

One NFP teaching couple cannot possibly do all the work that is needed in a parish. There is more to be done than working with the young couples in the marriage prep program. Here is what is involved in a contemporary viable parish:

The *marriage preparation program* needs the full program of NFP. It is not enough to simply provide an introductory session on NFP during the marriage prep program. The pastor should explain to young couples, “If you are contracepting, I’m not going to marry you in the Church. A contracepting arrangement is not a consummated marriage. I don’t want to enable you to sin. If you don’t believe in this, then you are not a Catholic.”

This means that any couple preparing for marriage must be prepared to use a morally good means of spacing pregnancies, when there are justifying reasons for doing this. If they do not understand NFP, then they will immediately resort to using the Pill. This leads right into the contraceptive culture, which, in turn, leads to a 50% divorce rate.

RCIA people need to hear about the remedy for contraception. RCIA candidates should affirm the Church’s teaching on contraception, or not be brought into the Church. This issue must be clarified. Nationwide, there is a 60% dropout rate among RCIA people received into the Church. What is the advantage of providing an incomplete RCIA program, with such a dropout rate? This issue needs to be clearly addressed. This means that RCIA couples of childbearing age must also learn NFP by taking the prescribed 4-5 classes.

Juniors and seniors in the parish religious education program should know the basics about NFP and chastity. Fertility awareness and appreciation is very important especially for this age group. This means more work for the parish NFP teachers. Contraception reaches into our high schools and middle schools. If our teenagers do not appreciate God’s plan for sex and marriage, and why sex is to be saved for marriage, then they become easy victims of the dominant culture.

Less than 5% of Catholic couples practice NFP. This means that the vast majority of Catholic couples knows almost nothing about NFP, and will need to find instruction when they realize that contraception is seriously sinful and must be repented of. That means more work for the parish NFP teaching couples, and for the priests who must evangelize them.

It should be obvious that one NFP teaching couple cannot do all the work for the parish. Building strong marriages and healthy, happy families is a herculean task. There are many people in the parish who can help with the task. They need to be recruited and encouraged. Retrieving and restoring God’s plan for marriage and

spousal love is largely the work of the laity, but then the laity is 99.9% of the Church. There are plenty of workers for the vineyard. This is heavily the work of the lay apostolate. Many parishioners will be involved with marriage prep programs, RCIA, religious education, and marriage enrichment programs.

This is a joint effort. The laity can’t do the priest’s work, nor can the priest do the laity’s work. The pastor must proclaim God’s plan for marriage and spousal love. The people must see that their pastor passionately believes in this. In his preaching the pastor must explain the rationale of NFP, the beauty of God’s plan for human love and sexuality as provided in *Humanae Vitae* and *Familiaris Consortio*, and draw upon some of the helpful insights in the Theology of the Body. Then the people will become more open to God’s plan. Only then can the NFP teachers teach the methodology of NFP to a receptive audience. To bring about the obedience of Faith, both aspects, the theological and the methodology, must be applied. One cannot function without the other.

It is our experience that couples who practice NFP are very generous people. They demonstrate generosity in their marriage and their families. They become the parish’s best and most sustained volunteers. They are generous contributors to the collections. Most vocations to religious life and the priesthood come from these families. It is all to a pastor’s advantage to encourage his people to abide by God’s plan for spousal love. It will revolutionize the parish.

We priests, and now Deacon Rick and Jenny Condon, at NFP Outreach are available to help you get these programs started. You can reach us at our website (www.nfpoutreach.org), by phone: 405 942 4084, or by email: nfpoutreach@att.net. **Let the healing of our marriages and the strengthening of family life begin!**

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Pamphlet 617

Blueprint for an NFP-Focused Parish

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In this article we wish to explain why every parish, or cluster of smaller parishes, needs to have several trained NFP teachers.

Both of us have been ordained for over forty years, and have acquired an extensive amount of experience with marriage and family life. We have dealt with college students, soldiers in the military and their families, with Newman chaplaincies, with marriage prep programs and with countless married couples. We have considerable experience with all the major NFP providers throughout the world. We have been pastors of parishes, and now visit hundreds of parishes where we give NFP weekends, parish missions, Theology of the Body seminars and clergy conferences. We both have doctorates in moral theology, and we wish to bring this background to the service of contemporary viable parishes.

Why should there be a focused concentration upon building strong marriages in all parishes today? Because half of marriages among Catholics today end up in a divorce. Catholics today reflect the mores of the surrounding secular culture more than the teachings of their Church. We live in a fault free divorce culture, where either of the spouses can initiate a divorce and carry it to completion despite the objections of the other spouse.

Think of what this does to the spouses and their sense of commitment to God’s plan for marriage. Consider the trauma and pain inflicted upon their children. Think of the impact of this upon family life. A nation’s life is only as strong as its family life. If our marriages lack irrevocable commitment to marriage and spousal love, then there is not a strong foundation for healthy, happy families and a healthy society.

That is why we must give serious attention to the retrieval of God’s plan for marriage, spousal love and family in all our parishes. Of what value are the many and various programs in a parish, if their marriages are falling apart and their families are fractured?

We promote Natural Family Planning (NFP) because it encapsulates all the many values that go into strong marriages and healthy, happy families. Of itself, NFP is a method of spacing pregnancies. But it presupposes an

understanding, and an active pursuit, of God's plan for marriage, spousal love and family.

We now live in a contracepted society. The practice of contraception leads to the fading of the perception that the sexual act has anything to do with the procreation of children. The act is deliberately manipulated to exclude the possibility. When contraception fails, the resulting baby is likely to be aborted. This is particularly true when contraception takes place outside marriage, in which case there is no proper provision for the upbringing of the child.

The perception that sexuality is not connected to reproduction, gives rise to the concept of "recreational sex." Sexual intercourse is regarded primarily as a source of pleasure. Since "nothing can happen," i.e., no baby can be conceived, sexual activity is not confined to marriage. This leads to increased promiscuity, adultery and prostitution, and to perverse sexual practices, including homosexual practices, which are even proclaimed as ideal because they are 100% sterile. All these practices lead to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

If there can be sex without babies, there can be babies without sex. The separation of the procreative from the unitive aspects of the sexual act through contraception has prepared the way for artificial reproduction. The first step was IVF. Further steps followed quickly: selective reduction of embryos, the implantation of embryos from third person, surrogate motherhood, experimentation with surplus or deliberately produced embryos, pre-implantation diagnostics and cloning.

Abortion and artificial reproduction leads to contempt for life, which opens the way for euthanasia.

In the practice of contraception the spouses do violence to one another in that they tend to regard one another as a source of pleasure. The mutual rejection of fertility implies a (subconscious) personal rejection of each other. This burdens the marriage and often leads to divorce, which in its turn means suffering for the children. Society becomes dysfunctional and violence proliferates. Non-traditional "families," such as single and divorced women with children, families with children from two or even three sets of parents, and same-sex unions with children, become acceptable, hence weakening the traditional family.

Husband and wife no longer regard each other with awe as a gift of God, entrusted to one another for life, but as a source of pleasure, which can be manipulated as required. Children are no longer seen as gifts and blessings of God, but as objects, which we have a right to destroy. It is presumed that children can be produced, selected, rejected, killed, cloned and designed to order. The Creator is rejected and man arrogantly arrogates to himself the

place of God. It is blasphemy, which cries to high Heaven and which will one day lead to disaster.

The healing of society requires the abolition of the widespread practice of contraception and sterilization. The Catholic Church is the only body which consistently opposes contraception, so it should be a priority for bishops and priests to promote chastity both outside and within marriage. If this is done consistently, it will eventually have an effect on society as a whole. We should be aware that contraception is being vigorously promoted for commercial and ideological reasons.

The regulation of conception can be achieved by means of the natural methods, which are highly reliable and have none of the above-mentioned disadvantages, and on the contrary foster a positive attitude towards children, build marriages and preserve faith. (See "The Contracepted Society" by David Prentis, Population Research Institute Review, Sept-Oct 05, pp. 5 & 10.)

This is why every parish, or cluster of small parishes, needs a set of NFP teachers. If we are to begin to cut into the 50% divorce rate among our people, then we must address the 85% contraceptive rate, and now 40% sterilization rate, among Catholic couples of childbearing age. This will be a massive effort, and will require the cooperation of many parties. Fortunately, this is a team effort, and there are many players available.

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Pastors will have to take the initiative here. The life of Faith is lived and promoted primarily at the parish level. Either the Faith is fostered at the parish level, or it simply does not happen. Thus pastors cannot push off these responsibilities to the chancery. The chancery exists to serve the needs of the parish. It cannot replace the pastor.

The retrieval of a pro-marriage, pro-spousal love and pro-family culture in a parish begins with the efforts of the priests. Pastors have a vital, role to play. They were ordained to proclaim God's plan for marriage, spousal love and family to their people, and to provide the Sacraments. The people must hear God's remarkable plan from the

pulpit, where everyone hears the same message. Preaching God's plan with conviction is a pastor's first responsibility in promoting strong marriages. There is a wealth of material available for this pulpit work.

We priests need to recall Pope Paul VI's reassuring challenge to us in *Humanae Vitae* #29: "So beloved Sons, preach with full confidence and be certain that the Holy Spirit of God, who guides the Magisterium in its teaching, will illuminate the hearts of the faithful and invite them to give their assent." This means that God is the primary power at work in all faithful preaching, and that we can be assured He will not disappoint us if we are his faithful laborers.

This is the Year of the Priest, and St. Jean Vianney is held up as our model. We recall that the Cure d'Arns did not wait for signals from his chancery office to begin his focused preaching and sacramental ministry. Nor did he depend upon the approval of surrounding parishes to sustain him in his God-given vocation. The Spirit of Jesus guided him and sustained him throughout all his heroic efforts. Pope Paul VI reminds us: "Refusal to compromise anything concerning the saving doctrine of Christ is an outstanding act of charity to souls; yet at the same time it is necessary always to combine this with patience and goodness" (HV 29).

If the pastor is not with the program, then there is no program. Without his initiative, and his sustained encouragement, nothing will happen and the status quo continues. The pastor must see the clear connection between contraception and divorce, between contraception and the breakdown of marriage. That should motivate him to seek ways to address the root of the problem.

A pastor has great resources at his disposal in the parish. There are many gifted and faith-filled couples who will respond to the need, once they are convinced that the parish is making a serious effort to build up strong marriages and happy families. A pastor has only to reach out to these couples and invite them to become NFP teachers. A typical parish needs several NFP teaching couples, as we shall explain shortly. These couples should have a strong marriage, be relatively young, living their faith, and be willing to witness to this.

NFP teaching couples need to be thoroughly trained in the art of NFP. They can seek their formation from any of the major providers of NFP in this county. (See our website for contact information: www.nfpoutreach.org.) The parish should cover all their expenses incurred while becoming certified teachers. This will become their apostolate. The very least the parish can do is to cover their expenses for becoming certified instructors. They become excellent assets to the parish program in a vital area.