

NFP respects human dignity, natural law, says speaker

NOTRE DAME, Ind. - In deciding a correct course of action, a person must determine not just whether a means is efficient, but, more importantly, whether it respects the dignity of the person and natural law, a physician told a University of Notre Dame audience July 15.

Natural family planning, known as NFP, not only provides efficient family planning without side effects, but also is ethical because it respects both the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage, said Dr. Maria del Pilar Calva Mercado of Mexico. NFP teaches couples to identify the fertile days in a woman's cycle so that the couple can avoid or achieve pregnancy.

Calva Mercado teaches genetics and bioethics at the university level. She is also a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life and serves on the Commission for the Family for the Bioethics Council of the Mexican Episcopal Commission.

With her at Notre Dame was Judith Leonard, director of the Office of Family Life and Natural Family Planning for the Diocese of Wichita, Kan.

Their visit to the campus came at the end of a week of NFP instruction, which included stops in the Diocese of Gaylord, Mich., and Chicago.

In her remarks, Calva Mercado talked about the relationship among bioethics, NFP and contraception.

Faulty bioethics bases decisions on the central value of freedom, and thus anything that is a free choice is determined to be correct, she said. Another faulty kind of bioethics considers anything that advances science to be acceptable, she said.

She criticized those faulty points of view because "the dignity of the individual is reduced to (the) extrinsic: The person is valued according to what she has, not because she's a person."

This kind of reasoning makes people argue that it is acceptable to abort an unborn child who may have abnormalities because her birth would make her parents and society suffer, Calva Mercado said.

The contraceptive culture began in the 1960s, she continued, because of the erroneous theory that contraception would reduce the rate of both abortion and divorce. This goal was laudable, but the means incorrect, she said.

Because the unitive and procreative aspects of sexual union were separated by contraceptive use, the result has been increases in divorce and abortion, as well as an increased rate of infidelity and sexually transmitted disease, she said.

This philosophy has made acceptable and even commonplace the creation of new human life in a laboratory, with the human embryo being treated like a mere commodity, Calva Mercado said.

Leonard, who has taught NFP for more than 20 years, reported on a test-market study conducted in her diocese to see if people wanted to learn NFP and would come to a class.

A publicity campaign created for the study included print, radio, television and billboard ads, she said. The trademarked tagline for the campaign was: "99 percent effective. 100 percent natural. Your body knows."

The campaign nearly quadrupled the number of calls from people inquiring about NFP, Leonard reported.

About 12 percent of the callers were men, and most callers indicated an interest in NFP for a healthier lifestyle and concern about the side effects of hormonal birth-control pills.

A survey conducted as part of the campaign found that 97 percent of the people contacted were aware of some kind of family planning; 68 percent were aware of natural alternatives; and 20 percent were aware of NFP.

However, half of those aware of natural methods tended to think of NFP merely as calendar rhythm. Only about 10 percent were aware of newer, more effective scientific methods, such as the sympto-thermal method, which combines

observations of temperature and cervical mucus with other indicators such as changes in the cervix and secondary fertility signs.

About half of those surveyed were interested in learning more about the new methods, and more than one-third found NFP appealing, leading Leonard to conclude that interest in NFP will grow as more people learn about its benefits and come to realize that the newer methods are 99 percent effective.