

NFP... Acceptable Birth Control

BY CARMEN VIGLUCCI

Natural Family Planning. The phrase, unlike many others in an increasingly gobbledegook world, is perfect in its simplicity in describing the method itself.

NFP is a way of planning the size of a family without resorting to pills, devices, surgery, foams, jellies or abortion.

Perhaps the only semantic explanation needed is that the word "natural," as John and Sheila Kippley point out in their book, "The Art of Natural Family Planning," means that which is in accord with the very being of man and woman as creatures made in the image and likeness of God. It does not mean "doing what comes naturally," including the contemporary acceptance of non-marital relations and contraception.

And if you haven't heard very much about NFP or don't know what it's all about, chances are that you will be hearing more about in the coming months.

NFP of Rochester has at least 15 couples in training in the certification process and another 400 to 500 couples have been taught the method. In October and December a couple from the national federation will provide the final certification steps.

Therese Petracca is volunteer program director for NFP in this area.

There may be some mistaken ideas about NFP. First of all, it is not the rhythm method, which has been called "Vatican roulette" in some circles. Calendar rhythm methods are based on knowledge of the menstrual cycle as judged from past experience. But since cycles can vary, even with an individual, such past records can be faulty. As Mrs. Petracca puts it, "At best, it provides a good guess."

A "good guess," however, has not been sufficient for Catholic couples trying to cope with present-day economic problems, lifestyles, and future plans—especially not with the tempting abundance of birth control devices available.

Natural Family Planning differs from strict rhythm methods in that a couple, if they understand and follow the method correctly, can tell at any time if they are fertile or not. "It WILL work," Mrs. Petracca states emphatically.

"Furthermore," she declares, "it is completely acceptable to the Catholic Church. In fact, it is acceptable to all religions."

Its acceptability is only one of the advantages of NFP, according to its



TERESE PETRACCA

adherents. A long list of other advantages includes information that "there are no side effects... communication between husband and wife increases... men learn that family planning is a SHARED responsibility... many women find this new self-knowledge very liberating... respect for each other and for human life increases."

Pope Paul's "Humanae Vitae," which rejected artificial means of birth control, gave impetus to NFP. In Humanae Vitae, the Pope voiced the concerns of those who worried about increased population — "First there is the rapid increase in the number of births. Because of this many are terrified lest the multitudes of people in the world increase more quickly than the available life-support would allow..."

But he voiced more direct concerns — "Moreover conditions of employment and housing, as well as growing needs both in the economic field and in the raising and teaching of youth are responsible for that kind of condition of life in which it might be troublesome today to care for a greater number of children properly."

The Pope concludes this section by stating, "Finally it must be especially noted that mankind, having progressed so wonderfully in controlling and in skillfully reconciling to reason the forces of nature might attempt to extend this control to the whole of life, that is to the body, to the powers of the soul, to social life, and the very laws governing the procreation of life."

In response to the 1968 encyclical, the American bishops formed the Human Life Foundation. One of its first actions was the establishment of a scientific advisory committee, which began underwriting research of birth control through natural means.

In 1976, Edward B. Hanify, foundation chairman, and other members of the organization's board of directors discussed their work. Hanify, a Boston lawyer, saw bright prospects for NFP but saw some obstacles such as "commercialism, 'subtle bigotry,' and ignorance. There is no money to be made by entrepreneurs in natural family planning."

The bigotry, he claimed, is shown by a refusal by some to admit that the Pope was correct in reaffirmation of the Church's traditional ban on artificial methods of birth control. "What's moral can't be practical in the eyes of many," he said.

The ignorance he alluded to is that many associate NFP with the rhythm method.

How then does Natural Family Planning work?

The menstrual cycle is divided into three parts — early infertile, fertile and late infertile. The woman can tell by certain natural observations (this is taught by NFP) when they occur.

"Body temperature, so important in the rhythm method, is part of NFP," Mrs. Petracca said, "but we do not use it to predict ovulation."

There are three basic methods of natural planning, Basal Body Temperature (BBT), symptothermal and the Billings method. The BBT method relies on the recording of the woman's temperature each morning throughout the month. Ovulation is accompanied by a discernible elevation of temperature 12 to 16 days before onset of the next menstruation.

The symptothermal method combines BBT and natural fertility cycles that occur in fertility cycles.

The Billings method, also known as the ovulation method, involves learning to discern changes in cervical mucus.

The symptothermal method is advocated by the area NFP.

Mrs. Petracca admits that NFP doesn't always work but says that is not the fault of the method but rather through the carelessness of practitioners. "That is why we insist on instruction by trained, certified instructors," she said.

There are other complicating factors. For instance, according to Mrs. Petracca, "about 50 per cent of those joining the classes are coming off the pill" and their cycles may be out of balance for some time.

In addition, periods of abstinence are necessary.

"NFP couples are aware of planned abstinence," she says, "and being aware of it really enhances marital relationships — each is aware of the sacrifice one is making for the other. But if anyone is using it strictly as birth control, they may be disappointed."

More than 170 dioceses have NFP supported or related programs. It has been described many times in popular magazines. The government has granted Los Angeles NFP \$1.6 million for study. Still it is comparatively obscure in this diocese. Mrs. Petracca feels this is because there is no organized diocesan program, funds are lacking, and there is no paid, full-time director.

"We need more publicity," she says. "In addition perhaps many associate it with rhythm. Perhaps many use the pill or other device in defiance of Humanae Vitae. But most likely it is simply not understood — it sounds complicated. It is associated with risk when it shouldn't be."

These are the obstacles that Mrs. Petracca and the hundreds of others in the diocese who have embraced NFP, will be striving to overcome in the months and years ahead.

NFP Sets Sept. 18 Meeting

A Natural Family Planning (NFP) followup meeting for all couples using NFP has been scheduled for 7:30 p.m., Friday, Sept. 23 at Guardian Angels School on West Henrietta Road.

The meeting is set to field any questions NFP couples may have and for group discussion, according to Therese Petracca, director.

No registration is required and there will be no fee.

Freshman Class Up At Nazareth College

An estimated 14 per cent in the freshman class will boost Nazareth College's full-time undergraduate enrollment over the 1,000 mark for the first time in six years, Robert A. Kidera, president, has announced.

Kidera said near-final enrollment figures indicated that 1,025 full-time undergraduates will be enrolled this year — an increase of almost 100 students, or 10 per cent over last year.

"Our progress this year

increased my confidence that our goal of a full-time undergraduate enrollment of 1,200 students will be reached within three to five years."

Fifty men are included in this year's freshman class of 293, Kidera said, bringing the total of full-time male undergraduates to 144, a 33 per cent increase over last year. The female-male ratio undergraduate ratio has dropped from approximately 7.5 to 1 last year to 6 to 1 this year, with a 5 to 1 freshman class ratio.

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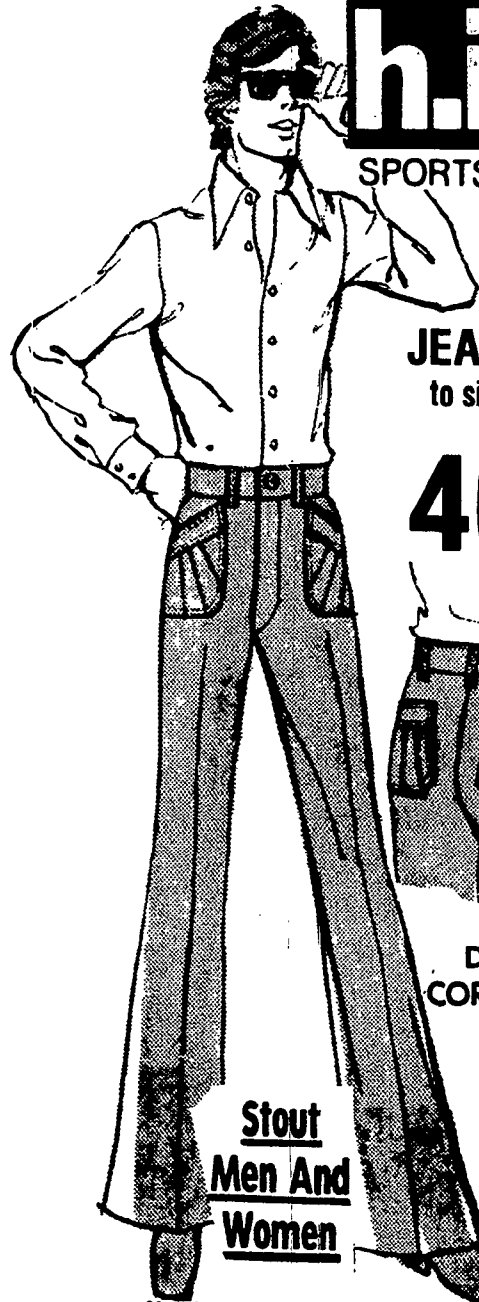
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