

couples to find other ways in which to be attentive to each other in each cycle. These other ways may be through cooking a favorite dish, or bringing home flowers. NFP can reignite the romance of dating for a married couple. As couples who use NFP often say: "Every cycle we have a wedding night." When spouses love one another enough to abstain and be more considerate of each other, both become more secure in their relationship.

Periodic abstinence is difficult at times. It also brings its own reward. Men find they can direct sexual urges in the service of love and not be controlled by it. Only if a man is in full possession of himself can he love his wife well. As one husband said, "NFP has challenged me to self-mastery so that I can freely give of myself." The nature of married love is total self-giving. If one is controlled by sex or withholds part of himself or herself (his or her fertility), that person cannot give totally to another. Self-mastery, on the other hand, can actually enhance sexual pleasure. Many couples explain: "Giving our whole selves to each other intensified the sensations of pleasure and the feeling of unity in this expression of our love."

When NFP is adopted as a lifestyle, fertility is regarded as a gift and children are valued and welcomed. A sense of awe at their power to procreate strikes many couples during the fertile time. One couple remarked that "NFP opened our hearts to children ... Children are a gift, a blessing, not a burden." Others have remarked that the time of fertility comes to be viewed with "a tremendous reverence" because fertility "is the time God created us to create." When a couple knows the most fertile time in the cycle and tries to achieve pregnancy, it becomes a shared joy.

NFP instruction puts the emphasis on a couple's shared responsibility not only for having children, but also for managing their

combined fertility. Taking joint responsibility for fertility means that both spouses accept the challenge of abstinence during the fertile phase if they wish to avoid pregnancy. NFP requires couples to communicate. It helps them to talk about many things that may have been difficult to talk about before, including their sexuality. Through charting their fertility, they have a starting point for discussing the intimate aspects of their life, such as their sexual feelings and desires and their hopes or fears about pregnancy. Good, substantive interpersonal communication strengthens a marriage.

Many couples say that an NFP lifestyle deepens their faith in God. "(NFP) involved us with the Truth .... We experienced ... the conversion point in our lives." "NFP is putting ourselves in God's hands, totally allowing Him to work spiritually in our lives." With so many rewards for those who persevere with NFP it would be surprising if there were not also challenges. As one husband says: "The reality is that NFP is challenging .... (But) it is clear to me that working together through the tough times strengthens and enriches our marriage." And as another spouse says: "The value I experience in NFP is in the long run .... It forces you to place your immediate choices in the context of spouse, children, family and Creator."

For additional information on NFP go to:  
<http://www.nfpoutreach.org/>

**The Evangelization Station**  
P.O. Box 267  
Angels Camp, California 95222, USA  
Telephone: 209-728-5598  
E-mail: [evangelization@earthlink.net](mailto:evangelization@earthlink.net)  
[www.evangelizationstation.com](http://www.evangelizationstation.com)

Pamphlet 615

## **What Must a Man do to Ensure that I will have a Strong Marriage and a Happy Family?**

Fr. Matthew Habiger OSB

When God designed marriage for a man and woman, He had in mind a lifelong relationship that would bring fulfillment and happiness to the man, the woman, and all their children. God wants every couple to have a happy marriage, a strongly bonded relationship, and a healthy, happy family. He intends that their love for each other will deepen and mature. To catch a glimpse of God's original design for marriage, read the first three chapters of Genesis, and then Hosea 2, Jeremiah 16, the Song of Solomon, and finally Matthew 19 and Ephesians 5.

We can know both God's original plan for marriage, and all the means that He provides to make a successful marriage possible. God designed marriage as the personal vocation for the vast majority of the human race. He will help each couple to achieve a good marriage, but He also leaves to each couple many things that only they can do make it happen. Created as persons with free will and intelligence, and graced with freedom, we must use these powers in a manner that freely cooperates with God's plan.

What is our end of the bargain? We must learn how to love. This means that we must move away from a self-assertive, self-grasping, and self-seeking expression of love (erotic love) and move towards a self-giving, self-sacrificial and self-emptying expression of love (agapaic love). Simply put, we must learn how to make the total personal gift of ourself to another. As we grow older, we are expected to leave former stages of life behind us and grow into more

complex and richer stages. We understand this in physical terms, intellectual terms, and even emotional terms. But most important of all are the affective terms, the capacity for loving.

A couple falls in love, almost unconsciously. But they must make repeated conscious choices to remain in that love and to carry their share of the burdens that will keep this love alive and growing. It is easy to fall in love, but keeping that love alive requires good choices, repeated acts of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, and a willingness to do whatever is required for the welfare of those we love.

Real love means that we place the welfare of those we love above our own comfort. We want what is best for them. We want what is truly good for them, all the goods that make them flourish as persons, even if that comes at a personal cost to ourselves. Thus, a man is most happy when his wife and children are surrounded by love and have the opportunity to develop themselves as full persons. The same is true for a woman, wife and mother.

Making the total gift of self means that we must sometimes say "No" to our personal inclinations and preferences. My habits and recreations as a bachelor must yield to the needs of my marriage and family. This means giving up some of my previous forms of recreation. As a married man, I recognize that my wife and children have claims upon me that must be met.

To have a good marriage, I must admit that I am no longer the center of the universe. Rather, I am now part of a new universe, which is my wife, our marriage, and our family. I will only be truly happy if they are thriving as persons who are open to all the gifts of love and life. My God, my marriage, and my family are the center of my universe. If relationships among these persons are not in good condition, then I cannot be happy, because those most important people in my life are not happy or healthy.

A relationship, like life itself, is never static; it is always developing, like a flower that is unfolding. A relationship requires constant attention. We foster it by attending to what the real requirements are for the present day and present circumstances. A relationship, like real life, constantly brings new challenges. These challenges call for adjustments, greater maturity, and the willingness to find adequate solutions. Love finds a way.

When there is a spirit of generosity and self-giving, then relationships flourish within a marriage and within a family. A person knows that he or she is loved when their real needs are being attended to. That is so characteristic of a home, and of a marriage.

Parents learn self-discipline and self-sacrificial love. They must help their children to learn these values. Activities in a family that enhance family life are good and beneficial. Activities in a family that detract from family life are evil and harmful. Because contraception closes a person off from making the total gift of self in the spousal act, it is destructive of authentic spousal love.

Every marriage, and every family is unique because the persons involved are unique. But there is a commonality to all successful marriages and families. They have all discovered God's plan for authentic human love. They have learned that real happiness comes from generous self-giving, and not from self-taking. They have discovered that the greatest model for human love is the God-man, Jesus, who gave Himself completely for us, because that is what real love required of him. True love follows in the path of Jesus.

If we bring these dispositions to marriage, then God will bless all our efforts with success. Spouses and children will know that they are loved just for being the persons they are. The child will be recognized as the greatest gift God

can give to a couple. The spouses will understand that their love for one another comes from God, and that each spouse is the God-given complement to the other. They will know that every day God is drawing them closer to Himself and into his own communion of love and life.

## **How does NFP Enrich a Couple's Relationship**

Mary Shivanandan, STD

Couples who adopt NFP to space the births of children find that it brings about many positive changes in their relationship and even becomes a way of life. It begins with acceptance, and even wonder, at the way the human body is made. As one woman noted, "Knowing and learning about what goes on inside of my unique body amazed me." Women especially find this information empowering. The woman gains a new respect for herself and often finds that her husband has a new supportive attitude: "My husband respects me as a person in my own right. He accepts my fertility as part of me." This new-found confidence contrasts with what one woman explained about how she felt using contraceptives: "I was required to sacrifice my health ... I felt as if I were an object and not an equal partner in our marriage."

Couples using NFP accept their fertility not as a nuisance or even a disease, but as a gift. When the physical pleasures of sexual intercourse are a couple's primary focus, the woman can feel used. NFP treats the woman not as a sexual object, but as the unique person she is. NFP does not downplay the importance of sexual union and sexual pleasure. Through the practice of periodic abstinence NFP helps