

Listening to the call – one doctor’s conversion to Natural Family Planning

by Sam Patet
The Prairie Catholic

Editor’s note: The USCCB has designated July 22-28 as Natural Family Planning Awareness Week. This story highlights how one individual is serving the NFP ministry in the Diocese of New Ulm.

NEW ULM – When Jane Gaetze, a Catholic, started her work as an obstetrician-gynecologist 32 years ago, she was excited to help women.

Unfortunately, her medical practice wasn’t Catholic. She gave women contraceptives and did procedures that made women infertile, including tubal ligations and the insertion of intrauterine devices (IUDs). These methods go against Catholic moral teachings.

God, however, had a different plan for her. Today, she’s a staunch defender of the Church’s teachings on human life and women’s health.

“I’m pretty sure the Holy Ghost was pushing me for a long time before I said, ‘Okay,’” Gaetze said.

Gaetze works at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls, S.D., and spends part of her time at Avera’s outreach location in Tyler, Minn. Since 2000, she has assisted couples using the FertilityCare method of Natural Family Planning to address family planning and women’s health issues.

Barb Giles, a registered nurse who is trained to teach FertilityCare, has been working with Gaetze for 12 years. She says the doctor’s practice is flourishing.

“It takes some time to get in to see her because she has a waiting list,” Giles said. She is “a very caring, compassionate physician” who “has a heart” for Natural Family Planning.

Natural Family Planning, or NFP, is an umbrella term for methods that allow a couple to achieve or avoid a pregnancy by monitoring the wife’s fertility, said Sr. Candace Fier, director of the



NFP methods – which one might be right for you?

There are many different programs that provide methods of Natural Family Planning. Each program teaches either the ovulation method or the sympto-thermal method. Each is a safe, natural, and reliable way of timing pregnancy. Both methods require observing daily signs of a woman’s fertility and recording this information in a chart.

Ovulation method

The ovulation method instructs a couple to monitor and chart the woman’s cervical mucus, the most accurate sign of fertility.

Sympto-thermal method

The sympto-thermal method instructs a couple to monitor the woman’s cervical mucus, to monitor her basal body temperature, and to do a cervix check.

In the Diocese of New Ulm, both NFP methods are being taught with three programs represented: FertilityCare (ovulation), NFP International (sympto-thermal), and Couple to Couple League (sympto-thermal). Contact Sr. Candace Fier, 507-359-2966; cfier@dnu.org.

Diocese of New Ulm’s Office of Family Life. Sr. Candace is a registered nurse who has been teaching FertilityCare for 22 years.

Certain signs in a woman’s body – including her cervical mucus and her basal body temperature – tell her whether or not she is fertile on a given day, Sr. Candace said.

Each day, a couple records these signs on a chart. Then, they use this information to discern if they would like to have intercourse. If they would like to achieve a pregnancy, they choose one of the woman’s fertile days. If they would like to avoid a pregnancy, they can choose any day except when the woman is fertile.

Gaetze said even though part of her felt that birth control was wrong, she still prescribed it to women, between 50 and 70 percent of her patients.

“I was making money; I was in a position to influence women,” she said. She swept her objecting conscience “underneath the rug,” she said.

Slowly, though, Gaetze’s conscience began to change. She said she got tired of giving out birth control as the solution to a woman’s medical problems. These included heavy periods, pelvic pain, and ovarian cysts.

“It almost didn’t matter what the diagnosis was – you just gave a birth control pill for it,” she said.

Her family and her patients also played a part in her conversion. Her brother-in-law – also an obstetrician-gynecologist – had been encouraging her to explore NFP. Two of her patients gave her the book “Physicians Healed,” an account of 15 physicians who

stopped prescribing contraceptives. Even her young children influenced her. They told her what they had learned at their Catholic school on abortion and birth control.

By 2000, she had stopped prescribing birth control pills and had stopped performing tubal ligations and inserting IUDs. That year, she was asked by Avera officials to learn FertilityCare. She readily agreed.

“I really, really enjoyed the FertilityCare ... training,” Gaetze said. “It answered so many, many wishes that women should have in their life for understanding their bodies and understanding how God meant for us to live.”

With FertilityCare, Gaetze said, she helps women “assess how their cycles work for them, without trying

to force their cycle(s) to do something that’s not natural.”

Also, if a woman is having problems like heavy periods or ovarian cysts, FertilityCare helps her understand what the problem is, Giles said. A birth control pill “covers up” the symptoms and doesn’t cure the problem, she said. “There are other ways to treat those conditions other than the birth control pill.”

NFP also invites a woman and her husband to communicate more, Sr. Candace said. “Communication becomes a much more important and well-developed aspect of their relationship.”

For example, when Sr. Candace works with a couple, she asks them to chart together. This simple act invites them to talk about how they want – and how they think God wants – their family to grow, Sr. Candace said.

NFP isn’t always easy. For example, if a couple wants to avoid a pregnancy and they know that the wife is fertile, they will need to practice abstinence, Sr. Candace said.

These sacrifices, though, deepen their relationship. They learn that sexual intimacy is “just one part of their relationship,” Sr. Candace said.

Does Gaetze know that she’s going against the current? Yes, she does. For this busy doctor, though, teaching women and men the truth about their fertility is worth it.

“My day is really good,” Gaetze said. “I love what I do.”

For more information about NFP or any of the methods taught in the diocese, contact Sr. Candace, cfier@dnu.org, 507-359-2966. For a list of NFP teachers, as well as NFP-only physicians, go to the Office of Family Life Education Web page: www.dnu.org/word/family-life.html.