that woman's education and religious background affect the transition. It is important to emphasize to the engaged that a woman's self-awareness includes knowledge of her fertility cycle and of the positive benefits of parenting. It is also important to emphasize that parenthood involves both partners and merits a more cooperative approach, especially in light of the educational and employment patterns among contemporary women.

DIOCESAN ACTIVITIES

1. The Archdiocese of Portland is beginning a study of NFP users. A pre-survey questionnaire has been mailed to 50 pre-test clients. More information from Sr. Grace, Family Life Office, 1715 N.W. Couch, Portland, Oregon 97209.
2. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has developed a slide presentation for its NFP teachers. The package is used at all NFP courses, and at some information programs. For more information write to Msgr. Charles McGroarty.
3. The dioceses of New Jersey and southern New York held a one-day convention on October 7, 1984. The central topic was NFP and fertility awareness for high school students. A more detailed report will be provided in the next newsletter.
4. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles, along with the L.A. Natural Family Planning Teachers Association, sponsored a three day Institute on Sept. 14-16, 1984. Drs. John and Lynn Billing addressed the Institute, initiated a six week tour of the U.S. On Sept. 17th Drs. Billing, Hume and Msgr. McHugh addressed a workshop for priests.
5. Pope John Paul II began a new series of audience addresses in early July 1984, focusing on the teaching of Humanae Vitae. The series has not yet been completed, but as soon as possible we will compile all the audience talks and make them available. By way of innovation or exception, each address has been followed by a press conference.

ARTICLES

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- HOFFERTH, Sandra L. "Childbearing Decision Making and Family Well-Being: A dynamic Sequential Model." American Sociological Review. (August 1983). Vol. 48, No. 4. p.533.
- PISTRANG, Nancy. "Women's Work Involvement and Experience of New Motherhood." Journal of Marriage and the Family. (May 1984). Vol. 46, No. 2. p.433.
- RINDFUSS, Ronald R., MORGAN, S. Philip and SWICEGOOD, C. Gray. "The Transition to Motherhood: The Intersection of Structural and Temporal Dimensions." American Sociological Review. (June 1984). Vol. 49, No. 3. p.359.