

Diocesan Activity Report - NFP

Seton Hall University
South Orange, New Jersey 07079

(201) 761-9647

May 1985

NATIONAL MEETING SCHEDULED

The Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning will hold a National NFP Coordinators Meeting June 19-22, 1985 at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. Dr. John Quesnell will deliver the keynote address focusing on the marriage relationship and NFP. Bishop Walter Curtis will address the meeting on behalf of the Bishop's Pro-Life Committee. Additional speakers include Dr. Konald Prem, Dr. Hanna Klaus, Dr. Frank Rice, Dr. Anthony Haynor, Mr. Pat Downing, Rev. William Smith and Rev. Donald McCarthy.

The Thursday afternoon session will primarily be a working one dealing with the future activities of the National Office of the DDP in relation to developments in the dioceses. We have also scheduled a number of workshops and an evening session on funding opportunities.

COMMENTS IN REGARD TO THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE REPORTS ON INTRA UTERINE DEVICES (IUD)

The reports in the current issue of the New England Journal of Medicine confirm what has been a growing public perception, that is, that there are serious problems associated with the use of the IUD. Specifically, there is increased risk of infection and increased risk of infertility. Use of the IUD in the U.S. has declined in recent years, probably reflecting a growing public awareness of the dangers associated with its use, and/or a growing dissatisfaction.

These latest findings signal a need for increased public information so that women may be forewarned of the dangers. Adequate information of the risks and contraindications is essential for informed consent, and informed consent is a fundamental principle of medical ethics in a religiously pluralistic society. Roman Catholic teaching has always rejected the IUD as morally unacceptable, not only because of its contraceptive nature but also because of its abortifacient action.

The IUD was heralded as a new and efficient contraceptive in the 1960's. It was seen as a new and effective way of bringing about a decrease in population growth and also as a useful mechanism in advancing greater sexual freedom. In the context of such promotional campaigns, the dangers for women were not adequately assessed, and according to some reports, not appropriately publicized. Little or no attention was given to women's overall health and well-being in the efforts to promote acceptance and use of the IUD.

This latest information certainly raises questions regarding the responsibilities of manufacturers of IUD's to provide adequate information for informed consent. Since the IUD has also been used in family planning programs funded by the U.S. in developing nations, this latest information calls for a review of its use in these programs since the principle of informed consent applies there as well.

Commenting on the scientific reports on the IUD, an editorial in the New England Journal of Medicine is somewhat misleading. The editorial states that "an ideal contraceptive, one that is completely effective without having adverse effects, has not been produced and will most likely not be developed in this century." I take strong exception to this statement. Natural family planning is an effective and safe method of family planning, one that adequately meets the social, medical, psychological and moral demands of an increasing number of couples in the U.S. As better educational methods are developed and new instructional programs come into existence, we expect the popular acceptance of NFP to grow. Evidence to date indicates satisfaction on the part of those who are properly instructed in the use of these methods. Unfortunately, in the evaluation of family planning methods, technological efficiency and effectiveness become paramount factors, with the result that the personal satisfaction expressed by NFP users as well as its moral acceptability are often overlooked.

Finally, much more attention should be given to the moral and ethical aspects on contraception, and the need for clearly understood guiding principles that go beyond efficiency and effectiveness. Moreover, by allowing considerations of family planning methods to be overburdened by ideological concerns such as population control and sexual freedom, the health of women and their capacity for childbearing are denigrated or ignored.