

## **NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING**

### **General Information on Natural Family Planning**

Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods represent authentic family planning. They can be used to both achieve and to postpone a pregnancy. NFP makes use of periodic abstinence from sexual intercourse based upon the observation of the woman's natural signs of fertility, in order to space births or to limit the number of children when there is a serious reason to do so... this practice fosters in couples an attitude of respect and wonder in the face of human life, which is sacred. It also fosters profound respect for one's spouse, which is necessary for... authentic intimacy. (*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 20)

NFP is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. Couples using NFP to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy. NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of the child. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife. (*Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010, p. 23)

The natural methods of family planning (NFP) do *not* depend on a woman having "regular" menstrual cycles. NFP information treats each woman and each cycle as unique. NFP teaches a woman to watch every day for her signs of fertility. NFP therefore works with menstrual cycles of any length and any degree of irregularity. It can be used during breastfeeding, just before menopause, and in other special circumstances. NFP allows a woman to understand the physical signals her body gives her to tell her when she is most likely to become pregnant. (See: *NFP, Myth and Reality*, NFP Program, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a unique form of fertility education. Specifically, NFP is the title for the moral, natural and healthy, modern and scientifically reliable methods of family planning. These methods teach married couples how to identify and understand their combined signs of fertility. This information then helps married couples plan to achieve or postpone a pregnancy. NFP is morally good because it helps married couples respect God's design for married love. (*Theresa Notare, PhD, Assistant Director, NFP Program, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*)

*Who can use NFP?* Any married couple can use NFP! A woman need not have "regular" cycles. NFP education helps couples to fully understand their combined fertility, thereby helping them to either achieve or avoid a pregnancy. The key to the successful use of NFP is cooperation and

communication between husband and wife—a shared commitment. NFP is unique among methods of family planning because it enables its users to work with the body rather than against it. Fertility is viewed as a reality to live, not a problem to be solved. (*What is NFP?* NFP Program, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, see: <http://usccb.org/nfp/natural-family-planning/what-is-nfp>)

### ***...on the morality of NFP***

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality. These methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them, and favor the education of an authentic freedom. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2370)

Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods "reflect the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, and promotes openness to life and the gift of the child. By complementing the love-giving and life-giving nature of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife." (See: *Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry*, NFP Program, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010)

When ... by means of recourse to periods of infertility, the couple respect the inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative meanings of human sexuality, they are acting as "ministers" of God's plan and they "benefit from" their sexuality according to the original dynamism of "total" self-giving, without manipulation or alteration. (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, no. 32)

### ***...where to learn more about NFP***

Learn about Catholic teaching on responsible parenthood and Natural Family Planning. Visit the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops NFP Program's website at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning>.

Want to learn a method of Natural Family Planning in a class near your home? Visit the U.S. Bishops' online diocesan NFP coordinators' directory at: <http://www.usccb.org/nfp/find-an-nfp-class.cfm>. Be sure to look up your state and diocese for local contact information.

Learn a method of Natural Family Planning in the comfort of your own home. There are national NFP providers who offer distance learning, through correspondences and even the Internet. See: <http://www.usccb.org/nfp/nfp-home-study.cfm>.

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