

Diocesan Activity Report-NFP

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1987 NATIONAL MEETING

The biennial National Meeting of Diocesan NFP personnel was attended by 145 participants from 62 dioceses. The meeting ran from Wednesday July 8 through Saturday, July 11th. There was an equitable distribution of participants from all regions of the country. Bishop Walter Curtis, a member of the NCCB Committee for Pro-Life Activities, was present for the opening days of the meeting.

There were two dimensions to the program. The substantive presentations focused on marriage and family life, and particularly on the implications of the Instruction on Respect for Human Life and the Dignity of Procreation. Rev. Robert Harahan, STD, Professor of Moral Theology at Immaculate Conception Seminary at Seton Hall, gave the keynote address in which he explained the background and principles of the Instruction. In the course of the following days, Dr. Franklin Desposito, Professor of Genetics at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and Dr. John Driscoll, Chief of the intensive neo-natal care unit at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, described current advances in genetics and neonatology, two of the specialized areas addressed in the Instruction. Dr. Hanna Klaus reviewed advances in scientific research in NFP, and Dr. James Fox provided information on the cause and therapeutic approaches to infertility. Dr. George Perez of St. Michael's Hospital Center in Newark, N.J., explained the causes and present status of AIDS. Dr. Miriam Labbok of Johns Hopkins University provided an overview of

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS - "INSTRUCTION"

The recent Vatican Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation is a serious articulation of a believing community's moral commitment in the realm of human sexuality and procreation. The document addresses by its very nature issues of family life, Christian marriage and social teaching. While some of the document's principles are challenging to contemporary thinking, its willingness to address complex issues is noteworthy. In particular the Instruction demands accountability and calls for profound formation of conscience in the face of critical decisions. Underlying the Instruction are three principles which direct the document and shape responses to it. These are the person and the personal vocation; the dignity of newly begotten life; and marriage and procreation.

Vatican II emphasized the theme of personal vocation, especially in its pastoral document Gaudium et Spes. The person must be - in keeping with biblical tradition - the center of moral deliberation and decision making. If each person is a vocation, the questions of biomedical technology must be rethought.

This personal emphasis becomes clear in the reverence that ought to be shown to newly begotten life. Conception, then, is not a biological moment, but a critical event in a person's life. Such a recognition prompts the assertion that the conjugal union of husband and wife is the proper context for

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NATIONAL CERTIFICATION PROPOSAL

A major proposal outlined by Msgr. McHugh and discussed by conference participants was the NFP Instructor National Accreditation initiative. The Diocesan Development Program proposed that a committee be appointed to study the best approach to national NFP certification standards. The fundamentals of the process are: it would be diocesan based; NFP teachers would be expected to understand and support the contemporary theology of marriage and the Church documents concerning procreation. They would be brought up to date by diocesan seminars; knowledge of the methods would be ascertained by testing; there would be an appropriate grandfather clause and there would be built in renewals.

The meeting broke into several groups to allow for the full discussion of these ideas. Some of the problems raised included: what would be the nature of the testing process; the need for input and endorsement by diocesan NFP coordinators; and how could the process cover the different training programs and philosophies of all the provider groups.

The benefits would be:

- 1) Couples trained in one diocese would not have to be retrained in another.
- 2) There would be quality standards for NFP.
- 3) It would give a sense of unity of purpose to NFP within the Church.
- 4) It would allow for improved communication among providers.
- 5) It would assist NFP to grow and prosper.

Despite the problems and concerns, there was very strong support, virtually unanimous, for the proposal among conference participants. As one well known NFP director for a major U.S. center said, "Its about time."

Robert Kambic

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL MEETING

During the four days of the 1987 NFP Conference the participants listened to talks, engaged in conversation, and examined materials on display from various provider groups. The program was quite full and demanding, but as one of the participants noted, also "...stimulating, informative ... highly inspirational, and should serve us well throughout the year."

Evaluation forms were included in the Conference information packets. Of the 145 participants, most gave verbal feedback, while approximately 40% handed in the forms. The overall response was quite positive. Comments ranged from praise of the speakers to appreciation for the facilities. Specific comments on particular points included: "The panel discussions are very helpful to exchange ideas and helpful hints." "Loved talking to people from other programs and to realize there are far more similarities in our teaching encounters than differences..." "I'm so glad the unanimous agreement to proceed with certification criteria happened!"

Lack of enough free time and slotted program space for group sharing were the top negative responses. Organizational issues, (such as providing conference agenda in advance and child care provisions), were among the suggestions for future conferences. Topics such as "Spirituality of NFP"; "starting...diocesan administrative structures for teaching NFP"; "psychology of volunteerism"; and "media use", were also given as items for a future program.

(National Meeting cont.)

research on breast feeding and Dr. John Queenan of Georgetown University Medical Center described the work being done there under a USAID grant for NFP development in developing countries. Rev. Stephen Priester of the National Center for Family Studies, Philip Mango of St. Michael's Institute and Greg Risberg of Chicago, gave presentations on marriage and family life topics.

Following up on the report of Cardinal Bernardin at the November, 1986, NCCB meeting in Washington, D.C., which called for a more intensive institutionalization of NFP programs at the diocesan level, the participants developed strategies for systematic evaluation of programs. A standardized form for periodic reporting of NFP activities to the national office of the DDP was agreed upon, to be put into use by September, 1987. The participants also worked on a proposal for nationwide accreditation of diocesan NFP teachers, for which there is widespread support. A task force will be appointed to develop a specific protocol that dioceses will adopt to assure competent training of teachers and eventual accreditation. Note that this proposal is directed to diocesan programs.

The appropriate inclusion of NFP in pre-marriage programs and teenage sexuality education were also explored, with emphasis on successful program approaches. A model college course in NFP was described by Sr. Thomasita Homan from Benedictine College.

In addition to the two central tracks of the program, opportunity was provided for presentations by Mrs. Mercedes Wilson of the Family of the Americas Foundation, Shirley Hoefler of the American Academy of Natural Family Planning and Pat Homan of the Couple-to-Couple League. Workshops were conducted by Dr. Robert Jackson on breast feeding and Dr. Edward Keefe on the cervical sign.

(Keynote Address cont.)

bringing about new life. A bold statement of rights made on behalf of the newly conceived is situated on such a foundation.

Finally John Paul II speaks forcefully to the theme of the human body and marriage. His influence is clear in the Instruction as it seeks to balance the unitive and procreative dimensions of human love. Separate subjects becoming one in marriage is the mystery which science, technology and society must acknowledge. Even the pain caused by infertility is analyzed in terms of the meaning of the human person and marriage. Both body and spirit need to be kept in mind to avoid an improper emphasis in a limited or partial aspect of procreation.

Rev. Robert Harahan, S.T.D.

NEWS BRIEFS

Drs. John and Evelyn Billings will be in the U.S. giving a series of talks during the month of October on the following dates:

Oct. 7th and 8th - Diocese of Corpus Christi, TX.

Oct. 20th - Diocese of St. Augustine, FL.

Oct. 24th - Archdiocese of Portland, OR.

Diocese of Philadelphia, PA

Msgr. Charles E. McGroarty, former Director of the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Family Life Bureau, will be honored as Founder Planning Program in Philadelphia at a dinner on Sept. 11, 1987. Also recognized at the dinner will be Mrs. Doris McHugh, who with her late husband Jack, worked closely with Msgr. McGroarty, to establish the beginnings of the NFP program in Philadelphia.

TITLE X REINFORCED

On September 2, 1987 regulations were published in the Federal Register in regard to the statutory prohibition on use of appropriated funds in programs where abortion is a method of family planning. These regulations spell out in detail the meaning and implications of Section 1008 of Title X of the Public Health Service Act providing that "none of the funds appropriated under this title shall be used in programs where abortion is a method of family planning." This original 1970 Public Health Service Act which authorized U.S. government funding of family planning programs.

Responses to the new regulations must be sent to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services within 60 days, that is, by November 2, 1987. Earlier Regulations and Guidelines required family planning agencies receiving Title X funds to provide a wide range of services; including access to all methods of family planning and abortion counseling. For NFP-only programs this was interpreted to mean that the NFP agency would provide either a) information on all contraceptive methods or b) referral to the nearest Title X clinic that provides the services and information specified in the Title X guidelines. In effect, the counseling and referral requirements have prevented NFP agencies from participating in the Title X program.

Section 59.8 of the new proposed Regulations eliminates the requirement for abortion counseling or referral for such counseling. The last sentence of 59.8 states:

"One effect of these regulations will be to insure the ability of otherwise eligible organizations or programs that refuse to engage

in abortion - related activities to receive support under this subpart."

In order to eliminate all counseling and referral requirements, it is necessary to support and improve these proposed Regulations. Write to the DHHS at the address below urging adoption of the Regulations, especially Section 59.8. In your letter emphasize that agencies that provide NFP services are conscientiously opposed to providing other contraceptive services.

On another level, the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education is also considering Title X appropriations, and is considering a special stipulation preventing adoption of any new Regulations. Thus it is also important to write to the U.S. Senators from your state asking them to legally ensure that NFP agencies may receive Title X funds without being forced to violate their conscience or professional integrity by counseling or referring clients for abortion or for other methods of contraception.

Address: Deputy Asst. Sec. for
Population Affairs, DHHS,
P.O. Box 23993, L'Enfant Plaza,
Washington, D.C. 20026-3993

(News Briefs cont.)

Diocese of Saginaw, MI

Michigan Diocesan Directors of NFP and the Michigan Catholic Conference have published a brochure on NFP which is being distributed to all parishes, diocesan offices and institutions in the State of Michigan during August. Anyone interested in a copy of the brochure can contact Marian Ruth, St. Mary's Hospital, 830 S. Jefferson Ave., Saginaw, MI 48601.

* Thank you for your response to our call for info. Due to the number of responses selections are prioritized through date, general interest, and importance. Let's continue to share news of our work with each other!