

Diocesan Activity Report-NFP

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CARDINAL BERNARDIN'S REPORT

Cardinal Bernardin delivered a long report on NFP activity in the U.S. to the American Bishops at their November 1986 Annual Meeting. The Report was frank in its assessment of the status quo, and positive in its projections. But the key to future progress is increased institutionalization of NFP. That means that NFP must be given an appropriate place in all pastoral programs related to the family, and it also means that all other ecclesial structures must accommodate to the NFP component.

The Report had been discussed by the NCCB Pro-Life Committee in June and again in November, and the Committee unanimously endorsed its recommendations. The Bishops recognized that NFP activity is overwhelmingly a voluntary lay effort in the dioceses. Teachers and promoters are well trained in NFP methods, and competent in teaching. But time and energy is limited and much more institutional support—including access to church offices and agencies, promotional assistance, personnel and money is needed. Note well, however, that the Report deals with diocesan programs, that is, programs that are responsible to the Bishops and a part of the

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NFP SURVEY UPDATE

Dr. Grace Boys of the University of Portland is continuing work on the national study of NFP programs. This study will explore the effects of diocesan NFP programs upon client satisfaction and marriage enrichment. The overall purpose of the study is to develop pastoral guidelines for NFP program development across the country.

In early December, briefing sessions for NFP coordinators were held in Newark, NJ and Chicago, IL. Dr. Boys explained that the nationwide survey would assess five areas of NFP:

- 1) continuance rate
- 2) client satisfaction with instruction and usage of NFP
- 3) effects of using natural methods upon marriage
- 4) intention and effectiveness of method
- 5) demographic profile of NFP clients

Questionnaires will be mailed to participating couples in March 1987. The final report should be completed by February 1988. At the present time, there are twenty-five dioceses participating in the survey.

NAT'L MEETING OF NFP COORDINATORS

Plans are underway for a national meeting of diocesan NFP coordinators at Seton Hall University in South Orange, NJ. The meeting will be in late June or early July. Mark your calendar now and more information will be mailed by mid-February.

ILLINOIS CONFERENCE

INFPA: Striving to Serve the Client More Effectively is the title of this year's conference sponsored by the Illinois NFP Association. The dates of the conference are March 6, 7, 8, 1987. For more information:

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SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD

The case of Baby M, a court struggle between two couples in New Jersey, has focused attention on surrogate motherhood. In this case, a young married mother agreed to artificial insemination by a man who with his wife had decided against attempting their own pregnancy. The final result was a healthy little girl who, according to the agreements, was to become the child of the father and his wife. The mother, however, found herself unable and/or unwilling to carry through after the birth, and the court is trying to determine who will have the child.

The New Jersey Bishops addressed the issue of surrogate motherhood in the context of possible legislative activity independent of the Court case. In opposing surrogate motherhood, the Bishop's letter argued that children are a gift from God and surrogate motherhood reduces the creation of a child to a commercial transaction in which the unique dignity of the child is diminished. Surrogate motherhood also "violates the biological and spiritual unity of husband and wife" because it introduces a third party into the marital and parental relationship. Perhaps most significant is the fact that the surrogate mother is required to deny two fundamental natural bonds that the behavioral sciences continually tell us are most important for the child. First, there is the maternal bond that begins early in pregnancy and is strengthened as pregnancy progresses, assuring the child nurture, acceptance and security. There is also the interpersonal bond of intimacy that deepens the unity between the parents and sustains the woman through her pregnancy. It is little surprise that the mother of Baby M now feels herself unable to give up the child with whom she and her whole family, perhaps imperceptibly, had developed the familial

bond prior to and immediately after birth.

As the New Jersey Bishops' point out in their letter, there is also a moral issue involved in surrogate parenting. Surrogate motherhood, said the Bishops, "is totally incompatible with the sanctity of marriage and the nature of the family, the basic unit of our social structure. The creation of human life cannot be reduced to the pecuniary consideration of a contract which by its nature ignores the humanity of those involved."

Procreation thus is linked to the union, biological as well as interpersonal, of the spouses and parents. Efforts at childbearing should not be isolated the interpersonal relationship of the parents or ignore the innate dignity of the child before as well as after the birth.

MORE ON RU-486

In its December 18, 1986 issue, the New England Journal of Medicine carried an article on the new, controversial RU-486 pill. This pill taken once a month would induce abortions in women very early in their pregnancies. The significance of this pill would be that it would enable women to abort in the privacy of their homes and not in the abortion clinics.

The authors of the article are also the doctors who are
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Father Herbert Smith's expanded version of Natural Family Planning: for the Very Best is now available from the Daughters of St. Paul. The pamphlet is 64 pages in length and it is priced at \$.80 per copy, however for quantity orders of 100 or more the price is \$.55 per copy. For more information:

Daughters of St. Paul
50 St. Paul's Ave.
Jamiaca Plain
Boston, MA 02130

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total pastoral activity of the dioceses.

While the document is referred to as a Report, it is in fact much more. It is a reference document for the Bishops to use in evaluating their diocesan programs and planning for improvement. It is a source of information for other family agencies in the dioceses. It is a new action plan for diocesan NFP groups and it is a working agenda for regional and national diocesan NFP meetings. Copies have already been widely distributed, but additional copies are available from the DDP office.

USCC URGES COURT TO RESPECT LIFE, FAMILY INTEGRITY

In an amicus curiae brief in the Hartigan v. Zbaraz case, the U.S. Catholic Conference has urged the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold parents' rights to be consulted when their minor daughter seeks an abortion.

The USCC brief argues that Illinois struck a proper balance among state, individual and family interests by "allowing parents a chance--twenty-four hours--to... reflect with their daughter" on a decision with grave and irreversible consequences. The Court of Appeals ignored the state's important interest in meaningful family consultation under its opinion, "a telephone call that an abortion would be performed imminently at some remote location" would be adequate notification to parents.

The brief also argues that even prior Supreme Court rulings on abortion "do not negate the principle that the family unit is itself a privacy interest deserving of constitutional protection." But it notes that the "confusion" evident in the appellate court's ruling "is symptomatic of larger problems in abortion jurisprudence," because the Court's prior abortion rulings have undermined valid rights and interests (such

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POPULATION INFO

The recent population literature confirms the continuing decline in births in Western Europe and most of the industrialized world, particularly English-speaking industrialized countries. The U.S. birthrate has been in decline for several years and is presently at 1.7 births per woman which is below the replacement level of 2.1 births. Recent U.S. Census Bureau reports indicate:

-American women are postponing marriage longer than ever before, with the consequence of higher age at first birth.

-The number of unmarried couples living together has leveled off, after sharp rises since the early '70s. Unmarried couple households amount to 4% of all households.

-In 1985 there were 128 divorced people for every 1000 marrieds, up from 47 per 100 in 1970.

NFP teachers occasionally seek info on population trends and policies, either in light of their own studies or for courses they are giving in high schools or adult education classes, and the DDP makes an effort to have such info available on request. The U.N. Population Commission meets in late January to assess world trends and a more complete report will follow that meeting.

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testing the pill in France. They argue that under a doctor's supervision, RU-486 can be effective and quite safe. Out of 100 women the French team gave the pill to, 85 pregnancies were terminated. The remaining 15 had surgical abortions.

The Paris manufacturer plans to put RU-486 on the market by the middle of 1987. The drug is not expected to be immediately available in the United States because of its abortifacient nature. Nonetheless, in time it will likely be developed and marketed in the U.S. because it makes termination of pregnancy even more secret and private than it presently is.

GALLUP POLLS

A recent Gallup Poll (Nov. 86) surveyed Catholic opinion on whether the Church should adhere to a change in its teaching on sexuality morality. Among practicing Catholics (those who attend Mass weekly and consider religion as very important in their lives) public opinion is almost evenly divided with 46% favoring change, 45% opposed to change and 9% with no opinion.

Among "all Catholics", 57% favor change, 36% oppose change and 7% have no opinion. The overall figures are influenced by non-practicing Catholics where 68% favor change and 26% oppose any change. Note that this question has to do with "sexual morals", not exclusively with contraception. Even so, even among non-practicing Catholics a significant minority oppose any change.

Other Gallup data show that 48% of the American population believe religious teaching is gaining in impact while 39% hold the opposite view. Most prominent among those saying that religion is increasing in influence are young adults (18-29 years), persons with a college background, Southerners, Westerners and evangelicals.

The almost even split among practicing Catholics on sexual morals can be seen as a challenge to Church leaders and teachers to explain the teaching more clearly and more repeatedly.

On another question, almost 75% supported a ban on sexual violence in video cassettes, movies and magazines. Almost 92% favored banning movies and magazines featuring sexual acts involving small children. Responders were more lenient in regard to non-violent sex, with less than half favoring a ban on x-rated movies or magazines displaying nudity. The growing revulsion with sexual violence and

exploitation may in the long run help temper what has been a trend toward sexual permissiveness.

STERILIZATION

A Research Note in Family Planning Perspectives (September/October 1986) indicates the 26% of sterilized couples want more children, and 10% want a reversal of the operation. The article describes sterilization as the most popular method of contraception in the U.S. Among Hispanics 49% want more children and 30% want reversal. Regret is also strong among younger couples, especially the poor and those on Medicaid.

The Note indicates that, overall, there is a substantial level of dissatisfaction with sterilization as a means of birth control. A careful reading of the article also prompts the question about whether some women have been strongly persuaded, perhaps without sufficient understanding to meet the criteria of informed consent.

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as the state's interest in regulating the medical profession) which would have been vindicated if the issue were anything but abortion. If the Court interprets Roe and other precedents as requiring it to follow the appellate court in this case, it should "reconsider and abandon" them.

The Family of the Americas Foundation has scheduled two national training sessions in 1987, one in Corpus Christi, Texas, May 29-June 6 and one in Chicago in the Fall. For more information:

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