

Diocesan Activity Report - NFP

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UNDERSTANDING U.S. FERTILITY

The Population Reference Bureau recently published a booklet summarizing the latest findings from the National Survey of Family Growth. The NSFG is an ongoing project of the National Center for Health Statistics, and it has collected and analyzed data on U.S. fertility since 1955. Among the findings reported in this brief study are the following:

- Reflecting the continuing decline in fertility since 1957, the average number of children already born to ever-married women aged 15 - 44 dropped from 2.2 in 1973 to 1.9 in 1982. The average number of births ever-married women expected to have during their child-bearing years also dropped from 2.8 to 2.5.
- The data on premarital sexual activity suggest that the incidence is leveling off among white teenagers and possibly reversing among black teenagers.
- Divorce rates increased during the period under study, but the rate of divorce among ever-married women was lower for Catholics (25.8%) than for Protestants (34.1%).
- Sterilization is now the leading method of contraception in the U.S., used by 33% of all contraceptors in 1982 (22% female, 11% male), followed by the pill (29%), condom (12%), diaphragm (8%), IUD (7%), rhythm (4%).
- By the early 1980's 53% of American babies were breastfed, compared to 24% in the early 1970's.

The authors of this report, William Pratt, William Mosher, Christine Bachrach and Marjorie Horn are all on the staff of the NSFG. They emphasize that this is a summary, and that many more specific and in-depth reports will no doubt be forthcoming. This article will comment on two items from the report: Catholic fertility patterns and the use of NFP in the general population and among Catholics.

First, from the data presented, the fertility of Catholics is still somewhat different from that of non-Catholics. In 1973, the average number of children born to Catholics was 2.37,

compared to 2.23 for Protestants. By 1982, the gap had narrowed considerably -- 1.96 for Catholics and 1.92 for Protestants. However, the total births expected in 1982 was 2.63 for Catholics and 2.45 for Protestants. When broken down by age cohorts, proportionately more Catholics expected a third (29.7) or fourth (19.3) birth, compared to Protestants (24.8 and 16.2 respectively). The higher proportion expecting a third and fourth birth can be expected to lead to greater divergence in completed family size. Perhaps more significant is the fact that higher birth expectations among Catholic women, if given value and acceptance in their own religious/cultural milieu, may also encourage larger family size among Catholics. Thus, it behooves the Church, and especially those in Catholic family ministry which includes NFP couples, to show approval and encouragement for Catholic couples who, in the words of Vatican II, "with wise and common deliberation, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively larger family." (Gaudium et spes No. 50)

The second item for consideration here is the use of rhythm. In a footnote, this report describes rhythm or periodic abstinence as including "calendar rhythm and natural family planning, or temperature rhythm methods". However, the questionnaire makes specific reference to calendar rhythm, sympto-thermic and cervical mucus methods. Accordingly, the information provided in this report is significant and promising.

In terms of current contraceptive use, 4% of American women aged 15 - 44 were using rhythm in 1982, and 6% of Catholics were using rhythm. This is higher than the popular estimate of 5%, and may be even higher.

In comparing the contraceptive use of married women according to their intent to have more children in 1965, 1973 and 1982, the data shows a significant drop in use in 1973 and an upswing in 1982. The total of all women using rhythm was 10.8% in 1965, down to 4.0 in 1973 and up to 4.7 in 1982. Of those intending no more children the figures were 9.2 in 1965, 4.3 in 1973 and 3.5 in 1982. But for those intending future pregnancies, the figures were 14.3 in 1965, down to 3.1 in 1973 and a doubling of that figure up to 6.1 in 1982. This suggests that greater efforts should be made to inform women intending future childbearing of the advantages of NFP, since they may be more inclined to use the natural methods.

In effect, though the data on effectiveness is misleading, the overall information presented in this report is positive in regard to NFP. It should be a source of encouragement for those promoting and teaching NFP, and it also reminds us that we need more information -- and publicity -- in regard to NFP.

A copy of the report, Understanding U.S. Fertility, can be obtained from the Population Reference Bureau, 2213 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037 (\$3.50).

BISHOPS' WORKSHOP ON THE FAMILY

The annual Bishops' Workshop, sponsored by the Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Center and funded by the Knights of Columbus was held in Dallas, February 4 - 8, 1985. In attendance were 237 Bishops from the USA, Canada, Mexico and several Caribbean nations. The theme was The Bishop and the Family: The Church Addresses the Future. In the keynote, Dr. William McCready spoke of the family in the age of community, the age of institution and the age of pluralism, which he sees as the present. Paul Glick, former director of the U.S. Census gave a more detailed description of the American family today. Glick noted that trends that were evident in the late 70's are continuing today, though perhaps at a slower pace. Marriage and birth rates continue their declines, with larger proportions of women delaying marriage or remaining single. Divorce rates have risen during the past decade in all cohorts, with the greatest increases in the 25-29 age group. Birth rates are low -- 1.8 children per family -- with a slight rise in rates among women aged 30-34. However, this is not likely to change the demographic picture greatly because these are generally first, or at most, second births, whereas during the baby boom of the 50's they were the third and fourth. The annual increase in abortions has slowed somewhat, probably due to an increased use of sterilization.

Glick described some other familiar patterns:

- A steady increase in the proportion of working wives and mothers -- in 1982, 52% of wives and 49% of mothers with children under six. Most women are working because of economic necessity.
- Between 1960 and 1982 the proportion of children under 15 years of age declined by 7%, and the proportion over 65 increased by 54%. The society has been shifting from a child-centered to an adult-centered population.
- Median family income in 1982 was \$23,400.

Glick noted that declines in marriage and birth rates puts marriage and childbearing in a shorter time frame. It also faces newly married couples with greater concerns about aging parents who will live longer than past cohorts.

Msgr. Carlo Caffarra, director of the Pope John Paul II Institute for the Family in Rome said that "concern for the family is the first and most important expression of the Church's concern for man." He argued that we consider the identity of the family "in truth," that is, in terms of God's overall plan for the family and for each couple who, by marriage, initiate a conjugal community. The family is an extension of the conjugal community, and despite changing circumstances, couples can perceive the design of God in regard to marriage and family life. Couples have both perception and freedom, and thus can model their lives according to God's design, or attempt to fashion another model. But the dignity of the human person, in marriage, the couple - consists in freely accepting God's design and attempting

to constantly realize that design. Caffarra also urged the Bishops to uphold the sanctity of the family, especially against those elements that tend to profane it -- contraception, abortion and the renunciation of the educative duty.

Fr. Stephen Priester spoke of the recent paper of the USCC Commission on Marriage and Family calling for the development of a family perspective in all Church programs, and of the use of systems theory in dealing with the family.

Beth Soldo of Georgetown and Msgr. Charles Fahy of Fordham described some specific aspects of aging, and the need to see aging not as deterioration and dependency but as a new and active age. The family can do more to meet care needs of the elderly and can profit from their presence.

Dr. Edmund Pellegrino spoke of the health care needs of the family and the capacity of the family unit to sustain the health of its members. Bishop John Ricard noted the special needs of wounded families, particularly battered spouses and abused children. Robert Destro noted the decreasing legal support given the family in a society that escalates individual rights.

The presentations were excellent and elicited great discussion by the Bishops. The proceedings will be published by the Pope John XXIII Center, probably in early Fall 1985.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Creighton University Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center has announced that its next educational program for natural family planning teachers will begin September 28, 1985. Those interested should write to: Thomas W. Hilgers, M.D., Director, Creighton University Natural Family Planning Education and Research Center, 601 N. 30th St., Omaha, NE 68131 or call 402-280-4430.

The Center For Life in Washington, D.C. is looking for a NFP/ Adolescent Fertility Awareness Coordinator. Strong organizational, teaching and planning skills are necessary to administer this hospital-based program. A Bachelor's degree in biology or related field, good writing and public speaking skills and 3 years NFP experience are desirable. Send resume to: Executive Director, Center for Life, Providence Hospital, 1150 Varnum St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017 or call 202-269-7439.

The Diocese of Fall River, MA is seeking a part-time NFP Coordinator to train and recruit instructors, develop and implement information programs for schools, parishes, etc., and to coordinate the NFP segment of its marriage preparation programs. Inquiries should be sent to: Rev. Ronald A. Tosti, Director, Office of Family Ministry, 500 Slocum Road, North Dartmouth, MA 02747.