

Diocese of New Ulm offers Natural Family Planning classes that teach two of the major NFP methods

By Christine Clancy
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The privilege of a husband and wife to bring new life into the world is a gift from God. It is a sacred responsibility through which they participate in God's creative power. Natural Family Planning (NFP) helps couples understand the beauty of this creative power by defining the scientific, natural, and moral aspects of family planning that allow them to achieve or postpone pregnancy.

NFP is a general name for the methods of family planning that are based on a woman's menstrual cycle. 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. By learning to observe and understand these signs, couples are enabled to participate in planned procreation.

“NFP is both life-giving, as it brings forth new life in the marital relationship, and love-giving, as it deepens and enriches the bond of love between husband and wife,” said Sr. Candace Fier, director of the diocesan Office of Family Life. Sr. Candace is a Schoenstatt Sister of Mary and a registered nurse who has been teaching Creighton Model FertilityCare for twenty-nine years. “NFP is very effective at both achieving and spacing pregnancies. It is truly a method of family planning and not a method of contraception,” said Sr. Candace.

In a study sponsored by the U.S. bishops, it was revealed that seventy percent of married couples were satisfied with their use of NFP. In Sr. Candace's experience working with couples practicing NFP, they are sometimes challenged by the temporary abstinence required by the method. However, she said a great majority discover their relationship gains stronger marital bonds and better communication.

Shaun and Katie Kober of Sleepy Eye have been married for a couple of years. The effectiveness of NFP has been a great support for them. They have appreciated how hard it can be to practice abstinence during a time of using the method to postpone pregnancy, which they had to do post miscarriage. “Seeing how well the method works when we adhere to it is very rewarding and helped us during that challenge,” said Shaun. The Kobers have used the NFP method for both postponing and achieving pregnancy with success. However, they made clear that they are always aware that no matter how perfect the charting, God is the ultimate author of life. “He can choose to give life or to withhold it. So there is always this sense of mystery even amidst the amazing science and intricate details behind NFP,” said Katie

NFP methods

In the Diocese of New Ulm, programs are available that teach two of the major methods of NFP, the Sympto-Thermal Method (Couple to Couple League and NFP International programs) and the Ovulation Method (Creighton Model FertilityCare System). Both methods are a safe, natural, and highly reliable method of family planning and require observing daily signs of a woman's

fertility and recording this information on a chart. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to postpone pregnancy. Both methods are available in the diocese in English, and the Creighton Model FertilityCare System is available in Spanish via Skype.

Educating couples about NFP is a component of what the presenters teach during the diocesan pre-marriage program and the God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage program.

Presenters Dan and Joy Wambeke of Marshall have been working with engaged couples for nine years through God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage. "A real highlight is seeing in those engaged couples when a light bulb turns on after receiving information about NFP, and they begin to respond to the invitation to pursue it in their upcoming marriages," said Dan.

Kevin and Mary Kate Losleben of Sleepy Eye are second-year diocesan pre-marriage program presenters. In addition to their presentation on parenting, they give a presentation on NFP. "We seek to communicate how sharing with your children the beauty and dignity of the human body, from little on, prepares them to receive NFP in the future," said Kevin.

NFP teachers are central to the NFP ministry in the diocese. The commitment and work of the NFP teachers are instrumental in helping couples build strong marriages and families as they live God's design for love and life. According to Sr. Candace, "They exercise a selfless ministry to provide professional teaching, as well as mentoring couples in making NFP a life- and love-giving aspect of their relationship as a couple."

Dan and Brenda Voracek of Mankato are NFP teachers for the Couple to Couple League. They enjoy meeting couples excited to learn NFP. Most times, class size is small, which allows them to more easily get to know the couple and more effectively teach NFP. "We give the couples the tools they need to practice a holy marriage – at least as far as intimacy is concerned. I think showing them the benefits of NFP and the ease of learning it, combined with exposing them to side effects of chemical and physical contraception, helps them to be steadfast in their NFP lifestyle," said Dan.

Pastoral leadership plays a role

Pastoral leaders in the diocese are also very important when it comes to proclaiming the truth the Church teaches about NFP.

Fr. Todd Petersen ministers to couples in the Apostles Peter and Paul Area Faith Community (Nicollet and St. Peter). He has found that couples he has worked with who practice NFP seem to have a better relationship with each other and with God. "There is not an artificial wall between the couple, their sexual expression, and their individual and marital relationship with God," said Fr. Petersen. "They have to have trust in the God-given cycle and signs of fertility, and that trust tends to extend to true discipleship."

In the Good Teacher Area Faith Community (Canby, Ghent, Minneota, and St. Leo), parish marriage mentors play a key role in proclaiming the message of NFP. Fr. Craig Timmerman, pastor of the AFC, explains, "Couples who attend the diocesan marriage preparation classes and

the introductory class on NFP, also talk about it with our mentor couples in the parish. These classes and conversations make them reconsider their [negative] assumptions.”

Fr. Timmerman feels that Catholic schools and religious education programs are also valuable partners in efforts to give the gift of NFP. In an effort to fulfill that task, Fr. Timmerman invited two NFP-only doctors to present to the Confirmation class on contraception and NFP. “It was something new for the students to hear that even the medical community does not hear anything in their training about NFP, and that they are never told the truth about the pill or how it works,” said Fr. Timmerman.

NFP is a gift that the Church longs to give to each couple for their married life. In the Diocese of New Ulm, the giving of that gift takes place through various parish and diocesan ministries. NFP Awareness Week is a great time to find out how NFP can strengthen your marriage or how to become involved in passing this gift along to other couples.

For more information about NFP ministry in the diocese, contact Sr. Candace Fier at 507-233-5328, cfier@dnu.org. For a full list of NFP services in the diocese, visit <https://www.dnu.org/nfp/>.