

Diocesan Activity Report-NFP

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USAID CHANGE OF POLICY

On July 8, 1985 USAID revised its policy regarding agencies that provide only natural family planning. Previously such NFP agencies were required to refer clients who wished other methods of family planning to agencies that would provide such methods. NFP agencies had objected to this requirement for a number of reasons, notably because it involved an NFP agency in a medical referral for which it was not prepared and because it could easily involve referral to agencies that hold philosophic positions and include programs and policies that are ethically unacceptable to NFP groups. After much investigation and dialogue, USAID officials understood the position of the NFP providers, and concluded that the referral requirement was not necessary and that more could be achieved by eliminating the requirement for NFP providers.

The change of policy has received considerable attention in the press, in Congress and among other family planning agencies. Unfortunately, the publicity has tended to confuse the issue, rather than clarify it. While it is true that some NFP groups lobbied for the elimination of the referral requirement, the compelling reason for USAID action was not simply political pressure, but the decision to take all reasonable measures to include NFP among the family planning programs sponsored by USAID. Accordingly, some further explanation of the reasons bringing about the change of policy may be helpful.

First of all, the referral requirement originated in health care legislation or guidelines to insure access to specific services while avoiding duplication of efforts. For instance, rather than have neighboring hospitals invest large sums of money in the same services or technology, it was argued that one hospital should specialize in one area such as heart disease and the next hospital specialize in cancer. Patients would then be referred by physicians and each hospital to the appropriate center for special diagnosis and treatment. The concept was brought into family planning to increase family planning programs, usually under tight control of the government sponsored family planning agency. To some degree, this created a monopoly in the family planning field for providers of contraception and sterilization, and left NFP programs on the outside.

In any case, NFP programs are essentially educational programs, and do not fit neatly into the concept of medical care. Couples or women are instructed about human reproduction and the woman's fertility cycle, and are expected to use the information to achieve or avoid a pregnancy. NFP requires careful and accurate instruction and commitment. However, the instruction doesn't require medical workers and the practice of NFP does not involve surgery, chemicals or other materials.

NFP providers have also objected to the referral requirement because most often it involves referring people to agencies that strongly promote limiting family size to two children and that also endorse all methods of contraception including abortion and sterilization. This creates a special problem for church sponsored agencies because it amounts to a denial or repudiation of the Church's moral teaching, and for all it often involves a compromise of the basic rules for practicing NFP.

Moreover, since one of the guiding principles of the government's family planning policy is to provide access to medically safe methods of family planning for all couples on a voluntary basis, it is reasonable to avoid setting up obstacles that impede inclusion of NFP.

Critics of the policy change claim that the USAID position is now at variance with regulations for domestic programs which include referral, even for abortion. All this means is that regulations for domestic programs should be brought into line with overall government policy. Some have also claimed that the referral requirement is necessary for informed consent, but the principle of informed consent is primarily directed to a clear explanation of the procedure, therapy or drug that the patient/client is going to use so that he/she knows its mode of action, its advantages, disadvantages and likelihood of success. It does not include referral to another doctor or agency for a detailed explanation of alternative procedures or therapies.

Unfortunately, the public debate about the referral clause has surfaced a lot of misunderstanding of what NFP is and its reliability. Clearly there is a need for renewed efforts to explain the various NFP methods, to support their respective reliability, and to avoid any criticism of the various NFP methods among NFP providers.

JOHN PAUL II

Pope John Paul II has spoken on marriage and family life on the following recent occasions:

- May 13, 1985 - To Representatives of Various Christian Confessions, Utrecht, Holland. Provides pastoral advice on mixed marriage.
- May 14, 1985 - Homily at Mass for Families, Maastricht, Holland. Emphasizes the contributions that the family makes for the wellbeing of the individual and for society.
- August 12, 1985 - Homily at Mass for Families, Bamenda, Cameroon. Specific mention of population and NFP.

"This does not mean that the Church fails to recognize the grave problems posed by population growth in some parts of the world, of the difficult situations sometimes facing couples in the responsible transmission of life. With respect to the moral aspect of these serious questions, I wish to express particular encouragement to your Bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders who are responding to the recommendation of Familiaris Consortio 'to make a more decisive and more systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied' (No. 35)."

- August 17, 1985 - Homily at Wedding Mass, Nairobi, Kenya. Refers to the place of NFP in marriage preparation.

"Thus, it should not be too quickly assumed that young men and women are already aware of the basic requirements for a well-ordered family life. They may in fact have great fears and doubts about whether they can live up to the Christian ideals of marriage. They should therefor be carefully instructed concerning the grace of marriage, the role of the Sacrament in the mission of the Church, and its relationship with the other Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance. Important too is a proper understanding of the natural of sexuality and responsible parenthood, including the methods of natural family planning and the reasons for its use."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- USAID has awarded its new five year \$15 million contract for the development of NFP programs in developing countries to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. (9/13/85). More information later.
- On September 1, 1985, the Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction was established in Omaha, Nebraska. The goal of the Institute's founders is to establish a multidisciplinary research, education and science program of sound scientific research on human reproduction. Dr. Thomas Hilgers is the founding director of the Paul VI Institute, which will continue the education, training and research programs currently provided by the Creighton University NFP Center. Groundbreaking and dedication will take place on October 1, 1985, and in the years ahead the Institute will expand its activities and programs. Dr. Hilgers sees the Institute as a memorial to the teachings of Pope Paul VI and *Humanae vitae*.
- The John Paul II Institute for the Study of Marriage and Family at the Lateran University in Rome has published the first issue of its new scholarly journal, ANTHROPOS. It is a multilingual review of studies on the person and the family, and includes articles on philosophy, theology, ethics and the behavioral sciences. A subscription for the two issues each year is \$13.00. Write to John Paul II Institute, Piazza S. Giovanni in Laterano, 4 - 00120 Rome, Italy.

- Sunday, October 6, 1985 is Respect Life Sunday. The Respect Life Manual has already been mailed to diocesan coordinators. Enclosed is a reprint of the article "Children: Do We Care?" Additional copies are available from the Diocesan Development Program for NFP, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

- Copies of Archbishop Martinez' letter on behalf of the Holy Father to the national meeting of Diocesan Coordinators are also available from the Diocesan Development Program for NFP.

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

"The Role of Love in Marriage: A Historical Review", by John Connery, S.J. in Communio, Fall 1984. Fr. Connery traces the theological history of the concept of conjugal love to the earliest centuries, showing that it is not a discovery of contemporary times but a very traditional part of the Church's teaching on marriage. He recognizes that it was not always upheld by society nor achieved by couples, but was nonetheless an important basis for Christian marriage.

"New Life and its Lord: Ways of Saying Yes or No", by Rev. Edward Bayer in Ethics and Medics (newsletter of John XXIII Center), September 1985. A brief and inspiring article on NFP and how its use correlates with the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood.

"Marriage Trends in America: Estimates, Implications and Causes", by Thomas Espenshade in Population and Development Review, June 1985. Espenshade is Director, Program in Demographic Studies, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C. In this article, Espenshade analyzes contemporary trends and provides understanding of the economic pressures on the family. He agrees that marriage has been weakening as a social institution. Yet, he recognizes that some aspects of marriage seem to endure despite changing conditions, and will likely continue. Without predicting future events, he allows the reader to speculate as to whether current trends signal more disruption and family breakdown, or whether there is a cyclical pattern that is bringing back some of the old values and will lead to a rebound of more traditional expectations and commitments.

"Traditional Marriage: An Image or a Reality?" by Thomas Fox in Journal of Family History, Summer 1985. Fox is Associate Professor of History at McNeese University in Louisiana. Fox provides a critical analysis of his authors and some interesting observations on love in marriage and courtship.

"Sex in the West", by Lawrence Stone in The New Republic, July 8, 1985. Stone teaches history at Princeton. The article covers considerable ground and while one may question some of Stone's conclusions, he makes some thought-provoking comments on the books/articles surveyed.