

Natural Family Planning (NFP)

for beginners

Learn why
NFP is a gift
for your
marriage!



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Chapter 1

What is Natural Family Planning?



Natural Family Planning, also known as “NFP,” is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid conception. The varying methods observe the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman’s menstrual cycle.

NFP is a means for learning to live with fertility (fertility isn’t a disease to be treated or suppressed).

Natural Family Planning is:

- Total, Fruitful, Faithful, & Free (in body & spirit)
- Approved by the Church as the *only method* to achieve or avoid conception (that respects God’s design for married love)
- Growing in chastity and holiness together

- Reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life
- Promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of children
- Deepening of the vocation of marriage
- Living out of the *Theology of the Body*
- Deeper knowledge and understanding of who God made you and your spouse to be
- Provides a pathway of critical communication
- Enriches the bond between husband and wife
- Selfless and sacrificial
- NFP is counter-cultural

What NFP is not:

- Contraception (no “happy ending”)
- Fraudulent (it works!)
- Oppressive (it’s freeing!)

Chapter 2

The Church's Teachings on Marriage & Sexuality



The **vocation to marriage** is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution. (CCC 1603)

The Sacrament of Marriage is the original means of holiness for Christian Married couples and families (JP II's *Familiaris Consortio*, 56)

In **the gift of our bodies** to one another, we act on our love as Christ loved us. The body alone is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. Our bodies reveal God's invisible mystery!

Marital love is to be unitive, pro-creative, love-giving, and life-giving. This includes any sexual act between spouses.

"Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally **ordered to the good of spouses** and the generation of children... Moreover, it is a grave scandal when there is *corruption of the young.*" (CCC 2353)

Fornication:

- Moral evil (mortal sin- CCC 1755)
- Corrupts the marriage bond
- Can pervert & disable **true spousal intimacy**
- Lacks self-discipline (lack of virtue)
- Ignorance of moral conscious
- Disregards the other
- Creates a spiritual barrier

The Church's Teachings on Marriage & Sexuality cont...

After the fall, **marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure**, and to *open* oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving. (CCC 1609)

Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy... By coming to *restore* the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the **strength and grace to live marriage** in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and **taking up their crosses** that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. (CCC 1615)

Obedience at it's best doesn't stem from force or fear but from love for the good, the true, and the beautiful – love for God.

The truly free person doesn't look upon God's commands as a burden
The **truly free person longs to do God's will**.
It's the paradox of the gospel: by dying, we live (Jn 12:24); by giving ourselves away we find ourselves (Mt 16:25); by obeying the truth we are set free (Jn 8:32) - (*Good News About Sex & Marriage* by Christopher West pg.31)

Marriage is to be:

- Fruitful (open to life in flesh and spirit)
- Faithful (fidelity)
- Total (embodied)
- Free (no barrier in body, mind, or spirit).

Heavenly Holy Marriage:
Marriage is a pathway to the heavenly marriage: the **Wedding Feast of the Lamb** (Rev 19:7).

Remember this is a *MYSTERY* (we don't fully understand but are invited to enter in). Will you enter into the Mystery?



Chapter 3

Why not? Contraception

God's love is never sterile.

Contraception (n.)

Latin *contra* "against"

Contra (n.)

"a thing which is against
another"

"the contrary or opposite"

(www.etymonline.com)

"Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an **objectively contradictory language**, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life, but also to a **falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love** which is called upon to

give itself and personal totality..." (JP II's *Familiaris Consortio*, 32)

Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods [NFP], is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality.

These methods **respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness** between them, and favor the education of an **authentic freedom**. (CCC 2370)

Forms of Contraception:

- Condoms / Diaphragm
- Sterilization
- Birth control
- Intrauterine devices
- Spermicides
- Withdrawal method

Why not? Contraception continued...

Hypocrisy (n.)

"the sin of pretending to virtue or goodness,"
play a part, pretend,"
to sift, decide"

"separate gradually"

(www.etymonline.com)

Contraception:

- Harms the marriage bond physically, emotionally, and spiritually (by cutting off what spouses are made for: total union & God's grace, now creating a spiritual barrier)
- Has long-term effects on the woman's body and health (including potential harmful consequences to her fertility)
- Effects the marriage union spiritually (cuts us off from grace)
- Eliminates surrender to God and His Will in our lives
- Separates sex from reproduction (which is against natural law/order)

- Founder (Margaret Sanger) made contraceptives for ill-intent/evil purposes, including murder (see USCCB.org/resources)

Pope Paul VI predicted that artificial contraception would encourage "conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality."

He also **warned of the consequence on humanity** with the use of contraceptives:

1. open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards
2. the government might force contraceptives upon married couples
3. loss of respect for women
4. a loss of humility regarding humanity's role, we would begin to see ourselves as the ultimate masters of our nature

(Catholic Answers - taken from *Humanae Vitae* section 17).

Why not? Contraception continued...

Other forms of “Contraception” in a Catholic Marriage:

- Emotional withdrawal
- Spiritual withdrawal
- Withholding parts of oneself (including sexual past/history)
- Bearing false witness to the other (dishonest)
- partaking in sexual acts outside of the marriage bond (including lust)
- being unfaithful in spirit or flesh to one’s spouse

These forms of withdrawing oneself (as if in hiding or keeping from) can have long-term, life-long effects on the marital union, inhibiting it from growth and fruitfulness. One could also say it has **generational effects** that can continue down the generational line.

The hard things no one wants to talk about....

Artificial contraceptives and forms of sterilization are not always effective and can be quite unreliable (particularly the

“pull-out” method or douching). Any genital contact during the fertile period can lead to pregnancy.

Sterilizations (tubal ligation, vasectomy, Essure) are not actually forms of contraception. It is an **ultimate act of rejecting healthy fertility** (like cutting off a perfectly working limb!) and such acts interfere with God’s design for fertility.

Some forms of artificial contraceptives and sterilizations can indeed **cause a spontaneous abortion** of a fetus even without the individual’s knowledge (particularly with use of the Pill).

There are stats that reveal the **connection between contraceptives and abortions, & Plan B pills.**

Contraceptive industry is highly supported by the **Pornography** industry.

Chapter 4

NFP Methods: The Basics



There are **various approved methods** and approaches to either achieve or avoid pregnancy. If couples choose to avoid pregnancy they must abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile window.

Other terms:

- Periodic Abstinence
- Fertility appreciation
- Fertility awareness

NFP and fertility-awareness methods are not the same. FAMs are advertised as “natural contraceptions” and often promote the use of contraceptives.

NFP is MORE than monitoring biological markers- **it is learning to live with fertility.**

Husbands and wives are meant to SHARE the responsibility for **living with their combined fertility.** NFP is a healthy and holistic, and HOLY way to plan for children.

A great benefit of this way of living/approach is that women who chart their menstrual cycles find it easier to monitor their health and potentially detect problems.

There is no such thing as “watching your body too much” or “knowing too much about your fertility.” It is a core part of who you are!

Men are typically always fertile. Women are only fertile during certain phases of her cycle, the other phases are known as infertile windows.

NFP Methods: The Basics cont...

All NFP methods identify these phases based on a woman's biological markers.

Sperm can survive in a woman's body for up to five days, so she would be considered fertile before she even ovulates (this is often where it can get tricky!). Once ovulation occurs the egg can live for 12-24 hours after.

NFP is ALSO for couples who struggle with:

- Infertility (can help you better understand fertile windows)
- Women who have irregular cycles
- These methods help us gain a better understanding of the body and areas that might need medical attention
- For women who choose to breastfeed (you can breastfeed and practice NFP!) Return of fertility varies person to person.

A brief overview of the various NFP Methods:

- **Ovulation Method** (daily monitor tracking/
cervical mucus check)
 - Billings Ovulation Method (BOM)
 - Creighton Model FertilityCare System (Crm)
 - Family of the Americas Foundation Method (FAF)
- **Multi-Index Methods** (observing more than one marker)
 - Sympto-Thermal Method
 - Hormonal-Monitoring Method
 - Marquette Method
- There are many other tools and resources to use under the umbrella of these approaches.

It is highly recommended

to find a trained and certified NFP Instructor and find a Health Care Provider/practitioner who respects NFP and is educated to support you!

Chapter 5

Effectiveness of NFP

NFP Effectiveness:

All methods present have established effectiveness rates. Rates depend on the following:

Perfect-use or correct-use rates vs typical-use rates

No method, natural or artificial is 100% effective in avoiding pregnancy other than abstinence itself.

The effectiveness of NFP varies from couple to couple and on differing variables like charting, personal commitment, expertise, training, instructor help, etc.

NFP is known to be 95%-99% successful in spacing and limiting births.

Abstinence during the fertile window is 100% effective if following protocol/rules (no contact)

Even if there is no intent to have a child in every act of sexual intercourse, couples may never actively impede the sexual act from being ordered toward producing a child. (Catholic.com)



Chapter 6

Why NFP is a Gift

NFP is a total gift for Catholic marriages. Not only does it allow for the Total, Fruitful, Faithful, & Free union, it supports the couple by respecting and revering the physiology and biology of the partners, most especially the woman.

NFP does no harm to the marriage bond or body.

NFP is clear and free (and is approved by the Church).

NFP is free from harmful side-effects like that of which come from artificial contraceptives like the pill.

NFP also keeps the couple free from spiritual and emotional “side-effects” (or negative consequences) that eventually come with the use of contraceptives.

NFP **creates a pathway** for communication in a marriage about family planning and leads to less strain on the marriage surrounding family matters (couples are likely to be more in tune and aware of each other’s perspectives and experiences leading to a healthier marriage).

NFP always leaves room for God’s will.



Why NFP is a Gift cont...

NFP helps us stay **Obedient to the Mother Church** and God's Commands.

Obedience (n): "the practice or virtue of submission to a higher power or authority;" (www.etymonline.com)

It helps us **live out the Gospels** in a confused world. It helps us respect and revere life in a culture of death.

NFP helps us **honor our spouse** and his/her personhood; respecting their dignity.

Abstinence as a form of Fasting:

Fasting and abstinence help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart. (CCC 2043).

Fasting purges the soul and body of its impurities. It is a vital tool in marriage as it teaches us self-mastery during times of periodic continence.

Final Recap on NFP:

- It is more than just a technique to be used. **It is a way of life**; a way of practicing our faith and living out virtue and the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Creates a pathway for **wholeness, unity, and healing** as it is counter to our desires for instant gratification and upholds the dignity of each spouse in its place.
- NFP is a **means of protecting** and preserving not just the marriage bond, but the family unit as a whole.

Chapter 7

Resources & Helpful Tools



Helpful websites:

USSB

www.usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning

Couple to Couple League
ccli.org (online classes)

You, Me & NFP
youmeandnfp.com

Vitae Fertility Education
vitaefertility.com

One More Soul
onemoresoul.com

Marquette Method
(www.vitaefertility.com/what-is-the-marquette-method-of-nfp)

Billings Method
(www.boma-usa.org)

Creighton Model
(www.popepaulvi.com)

Books on NFP/Marriage:

Natural Family Planning: A Catholic Approach (Mary Lee Barron)

Eclipse of the Body: How we Lost the Meaning of Sex, Gender, Marriage, & Family and How to Reclaim it (Christopher West)

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family (The Pontifical Council for the Family)

Humanae Vitae “Of human life” (Pope Paul VI)



Resources & Helpful Tools Cont...

Books on NFP/Marriage:

Our Bodies Tell God's Story: Discovering the Divine Plan for Love, Sex, and Gender (Christopher West)

Holy Sex!: A Catholic Guide to Toe-Curling, Mind-Blowing, Infallible Loving (Gregory K Popcak)

Books on sexual healing:

Be Restored: Healing Our Sexual Wounds Through Jesus' Merciful Love (Bob Schuchts)

The Porn Myth: Exposing the Reality Behind the Fantasy of Pornography (Matt Fradd)

Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing (Jay Stringer)

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma (Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD)

Some encouragement!

You can do this. You were made for this vocation. The graces from the Sacrament of Marriage will be present despite weaknesses and inability. God is with you.

There may be challenges and hiccups along the way and that's ok.

If you fall, seek the Sacraments and work together to overcome sin.

Sometimes you need to change the method (think-different season different method). NFP offers many "tools" to choose from the toolbox.

When it is hard and you feel upset, press into it. Facing our our daily crosses can produce profound spiritual fruits to help us overcome trials.

Community is key! We cannot do this alone. Find an instructor and talk to like-minded friends to help support you on the journey.



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