



# Designed by God Guided by Love Open to Life

Rev. Msgr. Robert R. Cannon

## NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

**T**he natural beauty of creation has the power to draw us into the mystery of God. We can see, feel, smell, and sense God’s creative handiwork in so many ways. Consider when we pause to savor the burst of colors in a sunset or the rhythmic sound of waves rolling upon a beach. It might be in the playful antics of a kitten or a child’s first step. Everything reflects and proclaims God’s glory and love. The Church teaches that through natural revelation, “even before revealing Himself to man in words of truth, God reveals Himself ... in the universal language of creation, the work of His word, of His wisdom” (CCC, 2500).

The Church teaches that through “natural reason, man can know God...on the basis of His works” (CCC, 50). When we allow ourselves to be attentive to the wonder of creation, we begin to see that creation is not random or accidental, but ordered and purposeful. God has established laws within creation on which humanity can rely with confidence, laws that are to be respected by the stewardship of men and women (see CCC, 346).

### **Designed by God**

In creating man and woman in His image and likeness, God enables us to share in His own life (see CCC, 225). Human dignity flows from this divine design. And, because God is love, divine love is inscribed in the human body itself. St. John Paul II taught that the body has a “spousal meaning” (see General Audience, April 14, 1982), as God has written into human nature the vocation and responsibility of love and communion (see FC, 14). It is found in every man and woman, expressed in sexuality and fertility, marriage, and procreation. And here is where the modern methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) stand ready to help. NFP supports the

Creator’s sublime design for marriage, guided by love, and open to life.

God’s creation of male and female is not incidental but intentional. Sexuality, therefore, is purposeful. It draws people out of isolation and toward communion. It affects “every aspect of the human person” and it allows man and woman to unite in the unique communion of persons called marriage (see CCC, 371–372; 2332–2335). Flowing from this reality of community, marriage reflects God’s own inner life—a communion of love that is both life-giving and faithful.

### ***Guided by Love***

Guided by love means to be directed toward the good of the other. Love, by its nature, is relational. St. John Paul II powerfully expressed this truth when he wrote that man cannot live without love; without it, life becomes senseless and incomprehensible (see RH, 10).

Of all creatures, only human beings can know and love God and consciously participate in His life. St. Paul teaches, “we are created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance” (Ephesians 2:11). To be guided by love is to participate in God’s creative plan and to help build a culture of life and love (see EV, 77).

Marriage is neither a social invention nor a product of chance. “It is ... the wise...institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design” (HV, 8). Because of this divine origin, the Church teaches that married love is freely given, faithful, permanent, and fruitful (see HV, 9). Marital love reflects God’s own love!

When a man and a woman freely exchange consent, they establish a covenant for “the whole of life” that is

“ordered by its very nature to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education” of children (see Canon 1055). God Himself is present within this union. When the spouses are baptized Christians, marriage becomes a sacrament, receiving its strength and permanence from Christ Himself.

## *Open to Life*

A unique gift and responsibility contained in the marital vocation is stewardship over the powers of life. God calls husband and wife to embrace their shared fertility as a gift. The Lord God created marriage to be the home of the family. Spouses give “themselves to one another” and at the same time give beyond themselves to the reality of “children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity” (see FC, 14).

As stewards of the gift of fertility, married couples are invited to seek God’s will together in a spirit of trust and humility. It is in this spirit that God helps them make prudent decisions about welcoming children. It is within this discernment that NFP finds its proper place.

NFP methods are evidence-based approaches to fertility education that can assist couples in identifying when fertility is at its peak so that couples can attempt to achieve or postpone pregnancy. When avoiding pregnancy, no drugs or devices are used that can harm God’s gifts. NFP differs fundamentally from contraception. Rather than interfering with God’s design for married couples, NFP respects the integrity of married love and the gift of life.

When pregnancy has been attempted and a child is conceived, parents speak of the great joy and gratitude that they have. They also say that the time of childbirth is one of the most meaningful moments in their lives. Mothers will speak of God’s presence when first holding their newborn baby. Fathers proudly admit they finally understand the meaning of fatherhood when looking into their newborn’s eyes. This self-realization is due to the natural and “the fundamental task of family,” which is “to serve life, to actualize...the original blessing of the Creator ...of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person” (see FC, 28).

The fruitfulness of spousal love is not limited to the gift of children. Some couples, despite their desires, are unable to conceive. In this case, a married couple’s openness to life can be expressed in other ways through adoption, foster

care, or generous service to the Church and community. The vocation of marriage is wide—it calls all married couples to create homes where love is shared and others are nurtured. They are all called to mirror God’s love.

---

All of creation proclaims the glory of God and the handiwork of His love! Whether single or married, every person is created in God’s image and likeness, given the capacity to love, and invited to share in His life. Within the arms of God’s love, marriage stands as a unique gift to humanity—a sacred communion in which husband and wife live the fullness of human sexuality and become stewards of life. Marriage is not merely for the good of husband and wife, but for the good of the world. Truly, marriage is designed by God, guided by love, and open to life!

---

## *Reference guide with links*

CCC: Catechism of the Catholic Church (see <https://usccb.cld.bz/Catechism-of-the-Catholic-Church2>)

EV: Evangelium vitae, St. John Paul II, 1995 (see [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html))

FC: Familiaris consortio, St. John Paul II, 1980 (see [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html))

HV: Humanae vitae, St. Pope Paul VI, 1968 (see [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html))

RH: Redemptio hominis, St. John Paul II, 1979 (see [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html))

To learn about the Church’s teaching about married love and the gift of life and the ethical methods of NFP, see [www.usccb.org/nfp](http://www.usccb.org/nfp)

Questions? Contact [nfp@usccb.org](mailto:nfp@usccb.org)



---

©2026, Robert R. Cannon, all rights reserved. Msgr. Robert R. Cannon, MA, JCL, Diocese of Venice, FL. This article is used here with the permission of the author. Permission is given to reproduce this article in full with no edits. Please include this copyright information.