

# Speak to Any NFP Couple

Natural Family Planning Awareness Week is July 19-25 highlighting the anniversary of the papal encyclical “*Humanae Vitae*” (July 25) which articulates Catholic beliefs about human sexuality, conjugal love and responsible parenthood.

This week, the Church in this country asks Catholics to take time out to recognize the great gift to married couples that is natural family planning (NFP). Natural family planning provides married couples with the opportunity to plan prayerfully for the conception of children and accept them as the “supreme gift of marriage,” which they truly are.

NFP is proven to lower the divorce rate dramatically. In fact, research has consistently given evidence that couples using NFP have marriages that are happier, more stable, and spiritually enriched. Natural family planning requires regular communication about openness to children, because the responsibility for natural, biologically-based and prayerful family planning does not fall on the husband or wife alone.

Because the gift of natural family planning is widely misunderstood and sometimes out-of-hand rejected by some, I’d like to dispel a few of the myths surrounding it.

Natural family planning is *not* the old rhythm method. Up to 99 percent successful in avoiding or achieving pregnancy when used by a properly informed and motivated couple, it is based on scientific research about women’s fertility.

NFP can be practiced by *every* couple. Because it treats each woman and each cycle of fertility as unique, any couple can employ NFP. With this careful and personal approach, a couple can grow to better understand and appreciate the woman’s body and gift of fertility.

Natural family planning is *absolutely* different from artificial contraception. Natural family planning does not involve artificial contraception. It is true that both can be used to avoid pregnancy. However, NFP couples work with, rather than against, their God-given gift of fertility. Couples using NFP avoid unnecessary and unnatural medications and materials. NFP has no harmful side effects and is virtually cost free.

Natural family planning is also eco-friendly, as its primary materials are a thermometer, a chart, education, prayer, communication, and the mutual respect and love of husband and wife.

Not convinced? Speak to any NFP couple.

Natural family planning is *not* the Church's way to force women to spend their lives bearing children and couples to have as many babies as possible. In truth, it honors women and gives them due respect for the gift and beauty of their fertility. The Church urges couples to work with this gift to be responsible stewards of their fertility and encourages this incredibly effective method of family planning for building a more solid and a deeper connection between husband and wife.

The words of Pope Paul VI forty-one years ago remain just as true today. In "Humanae Vitae," Pope Paul told the world that "(t)he most serious duty of transmitting human life ... has always been a source of great joys to (couples), even if sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress" and that "each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life." And earlier this month, in his new encyclical "Caritas in Veritate," Pope Benedict XVI told us that "(m)orally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource." It avoids dangerous population decline facing many cultures today and impoverishment of social relations. This rich teaching of the Church, that married couples share in openness to life, provides great joy to wives and their husbands and strengthens the shared institution of marriage.

To those couples using natural family planning, I applaud your commitment to each other, to the beauty of your fertility, to this hopeful and wholesome teaching of the Church, and to your singular witness in the face of skeptics, even among some in our own ranks. I recognize the challenges and joys you face and pray for your continued commitment.

To those couples not using NFP, I urge you to consider this gift as a radical shift from the secular understanding of sexuality and marriage. Consider it as hope for a more committed, more loving, and more faithful future for your family.

For more information about NFP, including a brochure with information about the

couple to couple league, please visit  
<https://author.archbalt.org/marriage-family/marriage-enrichment/natural-family-planning.cfm>.

Explore!

Better still, once more, speak with any NFP couple!

*Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien's column will appear intermittently through the summer weeks.*