

"A Special Request"

How many of you have been asked such questions as: "Can NFP work for women with irregular cycles?"; or, "What's the difference between NFP and contraception?"

These and so many more questions are commonly asked in the context of NFP classroom instruction. Understandably, experienced NFP teachers have found a variety of ways to answer their clients. Experienced NFP teachers

know what type of language, i.e., imagery, phrases, pieces of information, analogies, etc., open the adult student's mind and heart to hearing the messages which they have to offer. However, these pearls of wisdom are not easily shared among NFP teachers. This is mostly due to the fact that NFP teachers have limited opportunities in which to share their experiences. Events of collaboration are usually provided in the

NFP teacher's immediate region, through the meetings of one or two organizations to which an NFP teacher may belong, or at special national conferences. Although these events are invaluable and eagerly awaited, NFP teachers need more regular vehicles of communication.

The DDP would like to help NFP teachers share their expertise with others in the country. We have a special request: **"Won't you share your wisdom with your colleagues and others by sending in your answers to commonly asked questions?"**

THE NFP TEACHER'S MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Church Teachings (The moral/spiritual questions):

1. "Is there really any difference between NFP and contraception?" "Isn't NFP just another form of birth control?"
2. "The Bible says we should be 'fruitful and multiply,' why should we try to control births?"
3. "I would never support promiscuity, but if a couple is truly in love, isn't intercourse a natural expression of that love even before marriage?"
4. "Who thinks that God is present during intercourse? Isn't that an obsession of religious fanatics?"
5. "How can a couple use NFP if one spouse is opposed to it?"
6. "Couples should have intercourse any time they want, it can only strengthen a marriage. Wouldn't abstinence cause stress in a marriage and ultimately hurt it?"
7. "But what about the woman whose husband is abusive, shouldn't she be protected by artificial contraception all the time?" "How could NFP help her in that type of situation?"
8. "Only people who are afraid of sexuality follow the Church's teachings and use NFP."

NFP (the "method of family planning" questions):

9. "Oh, I heard of NFP, isn't that the 'Rhythm' thing?"
10. "How effective is NFP in postponing a pregnancy?"
11. "Can NFP help me get pregnant?"
12. "Aren't the woman's fertile signs too difficult to learn to recognize?"
13. "Only educated, literate women can learn STM and OM."
14. "How long are the periods of abstinence?"
15. "My husband could never abstain, that's not natural."
16. "Isn't it 'unnatural' to take a temperature, do a cervical self check, and observe one's mucus every day? Or, 'Isn't it unnatural to chart one's fertility every day?"
17. "If these are such 'couple oriented' methods, why does it look like the woman has to 'do it all'?" "I mean, does the man have any role in NFP?"
18. "Too many things affect my cycle. Between medication and stress I'm much too irregular to use NFP."
19. "I know a woman who got pregnant and soon afterward had her period. If things like that can happen, I don't believe that the fertile signs can be trusted in general!"
20. "Can post-partum, non-breastfeeding women use NFP?"
21. "Can post-partum, breastfeeding women use NFP?"
22. "Can premenopausal women use NFP?"

We have spelled out several commonly asked questions and negative statements with regard to NFP and the Church's teachings on conjugal love and responsible parenthood, and we would like you to respond to them. The questions and statements are grouped into the categories of Church teachings (the moral and spiritual); and NFP as a method of family planning. We have tried to express the question or statement in a manner which is typical for the client. If you can say it better, or have other commonly asked questions not listed on page 8, please write them down, include your response, and send them to us.

There are no deadlines to this request. Simply send in your response when you have the time. Please type or print clearly and make sure to include your:

1. Name & address;
2. Day time telephone number;
3. Method of NFP you teach and school of NFP in which you were trained.

Responses will be printed in subsequent issues of the newsletter.

Depending upon the amount and type of responses we receive in a year's time, the DDP will try to choose the best and publish them in a format which you will be able to easily reproduce and use as a resource in the classroom. In essence, these future *NFP Talking Points*, will have been written by you, the NFP teachers. The DDP would see to their distribution to the dioceses (through the NFP coordinator) and to other appropriate groups within the Church.

Now is the time to share your wisdom! Please take a close look at the questions and statements on page 8. Choose two or three questions (or as many as you like) that either "hit home", or which you have had to answer many times. Try to write your response as succinctly as possible. You may get several NFP teachers together and write a joint response. We only ask you to make sure all authors include their names on the responses. We look forward to hearing from you! ■

COORDINATORS' CORNER

NFP in Arlington: Striving for Responsible Parenthood

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The Diocese of Arlington comprises Northern Virginia and has about 260,000 Catholics in a total population of about 2 million people. In the past three years Bishop John R. Keating has ordained 20 diocesan priests and currently has 50 seminarians for this 60-parish diocese. Last year the diocese had about 1,900 weddings and taught NFP to 277 couples. The NFP coordination is within the Office for Family Life. Currently, the sole provider of NFP in the diocese is the Couple to Couple League who has about 20 volunteer couples teaching in parishes around the diocese.

The diocesan NFP program was not created overnight. It began in 1975 when our former bishop asked the Couple to Couple League (CCL) to establish a program. In the early years, the number of teachers and the number of students rose and fell until 1986. Since then, there has been a steady rise. For example, in 1986, 136 couples were taught, and in 1992 that number has more than doubled. Because of our growth, we are often asked the question, "WHY?"

One of our answers to that question rests with our clergy. Our greatest promoters of NFP are our clergy! We are blessed with a tremendous number of vocations for a diocese of this size, and our young priests are well-grounded in our faith. The Arlington clergy understand the importance of married couples living as responsible parents. They see the impact that the NFP teachers and users make in their parishes in terms of role modeling Christian parenting, and they wish to pass that gift onto other couples!

This enthusiasm of our clergy is also supported by diocesan policy. For example, the diocesan marriage preparation manual highly encourages priests to recommend that each engaged couple takes a complete NFP course prior to marriage. We see the fruit of this policy working in the 70% or so, of engaged couples attending our classes.

There are other elements which make up the answer to our success. They are:

Keeping NFP Instruction Focused

Within this context, there have been several specific areas that this office focuses on to ensure a quality program.

1) NFP is taught only within the context of the teachings of the Catholic Church on Christian marriage.

We teach NFP as the "exception," not the "norm." By this we mean that the "norm" is children. Within the sacrament of marriage we know that the unitive and procreative aspects of conjugal relations cannot exist apart from each other. Only for important reasons should couples consciously avoid conception in a given month, then they may use NFP. All of our teachers understand and live this principle.

It is true that many of the couples taking our classes do so to avoid pregnancy. However, on a recent survey taken several months after a class, one of our NFP teaching couples found a substantial change in attitude among their students. Currently those clients who had wanted to avoid pregnancy were now saying that children were to be wanted. In fact, several of those couples were either expecting, recently had a child, or were trying to achieve pregnancy. Without exception they were all excited about it! This shift in attitude reaffirmed our belief that before we can teach couples NFP, they must first understand and believe what the Church