

Is NFP on the Move?

Its Director Says It Is . . .

And She Has the Facts to Prove It

By Carmen J. Viglucci

Ask Terri Petracca a simple question and she'll give you an equally simple answer. And then support her reply with reams of factual data and background information.

For instance:

"Is Naturally Family Planning progressing in this diocese?"

"Oh, yes," comes the soft but unequivocal answer from the woman who is NFP's director and long one of the driving forces of the organization begun here in 1973.

She continues: "We have a five-year plan which includes teaching some 300 couples in 1982 — in 1981 we taught 180 couples. We have added a community education coordinator (Maribeth Galecki) to work with all those interested in learning more about NFP, as well as with schools, Pre Cana and our information sessions."

The information sessions themselves are being expanded. "We have for some time been sponsoring regular monthly sessions (the first Monday of each month, her organizational mind parenthesized) at St. Mary's Hospital and at Rochester General Hospital (the second Friday of each month). Soon we will be adding monthly information sessions in Brockport and Canandaigua.

"In addition, we have begun offering in-service sessions for professionals such as nurses and doctors and are hoping to add such sessions for teachers."

To explain the growth of NFP in the diocese in a simple statistical fashion — it has grown from ground zero in 1973 to the point now where some "1200 to 1300 couples" are using the method," Mrs. Petracca said. "Since we opened our office in 1978 and have been able to keep accurate records we have taught 656 couples and there were at least that many in the preceding years."

With all of that, Mrs. Petracca thinks there is a more important, but more subtle, sign of growth.

"We have noticed more interest from professionals, clergy and community organizations," she explained. "We have had trouble gaining support from such people in the past — even priests."

Why this turnaround?

"I think they saw NFP as a fad but now they realize that we're here to stay. Also they're getting more questions on NFP from all over so they contact our office for information or even for speakers. So we can see this development as helping NFP expand."

Mrs. Petracca said the main reason for NFP's growth has been the word-of-mouth communications of satisfied users among friends and relatives.

NFP originally was an outgrowth of Pope Paul VI's call for new ways to combat the population explosion and is still heartily endorsed by the official Church. But the method's percentage of success ("99 percent if it is followed properly," says Mrs. Petracca) has brought many couples who are not Catholic into the fold. Mrs. Petracca estimates that 50 percent of NFP users do so because of "moral or religious reasons and 50 percent for health reasons."

And, she points out, fertility awareness not only helps couples to space births but also to plan pregnancies. NFP has made parents of couples who previously had trouble conceiving.

Recent disclosures about harmful side effects of the birth control pill have contributed to the growth of NFP and Mrs. Petracca reports on still another development.

"We have taught three couples, the men of which have had vasectomies reversed and who want to parent a child." So, NFP also is growing in depth as well as breadth.

NFP will be celebrating all of these developments at its fourth annual membership meeting Friday, Feb. 5, at the Kearney Building of St. Mary's Hospital. Reservations may be made by calling the NFP office at 464-8705. Hors d'oeuvres will be served 6 p.m. and dinner at 7.



"We will be teaching 300 couples in 1982 . . . we've added a community educational coordinator . . . we're here to stay." —
Therese Petracca, Natural Family Planning director.

After the dinner, Terese Petracca will give a progress report. To be sure, she will be, as ever, assured, direct and even concise although she has a lot of progress to talk about.

The Hatch Amendment:

An Analysis

Abortion and Public Opinion

An analysis of public opinion polls since 1973 shows that approximately one-fourth to one-third of the public actually supports unrestricted abortion, but only the same approximate percentage of the population actually supports banning all abortions or banning abortion except to prevent the death of the mother. Up to half the population would favor restricting abortion but would allow it for one or more of various other exceptions. Thus far, there is only minority support for the effect of *Roe v. Wade*; there is also only minority support for the traditional Human Life Amendment wordings, which attempt to set the standard of protection within the amendment itself. The Hatch Amendment will appeal to the public because it lets the people (their representatives), rather than the Supreme Court, decide what abortions should or should not be allowed.

It Avoids "States Rights"

The Hatch Amendment avoids the dilemma of "States Rights," namely, the prospect that some states would pass restrictive anti-abortion legislation while other states would not, thus creating abortion havens. By authorizing Congress to pass national legislation applying in all 50 states, this problem can be avoided. However, by also authorizing concurrent state legislation, the Amendment makes possible the utilization of both federal and state mechanisms for compliance.

Addressing the Question

The Hatch Human Life Amendment would propose the question of whether or not Congress and the states should have the ability to legislate in the area of abortion or whether unchecked abortion-on-demand should continue. This confuses the "stop HLA" rhetoric of the pro-abortionists which centers around hard case "exceptions" and legal complexities of "personhood" and places them on the defensive because they have to come up with justifying reasons for the "blatant" cases of abortion such as abortion in the eighth or ninth month of pregnancy (which the Supreme Court decision allows now — such as allowing abortion for the child being the wrong sex, allowing abortion without any say from the father or parents the minor mother, allowing abortion as a contraceptive back-up, etc.). To argue against the Hatch HLA, they will have to argue positively in favor of the Supreme Court decisions and abortion-on-demand, and thus take a position that is sup-

ported by only a minority. The pro-life movement would be in a position of advocating a majority position; namely, that unrestricted abortions should be ended. It gives the pro-life movement the best advantage during that time when it needs the support of two-thirds of Congress and three-quarters of the state legislatures. Traditional amendment approaches have had the opposite effect of placing the pro-life movement in the most disadvantageous position exactly at the time when they need it to gather the most support.

Exceptions

This approach avoids writing morally unacceptable exceptions to abortions into the Constitution in order to create an amendment that can be passed. Further, since it defers questions regarding the actual legislation prohibiting abortion until a time when only a majority of Congress is needed rather than two-thirds, a much more restrictive national standard can actually be obtained with this amendment (since a simple majority of Congress already gave a very strict legislation prohibiting abortion through the Hyde Amendment).

Legislative Advantages

Congressional

With a coordinated major effort, the Hatch Human Life Amendment can be passed in this session of Congress. The necessary two-thirds can be obtained through: (1) the votes of those who have already pledged to support other human life amendment proposals; (2) those legislators who believe the question should be solved legislatively rather than through a constitutional standard; and (3) those legislators who have opposed abortion-on-demand but have favored more exceptions than contained in the traditional Human Life Amendment formulation. To vote against this type of Human Life Amendment requires a positive vote in favor of abortion-on-demand and the current political climate is such that fewer politicians are willing to cast such a blatantly pro-abortion vote. Also, many congressmen are looking for a new way to cast a pro-life vote before the 1982 elections that they can still justify as consistent with their past statements and voting patterns. It will give other members of Congress a way to get the issue off their backs for a while and into the states.

State Ratification

Less than a quarter of the state legislatures actually have majorities that favor abortion-on-demand (there were only

four such state laws passed prior to 1973). While ratification of the traditional forms of a Human Life Amendment would be doubtful, the Hatch Human Life Amendment is ratifiable in a relatively short period of time. Only those legislators willing to cast a positive vote for abortion-on-demand will want to vote against it.

Effect

The practical effect of the Hatch Human Life Amendment would essentially be the same as the traditional Human Life Amendment forms in that it authorizes both congressional and state legislation prohibiting abortion. It is stronger than a states rights formulation and actually stronger than a traditional formulation incorporating exceptions since the Hatch Amendment would allow protection for the unborn free of those exceptions. It also results in removing the abortion issue from the courts, where the pro-life movement routinely loses, to the legislative and political arenas where the pro-life movement has shown time and time again it can win. There is one difficulty in this in that it will require a yearly effort in the Congress to prevent a liberal law from passing (until a full protection amendment can be passed).

Social Ramifications

People tend to feel what is legal is moral. One recent study showed 32 percent of the abortions were done on women for the second time and 23 percent for the third time. Thus abortion is becoming an acceptable way of life and will be harder to change as the years go on. The longer abortion-on-demand continues, the more acceptable it becomes. This constitutional amendment proposal seems to be the only realistic chance for a quick end to abortion-on-demand that establishes a national standard for protection of the unborn, does not write exceptions to abortion into the Constitution, and offers hope of stopping the new abortifacients. The laws that would follow ratification of this amendment would themselves have a profound teaching effect on the population at large, and really be a first step towards building a pro-life society. If action is delayed, however, we will soon have an entire generation of adults who have known nothing but unrestricted and constitutionally protected abortions during their entire lives. Once that happens, any protection for the unborn in the foreseeable future will probably be impossible. Hence, the Hatch Human Life Amendment may be the single factor that ultimately determines the success or failure of efforts to protect unborn children and build a society that respects life.