

# PARENTING

## Natural family planning has many benefits

### Family Events

● **JULY 19, 26** — Walking tour of downtown Rochester, meet at City Hall, 30 Church St., Rochester; noon-12:50 p.m. or 4:45-6 p.m.; \$5; call Mariana 585/271-7368.

● **JULY 20, 27** — Star show: "Awesome Stars!"; ages 6-11; RMSC Strasenburgh Planetarium, 657 East Ave., Rochester; 1 p.m.; \$4 adults, \$2.50 students/seniors; 585/271-1880.

● **JULY 21, 28** — Transportation exhibit and train ride; New York Museum of Transportation, Industry Depot, Rt. 251, Rush; rides depart every 30 minutes starting 11:30 a.m.; last trip 4 p.m.; \$5 adults, \$4 seniors 65+, \$3 students ages 5-15, under 5 free; open Sundays during summer; 585/533-1113; [www.nymuseum.org](http://www.nymuseum.org).

● **JULY 26, AUG. 2** — Cool Kids in the Park: July 26, "Instruments from Around the World"; Aug. 2, "Celebrate Differences in Abilities"; Sagawa Park, Main St., Brockport; 7-8 p.m.; free; 585/637-3984.

● **AUG. 7, 10, 14, 17** — Children's show: "Winnie-the-Pooh"; Bristol Valley Theater, 151 S. Main St., Naples; 11 a.m.; \$5; 585/374-6318.

● **THU, AUG. 15** — Open house: Hochstein School, 50 N. Plymouth Ave., Rochester; 6-8 p.m.; highlighting music & dance programs for preschool & elementary school-aged children; walk-in registration; 585/454-4596.

● **THRU DEC. 2002** — Exhibit: ExploraZone 2: fabulous science interactives; Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; Mon.-Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m.; \$7 adults, \$6 seniors/college students, \$5 children ages 3-18, under 3 free; 585/271-1880.

● **ONGOING** — Exhibit: "Geo-Zooom! and Riding Train"; fun activity stations invite children to learn about geography and transportation; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m.; \$6 adults, \$5 students/seniors, children ages 2-17, under 2 free; 585/263-2700.

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

In the 1980s, Dr. Steve Spaulding recalled, he carefully read *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's landmark 1968 encyclical on married love and procreation, which reinforced church teaching that the use of artificial birth control is morally wrong.

"I realized I had been believing a lie. The truth was there, and the church's teaching was there," said Spaulding, a general practitioner who also practices obstetrics in Montour Falls, Schuyler County.

From this "conversion," as Spaulding put it, he became an ardent supporter of natural family planning — the method by which pregnancies can be either achieved or postponed through daily monitoring of a woman's menstrual cycle.

By means of charting body temperature and other characteristics, NFP can help a couple determine which days hold the greatest possibility for conception during the cycle.

Promoters say that, when followed correctly, NFP greatly enhances the chances of achieving pregnancy. They also claim that NFP is 98 to 99 percent effective for avoiding pregnancy if couples abstain from sexual intercourse during the peak fertility time. And yet, because no contraception was used, advocates say this practice is morally acceptable to all major religious bodies, including the Catholic Church.

Spaulding recommends NFP to his patients, referring them to a professionally trained teacher, Michelle Scheffield. Several couples in the Diocese of Rochester also teach NFP classes through a network known as the Couple to Couple League. Two veteran instructors are Debbie and Yves Robinson, parishioners at St. John of Rochester in Fairport.

The Robinsons, who have taught NFP for 13 years, frequently offer classes that meet for two hours every month in four-month blocks. Yves Robinson said the classes are set up in this way so "you can go through three or four full (menstrual) cycles" during the time frame of the class.

This approach is known as systematic natural family planning. The other form of NFP taught by the Couple to Couple League is ecological breast-feeding, the only kind of nursing that creates a time of extended infertility following childbirth.



Karin von Voigtlander/Staff photographer  
The DeFord family — Dan (from left), Marie Claire, John and Karen — sit on the steps of St. James Church in Irondequoit July 14. Dan and Karen, who promote natural family planning, are expecting their third child in August.

People who attend the NFP classes run the gamut: those who have had trouble conceiving; single people; married couples; those who wish to avoid pregnancy and have previously tried birth control. However, Yves Robinson said, "We don't judge if they've been on the pill or whatever. We take people any way they come to us."

Because the availability of NFP instructors is limited in some areas, the Robinsons have gone as far as Auburn and Shortsville to hold classes. "If there's enough people in a parish we'll work something out with them," Debbie Robinson said. "It would be nice if there were four or five couples." The Robinsons also said they're available for follow-up by telephone when classes are not in session.

Debbie Robinson said that although some women attend NFP classes by themselves, having the couple there is preferable. Dan DeFord agreed that NFP classes are beneficial for men as well as women. "The understanding you gain — you learn more about women. Women learn more about themselves, too," DeFord remarked.

DeFord took an NFP class with his wife, Karen, shortly after they got married seven years ago. Karen had taken a class prior to the wedding as well.

"I actually learned more about the body than anything else. You know about the general facts of life, but this gives you the details that you don't normally hear about," Dan DeFord said.

The DeFords, parishioners of St. James in Irondequoit, have served as NFP spokespeople since 1999. As promoters they stay busy "lining up classes at churches, getting bulletin announcements in, doing mailings. We're always brainstorming," Karen DeFord said.

"Our main work is just to get literature out at this point, to either doctors or Catholic parishes," Dan DeFord said.

This promotional work is vital, they said. People who believe in NFP face an uphill battle — in the secular world and among Catholics as well — in convincing people to utilize this method.

"It's not really readily known about. You don't hear about it in pre-Cana (marriage-preparation classes) and don't hear about it from the pulpit," Karen DeFord said. "There's probably a percentage that's never heard about it, and has the misconception that it doesn't work."

Spaulding said he does not offer birth control or sterilizations but instead offers people information about NFP. He ac-

knowledged that many people are against discontinuing use of contraceptives and are therefore against NFP. "The thinking is, 'God's going to keep me from what I want to do,'" said Spaulding, a parishioner of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads.

"A really high number of Catholics use artificial contraception. They either have never heard the *Humanae Vitae* message, or they've heard it and chosen to ignore it," Yves Robinson said.

Other doubters believe NFP is an update of the rhythm method, which gauged a woman's fertility on a regular menstrual cycle each month. But Yves Robinson pointed out, "A woman can have a 28-day cycle, which is average, but not necessarily normal. It could be anywhere from 25 to 40 days." He added that whereas NFP has a nearly 100-percent success rate, the rhythm method was closer to 80 percent.

Physicians usually don't promote NFP either, Spaulding said. "If you talk to most doctors, they'll say, 'It's rhythm, it's no good,'" he remarked, pointing out that this viewpoint is likely tied in with the fact there's a gigantic sales industry connected with birth control. "They don't generate revenue by giving that kind of advice, they do it by offering the pill," agreed Yves Robinson, whose father and brother are doctors.

Although NFP is also designed to help couples avoid pregnancy, NFP families tend to be larger than average. The people interviewed for this story are good evidence: All have utilized NFP, and the Robinsons have five children while the Spaulding family has three and the DeFords are expecting their third in August.

"It strengthens marriages," Yves Robinson stated. "People get more in tune with each other and not the material things, so the prospect of having a larger family becomes more comfortable."

"It makes for a wonderful change in a marriage and a family," Spaulding added.

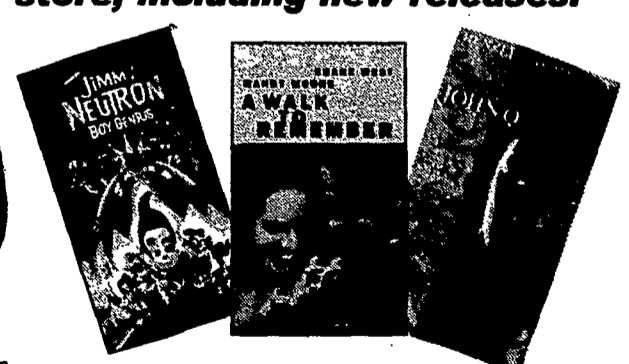
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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** To learn about natural family planning classes, or for other information on NFP, call Yves and Debbie Robinson at 585/425-3849; Noelle Pacer at 585/247-5973; John and Peggy Fraysier at 585/377-9358; Dan and Karen DeFord at 585/654-7117; or Dr. Steve Spaulding at 607/535-6080 if instructors are not available in your area, the Couple to Couple League offers a home study course. Call 1-800/745-8252 for details.



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