

The Romantic Side of NFP

DINNER DATES AND FLOWERS

By Carmen J. Viglucci

Natural Family Planning.

Could it be that that title is too clinical? Too foreboding? Too sterile? Too cold?

Because to many of the practitioners of the method, it is anything but plastic. Some 95 percent of the people who use NFP feel that it is more than a way of planning births: they say it has enhanced their married sex life.

Norm and Sandy Pawlak are among the approximately 1,400 couples in this diocese who have been trained to use NFP and they testify that it has improved their sexual relationship — and even more, it has enhanced their entire married life by opening up communications in general.

And Therese Petracca, Rochester NFP director, said that surveys taken of NFP couples a year after joining the program, support that feeling. "Ninety-five percent volunteer information that their sexual relationship has improved," Mrs. Petracca said. "Of they say we're closer or that one or the other used to feel abused but not any more."

The Pawlaks thus are typical of that belief and also, like most couples who eventually use NFP, they were reluctant to do so at first.

Sandy explained: "I'd like to say we joined for health or moral reasons but the truth is we joined mostly out of frustration with other birth control methods. I tried the IUD and had to have it removed surgically, I turned to the pill and my vision was affected, I lost hair and suffered headaches."

But perhaps more troublesome, she said, was a mental burden she felt — that only she was involved in planning the family.

At a Marriage Encounter meeting, a friend told her about NFP and Sandy signed Norm and herself up for an informational meeting without consulting him.

"I just didn't want to go and she knew it," Norm said. "It's rhythm by another name, I thought. Now I know nothing could be further from the truth. Anyway I saw it was very important to Sandy so I went along with the idea, thinking if we had another child, fine. Then that would be the end of it. But after six months it seemed to be working and it has ever since — our third child and the baby coming in December were planned."

He also had a kind of delayed self-revelation. "About a

year after we joined I realized that part of my original objection was because of the abstinence period. Now I know how valuable it is."

The Pawlaks became so appreciative of NFP that they are now one of 14 instructor couples in the diocese.

They have three children — Kelly, 11, Sara, 7, and Christopher, 4. Norm is a computer systems designer at Kodak and Sandy keeps busy with the children and their home.

The abstinence that concerned Norm has become "probably one of the best things that can happen to a married couple — six years ago I wouldn't have bought that. But now I know that because of abstinence we are literally forced to communicate. Our lovemaking has two parts now — sort of a courtship (abstinence) and the honeymoon."

For the average couple, the abstinence period lasts about seven to ten days a month.

"We never experience any boredom during those times," Sandy said. "Using contraception, a couple can have sex any time. Now we use that time to tend to other plans." She laughingly talked about the two issues ("among others," Norm chipped in) that they were apparently reluctant to discuss — God and sex. "I figured God was my subject and sex was Norm's. Now we realize that all topics are ours."

"We use the abstinence period to really romance each other," she said. "We go out on dates. Once I bought theater tickets and arranged for a babysitter and surprised Norm. And he brings me flowers."

And the cooperation and open discussions engendered by NFP have forged new links of trust.

"Many may not believe it," Mrs. Petracca said, "but we have taught some older couples, with as many as six or eight children, who have never discussed sex with each other."

Sandy Pawlak had a point to make along these lines. "Even though I had given birth twice, I was really surprised at how little I knew about my own body until I began NFP classes."

Rochester NFP follows the sympto-thermal system which by observing changes in a woman's body detects fertility or infertility. The signs observed are changes in the cervix, in the cervical mucus, and in the basal body temperature (body at rest). The sympto-thermal system



The Pawlaks with their children Kelly, 11, Sara, 7, and Christopher, 4.

differs from those methods which rely only on one sign, such as temperature, in that a couple learns to observe all the practical, useful signs of fertility. The information can be used to avoid pregnancy or, for those wishing to have a baby, to allow pregnancy to take place.

Mrs. Petracca points out in this regard two of the fallacies circulated about NFP. "It is not rhythm and it is not strictly a birth control measure."

Information sessions are free but classes cost \$40 which includes books, thermometer, three classes, a newsletter four times a year, review sessions, "and unlimited guidance, encouragement and support," Mrs. Petracca added.

Norm Pawlak has a thought about this — "It ought to be completely free. Handed down to the children from Mom and Dad."

The Pawlaks find NFP important to the entire family.

"We vehemently oppose premarital sex and will warn our children against it," Norm said. "But we realize that that often comes across as preaching. But when our children realize that we practice regular abstinence as a married couple they might see the importance of waiting — the beauty of abstinence."

Yet NFP has created a seemingly paradoxical situation for the Pawlaks. Although it has brought them closer together it also has enabled them to see each other more clearly as individuals. As Norm put it: "I used to make the mistake of prejudging how Sandy felt about things. In actuality, I really didn't know, because we are two different people."

And Sandy added: "That's another advantage of the abstinence period — it has given me the opportunity to get to know Norm better."

So NFP is more than a clinical procedure for most of its practicing adherents, especially Norm and Sandy Pawlak. That melancholy number by Barbra Streisand and Neil Diamond, "You Don't Send Me Flowers Anymore," will never be their song.

Hornell Hospital Merger Hits 'Rough Spot'

By Martin Toombs

Hornell — After years of discussion and negotiation, it will be up to another meeting of the Interim Advisory Committee and the respective hospital boards to put the Hornell hospital merger back together.

Merger discussions between St. James Mercy and Bethesda hospitals have been progressing slowly for five years toward approval of application to the state for permission for the two facilities to merge into one corporation, and launch an extensive building plan intended to upgrade health care in the Hornell area.

The St. James Board of Directors approved that application at its July meeting.

But meeting Aug. 18, the corporation of Bethesda Hospital was one vote shy of the number required to approve the merger.

Carl Wellington, Bethesda board president, said that the hospital's 15-member board approved the merger in a 9-6 vote, and recommended it to the corporation. The corporation consists of the 15 board members and three additional persons.

The corporation vote required two-thirds approval, Wellington said, and its 11-7 vote fell one vote shy, defeating the merger.

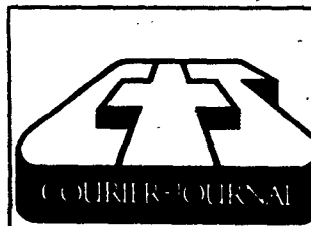
Wellington said that following a meeting of his board's executive committee, he has contacted Spencer Crow, St. James' board president, and requested that the Interim Advisory Committee, which piloted the merger to this point, meet again to discuss the situation.

Crow could not be contacted for comment last week.

Meanwhile, the St. James board met Aug. 21 and approved submission of applications for a \$10 million construction program.

In a letter to Arnold Gissen of the state Office of Health Systems Management's Rochester office, Crow states: "We sincerely regret that the Bethesda board turned down the proposed corporate consolidation on August 18, 1981, by one vote because we are convinced that this joint effort is vital for the future of health care in the area."

"Since the resolution of some of the issues may take months, and since we have already held up our Phase II



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major reconstruction for five years in order to produce a joint plan, we believe we must proceed to address code deficiencies which have been waived pending merger."

Crow's letter states: "Our request is for the same construction allocated to use in the consolidation application. This leaves the door open for Bethesda to rejoin the project. The only additional request is for a 60-bed skilled nursing facility which we are adding to our application because of the urgency of the need. The consolidation plan placed this unit at the Bethesda site. We would be pleased to return it to that site before construction if the consolidation is approved by the Bethesda board."

The projects included in the proposal provide for extensive new construction at St. James, to provide for a new

emergency room suite, laboratory, laundry, intensive care/coronary care unit, surgical suite, and expansion of other departments. The application also includes requests to replace \$621,000 worth of x-ray and laboratory equipment.

Wellington noted his disappointment that the merger plan wasn't approved, and indicated he does not see the vote as an end to the discussions, but a difficult point they will have to work to overcome.

He had no comment on the St. James application for the construction at its site.

Sister Rene McNiff, St. James administrator, commented that it "doesn't seem possible" that the years of work could be stopped at this time.

A lack of understanding of

what the merger will mean for improved health care in the area is part of the problem, she said.

Wellington said he expects they will receive further cooperation from St. James; "I don't anticipate that they would turn down any chance to work things out."

He is looking forward to the IAC meeting as a way to resolve the impasse. He said he would "understand they (St. James Board) might be quite upset," but he is too, "I feel as strongly as I ever did," he said, that the merger "would enhance the health care of the community greatly."

A complication for Bethesda is its application for a 20-bed alcoholism unit at the hospital, which would replace 11 obstetric, eight pediatric and one medical-surgical bed.

The application has

received Part 1 approval, according to George Ennis of the Rochester office of the state Office of Health Systems Management. Some contingencies have to be fulfilled before a Part 2 application can be submitted, Ennis said.

The application could still be withdrawn, and until the process is complete, they "still have them (the 20 beds) on their operating certificate."

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