

Natural Family Planning Ministry in the Diocese of Pittsburgh

The Natural Family Planning Program in the Diocese of Pittsburgh has been accredited by the Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and is overseen by the Office for Family Life and Catechesis in the Department for Religious Education of the Secretariat for Education.



Diocese of Pittsburgh
Office for Family Life and Catechesis
Department for Religious Education
Secretariat for Education
111 Boulevard of the Allies
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
412-456-3160
familylife@diopitt.org

Natural Family Planning Guide for Priests, Deacons and Pre-Marriage Instructors

Today's world with its secular and pervasive media has made it difficult for young people to "hold on to" their faith. Many engaged couples who come for marriage instruction and guidance are not practicing Catholics and find few good reasons for believing. They may have a distinct lack of catechesis that ended with Confirmation. Yet during the time between Confirmation and engagement, the culture around the couple has been a guiding and influential force.

Many couples today have a noticeable lack of recognition of moral authority. The climate in which they live is almost entirely materialistic with a heavy emphasis on individuality, autonomy and self-rights. In today's world, couples are given the message to "get what you can, as soon as you can, enjoy what you can today."

Some young couples might come from families who have not set a good example of the Catholic faith. It would be unfair to assume they know even the most basic catechetical points regarding the Sacrament of Marriage or that the couple has addressed basic questions pertaining to marriage with each other. Quite often, concerns such as when and if to have children have not been discussed. Perhaps the couple may not be able to verbalize why they want to marry each other in the first place.

The General Directory for Catechesis states that many engaged couples have been baptized yet live as if they do not know Christ. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops informs us that the number one reason for leaving the Catholic Church is the lack of a personal relationship with Christ. For these individu-

als, Pope John Paul II has called for a "new evangelization."

Engaged couples come to the Church for instruction and guidance regarding their future lives together in Christ. Through baptism they are entitled to hear and learn the faith in its entirety. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that catechesis is not a simple matter of passing on information. It is a conversion process, the sharing of a vision, a call to live the vision—most importantly, an intention to put people in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ.



Your role in this effort as priest, deacon or marriage preparation catechist, is critical, for this might be the first time the couple hears exactly what the Church teaches regarding morality in marriage and natural family planning. Preparing couples for the sacrament of marriage provides an excellent opportunity for evangelization and catechesis. This is a time of great hope as couples approach the Church and can continue to live a life of grace.

In guiding couples toward the gift of Natural Family Planning, it is important to remind them that:

- The Church has good news to bring them regarding sexuality and God's magnificent plan in making us male and female.
- God is the author of sexuality – He created sexuality as a gift through which He wishes to bless their lives in many ways.

- Our Lord tells us in Scripture that sex is meant for two main purposes:
 1. To bind couples together in lasting love, and so free them from the loneliness that the human spirit is inclined toward.
 2. To enable their love to be fruitful and to bring children, the joy of married love, into existence.

Facts to Share With the Couple

- Natural Family Planning (NFP) is not the “Calendar Rhythm Method” of birth control that their parents/grandparents (often unsuccessfully) used. It is based on the couple’s recognition of their own naturally occurring cyclic phases of fertility and infertility and involves no use of chemicals, surgeries, or devices.
- NFP is highly reliable and when used correctly is 97% effective. Effectiveness, as with any method, demands careful and well-informed knowledge and use. NFP is easy to learn and interpret.
- NFP can be used at any stage of a couple’s reproductive health: regular cycles, irregular cycles, breastfeeding, pre-menopausal, post-pill, etc.
- NFP is cost-effective. Outside of an initial physical exam, there are no physician visits connected with the use of NFP and no worries about surgery or irreversibility.
- NFP has no harmful chemical side effects. It is consistent with a healthful, natural way of life so sought after today in our technological society.
- NFP actually brings the married couple closer and allows marital sex to be a full expression of the marital covenant.

Husband and wife work together to achieve (or avoid) pregnancy. In doing so, they share everything—all of both body and soul.

- NFP has been proven to be very effective in helping infertile couples achieve pregnancy.
- Only NFP preserves true and integrally honest love. It defends the dignity of male and female as each gives and receives the unconditional and total love of the other. It is completely in line with church teaching.
- NFP challenges the couple to live up to their call to unconditional love, and to not settle for anything less from their spouse. To choose NFP in a marriage is to choose total and unconditional love; to choose artificial contraception is to settle for a lesser “love.” It is the choice of NFP in a marriage that maintains the dignity of humans as created in the image and likeness of God.

Methods of Natural Family Planning

The Diocese of Pittsburgh is unique in that it makes available four methods of Natural Family Planning:

1. The Billings Ovulation Method
2. The Couple to Couple League
3. The Creighton Fertilicare Ovulation Method
4. The Cervical Mucous/Basal Body Temperature (CM/BBT) Method

Brochures are available on each of these four methods. Contact the Department for Religious Education at (412) 456-3160.

Natural Family Planning Classes

The diocese offers Natural Family Planning classes for all four methods throughout the

year. For brochures and scheduled dates and times contact the Department for Religious Education at (412) 456-3160.

Natural Family Planning Promoters

Promoters of Natural Family Planning are trained to aid pastors in preparing couples for marriage and provide accurate information regarding Natural Family Planning and the various methods provided. NFP Promoters are not instructors in NFP, but are available to present information on natural family planning to couples at deanery/parish pre-marriage programs, and serve as a contact person for couples interested in obtaining information regarding all aspects of NFP and training in the various methods. Promoters can be found in every deanery across the diocese. Those interested in becoming an NFP trainer are always welcome to the training sessions held each year. A list of NFP Promoters can be obtained through the Department for Religious Education at (412) 456-3160.

Pre-Marriage Instruction

Diocesan pre-marriage instruction is held every other month from July through May at St. Mary of Mercy Parish, Lawless Hall. Pastors receive an annual schedule that can be reproduced and given to interested couples. A segment on Natural Family Planning is integrated into every parish/diocesan pre-marriage program across the diocese. Materials and information about Natural Family Planning can be obtained by contacting the Department for Religious Education at (412) 456-3160.

NFP Lesson Plans for High School Youth

Lesson Plans have been developed to acquaint high school students with the basic science and theology related to NFP. In this way, when these young people approach the Church for marriage in the future, they will have an accurate and positive background on which to base their formal training in this method. Contact the Department for Religious Education at (412) 456-3115 for information.

NFP Advisory Committee

The Natural Family Planning Advisory Committee was established to oversee all diocesan NFP related initiatives and activities. The committee is comprised of doctors, priests, educators and faithful interested in promoting Natural Family Planning. The director of the Office for Family Life and Catechesis is staff to the committee chaired by a diocesan deacon assigned by the bishop.

The committee works to direct such initiatives as obtaining national endorsement from the Diocesan Development Program of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Other responsibilities include: oversight of NFP class scheduling, implementation of workshops and in-services for NFP promoters, promotion and publicity for the NFP program, and future planning of diocesan NFP initiatives. The NFP Advisory Committee meets on a quarterly basis.