

NFP Is Thriving in the Diocese

By DOLORES J. SMITH

Natural family planning (NFP) has arrived in Rochester and is thriving in a very encouraging and positive way.

As of Feb. 6, 16 new teacher couples (those qualified to teach natural family planning techniques) completed extensive training in a course covering physical, spiritual and psychological aspects of living NFP. As they came to discover, natural family planning is a way of living Christian marriage as a sign of the covenant a couple makes with each other on their wedding day.

Many young couples are finding that family planning does not have to be a 'pill' or the IUD. To Terri and Joe Petracca, both in their early twenties and married less than a year, NFP is a positive alternative to the mass techniques of avoiding pregnancy offered in the popular media.

"Many engaged couples are attracted to NFP because it is 'natural,'" says Terri, who with Joe was recently elected a Rochester Area coordinator of a Natural Family Planning Committee of the Family Life Office of the diocese. "At the same time, they are torn by the thought of periodic abstinence," says Terri who talks to young couples because Joe and she became aware of NFP several months before they were married and began their marriage living NFP.

Continuing, Terri notes: "Because Joe and I have chosen this particular approach to family planning rather than the contraceptive one, we are forced every day to take this responsibility into our own hands."

"Not only is natural family planning beneficial to my marriage," Joe states, "through deeper involvement with my wife, it has also provided me with the means to express myself more fully as a loving person." Joe feels that NFP allows him to go beyond his male stereotype that "a man has to have 'it' when he wants 'it,'" and share in the responsibility of family planning.

"We have both found new ways of expressing our love for each other and are keenly aware of the many expressions of affection and sacrifice our spouse makes," says Terri. "This new awareness of each other has strengthened our marriage and has started us off on the right foot. A wise young priest told us, 'abstinence is someone worth waiting for.' He is so right."

Because of the efforts of couples like the Petraccas, there is a growing complex of available teachers in the Hornell, Auburn, Ithaca, Canandaigua as well as Rochester areas. NFP referrals to teacher couples, and information sessions are now available at pre-Cana Conferences and through the Family Life Office, where information can be received by calling 546-3630 (area code 716).

Besides the information sessions for couples, offered in the past three years in every part of the diocese,

special programs for clergy of the Rochester Diocese have been offered. In November, 1976, 60 priests attended an extensive program at Becket Hall to review the various approaches of temperature, mucous and cervix observation now taught in professional programs of fertility awareness. "This knowledge," notes Father James Hewes, associate pastor of St. Mary's parish in Canandaigua, and a member of the NFP committee, "offers couples the advantages of being able to plan consciously with God, the Creator, the children they feel God wants them to have."

"The involvement of priests is very important to NFP," Father Hewes says. "Their presence and input adds a dimension to the call to prayer in each couple's marriage. For it is in the call to unity with each other, that each marriage is opened to a deeper oneness with Jesus, the source of grace for every married couple."

Father Hewes pointed out that the priest comes into a special contact with couples before marriage, during marriage and in moments of crisis. "We want to be able to help them share their Christness more fully. In directing couples to

teachers of NFP, we offer an opportunity for a special awareness and ourselves add a dimension to this apostolate."

(Dolores J. Smith and her husband Joseph are pioneers in the promotion of NFP. They also are the authors of pamphlets on NFP.)

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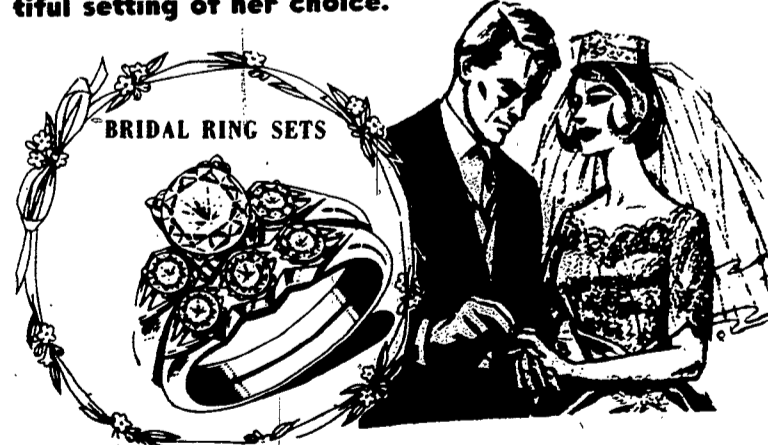
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