



## Creating a Culture of Life Within a Parish: Begin with NFP

Rev. Marcos Gonzalez



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Education and promotion of Natural Family Planning can take place in a wide variety of settings, but in this article I will be focusing on parish based NFP services. While there are many practical ways we can make parishioners aware of NFP and its moral use within marriage, it is important to first look at some of the fundamental assumptions that we must have if we are to effectively promote NFP in a parish.

First and foremost, it is vitally important that the pastoral team (priests and other ecclesial ministers) understand and are faithful to the Magisterium of the Church in this area. Fidelity to Church teaching, especially as articulated in authoritative documents such as “Humanae Vitae” and “Familiaris Consortio” and The Catechism of the Catholic Church must form the foundation from which to build a successful promotion of NFP. If there is dissent in these areas then it will not be possible to truly have the “mind of the Church” in promoting a culture of life which includes openness to God’s gift of children. On the contrary, theological dissent in this area of sexual morality will undermine the teaching of the Church and will lead to its rejection by the faithful.

In addition to the basic understanding of Church teaching and faithful adherence to it, there must be a willingness on the part of the pastoral team to integrate the life-giving philosophy of NFP throughout the parish ministries in an appropriate manner.

### MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Among all the programs found in a parish, probably none is more important in the promotion of NFP than the ministry to engaged couples. It is an excellent “teachable moment” for us. For the most part, couples coming to the Church to request the Sacrament of Matrimony are open to hearing what is required of them and tend to be thankful for whatever preparation their parish and

diocese provides for them. Young couples today are quite aware of the difficulties of marriage in our modern society. Many of them are children of divorced parents. Most have been exposed to the “culture of death” prevalent in our society through the promotion of artificial contraception, abortion, etc. by schools, media, and many of their peers. Most of them even have a fleeting knowledge of the Church’s condemnation of artificial birth control. Rarely, however, does one encounter a couple that actually understands this teaching. At least initially, the majority have serious reservations about this teaching of the Church and some have even rejected it. In my experience, however, most of these reservations and rejection come from a misunderstanding or an ignorance of the true teaching of the Church, and can be overcome with formation.

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### PREACHING

National pollsters and dissenting theologians love to point out statistics which show that the majority of Catholics reject Church teaching on the immorality of artificial contraception. What is rarely pointed out, however, is that the vast majority of Catholics are completely ignorant of authentic Church teaching in this area. One can ask an ordinary

*Culture of Life: NFP p. 7*

## President's Perspective

Gregory Polito, MD, KM

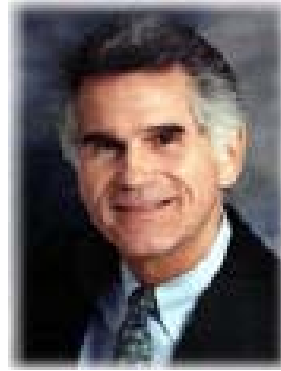
### Trust God!

There was a recent commentary on large families by a *Washington Post* film critic in my local paper. He pointed out that Hollywood likes to release movies with "big broods" near the Christmas season because they are emotionally appealing. Large families "depict the elusive reward of more love than you could ever run out of." He then goes on to wryly remark how most actors have no or very few children. And he demonstrated the "disconnect" between one road to true happiness as portrayed in, say, *Cheaper by the Dozen 2* and the one actually taken by the actors in that movie. Isn't that the truth? St. Paul lamented that he often chose the wrong course of action in spite of knowing in his heart of hearts what the right choice was. And so it is with human nature.

When I think of all the large families I know I cannot think of one that did not have "successful" children: God-

fearing, employed individuals going through the struggles we all do but able to draw upon their lived experiences growing up as one of many as an extra source of stability in a very destabilizing world. The virtues of sacrifice, sharing, and contributions from each according to their individual talents for the benefit of all are common to the multi-sibling experience. I would never trade my years as one of nine for anything. (I am often ribbed by my friends for the ability to either read intently or even sleep anywhere, any time with any amount of environmental noise. Hey! Developing mental filters early on was the only way to get anything done! And mental filters are much easier and more socially gracious to employ than earbuds and an iPod...)

"God cannot be outdone in generosity". So why do we doubt his wisdom when he has so articulately revealed his design for married love? Natural



Gregory Polito, MD, KM  
President, CANFP

family planning will not necessarily lead to many siblings—as we all know family size is determined over time through much prayer and discernment "one child at a time". But my point is that even the secular world as evidenced through the film medium recognizes that the happiness in the multi-sibling setting is a natural byproduct of love, a sacrificial love that is the consequence of human wills aligning themselves with that of our gracious Father. It is most visually obvious when a husband and wife do have many children. But there is no doubt as much hard work and spousal devotion going on with small family practitioners of NFP as well, those whose circumstances do not lend themselves to many children. It is just not as apparent to the untrained or superficial observer.

So for 2006 let us all resolve to mentally regroup, pat ourselves on the back (upper or lower...), and get out there to promote natural family planning and the values inherent therein...values so beautifully and understandably expressed in the Theology of the Body. As one little lapel pin so succinctly says: TRUST GOD!

### Send CANFP to the LA Religious ED Congress!

CANFP will be exhibiting at the Religious Ed Congress in Los Angeles this spring, distributing materials and getting the word out to the almost 40,000 in attendance about the excellent NFP resources provided by our CANFP members throughout California. Funding of \$4,000-\$5,000 would enable us to meet our expenses for this event. More, would permit us to update our exhibit, and distribute more materials.

**Pro-Life Catholic Ministries** of San Bernardino has generously provided seed money in the form of a challenge grant of \$500 in honor of their new Auxiliary, **Bishop Rutilio del Riego**. CANFP is grateful to **Bishop William Weigand**, of Sacramento, for providing the first donation, \$100, towards matching this grant.

If you would like to join **Bishop Weigand** in providing matching funds for the **Bishop del Riego Grant**, and investing in an NFP presence at the LA Congress, donations can be sent to the CANFP office, or made online at [www.canfp.org](http://www.canfp.org)

## Director's Desk

Sheila St. John, Executive Director CANFP

### Thank You



THANK YOU to our 300 members---a network of NFP teachers, users, advocates, physicians, clergy, and 44 parishes throughout California.

THANK YOU to our CANFP volunteers, especially: Tara, prayer team leader; Monica, translations; Gina, Ask the Expert Coordinator; and the excellent team of experts who respond to the steady stream of questions received over our website.

THANK YOU to all who contributed to the excellence of our newsletters through their submissions.

THANK YOU to the prestigious speakers who made our 2005 LA Conference one of the best ever.

THANK YOU to the valued Executive and Advisory Board Members of CANFP, who dedicated tens of thousands of dollars of in-kind services to CANFP. Their leadership, sacrifice, talent, and tireless commitment to the mission of CANFP is humbling to witness.

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## Ask the Expert Question

and

I have begun the perimenopause and my Dr. wants me on the pill. He has given me Demulin 135. Why? I have never taken the pill and do not like the idea of messing with the hormones. He wants me to do this because it is easier. Why if my estrogen levels are, as he says, good and in range, would I be prescribed estrogen 135 (he wanted 150). Should I perhaps see another physician? Help, this fellow is not giving me answers I need.

## Answer

Questions can be submitted through our web site, sent to the CANFP office, or e-mailed to [experts@canfp.org](mailto:experts@canfp.org)

There has recently been a huge marketing effort by the drug companies to promote birth control pills to perimenopausal women. Unfortunately many physicians have uncritically bought into this trend. There is NO long-term research on this group of women to substantiate the safety of the use of these drugs in this population. It amounts to a giant uncontrolled experiment. You do not mention why your doctor put you on birth control pills. The main reasons birth control pills are promoted to women in their forties is control of bleeding problems and prevention of osteoporosis from declining estrogen levels. There are safer and better ways of achieving these goals without using birth control pills, by the use of bio-identical hormones. See related article p.5



*Dr. Mary Davenport is an OB/GYN in private practice, a Fellow of the American College of OB/GYN, a Natural Family Planning Medical Consultant, and serves on the boards of CANFP and the American Association of Pro-Life OB/GYNs.*

## NFP on the Web

A new feature of our CANFP NEWS, this column will feature brief descriptions of internet sites of interest to our members, though our enthusiasm over our own site did not lend itself to brevity!

### [www.canfp.org](http://www.canfp.org)

CANFP's own website is an expansive source of information on NFP of all methods, with particular emphasis on California services.

#### Unique Features:

**Ask the Expert:** Interactive feature which has resulted in a database of over 400 questions with responses from CANFP experts posted on site, organized by topic and searchable by keyword or expert. Requests from CANFP Members are given priority.

**Directory:** Up to date online Directory of California NFP Professionals.

**Newsletter:** online access to CANFP News, current and archived.

**Store:** Complete listing of audiotapes from CANFP Annual Conferences, as well as other resources.

**Coming Soon:** Listing of NFP Professional positions available, or sought, in California. Service will be free to CANFP Members

*CANFP is currently seeking someone experienced in the design and maintenance of websites to dedicate approximately 10 hours a month to the CANFP website. Experience in HTML, PHP, FTP required. Database design and Flash helpful, but not required.*

### Method

### Web Sites

Billings Ovulation Method

[www.boma-usa.org](http://www.boma-usa.org)

Couple to Couple League

[www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org)

Family of the Americas

[www.familyplanning.net](http://www.familyplanning.net)

Northwest Family Services

[www.nwfs.org](http://www.nwfs.org)

Pope Paul VI Institute

[www.popepaulvi.com](http://www.popepaulvi.com)

## 9 Reasons for Women over 40 to Avoid Birth Control Pills

Mary Davenport, MD

birth

control

pills

sometimes

cause

very

early

abortions

**1. The estrogen in birth control pills may promote breast cancer, especially if used for a prolonged period.** Numerous studies of breast cancer have shown that longer duration of estrogen stimulation and higher dosages of estrogen increase breast cancer. High dosages of estrogen are required to prevent ovulation, the main purpose of birth control pills. Even low-dose pills have double or triple the average amount of estrogen present in a woman's cycle. The US Department of Health and Human Services placed the ethinyl estradiol in birth control pills on its official list of human carcinogens in December, 2002.

**2. The potent artificial estrogen in birth control pills, ethinyl estradiol, comes only in a one-size-fits-all dose.** If estrogen is needed for therapeutic reasons, the bio-identical estrogens, estradiol and estriol, can be given in a range of doses tailored to a woman's individual needs. The smallest necessary dose given during the part of the cycle in which a woman is deficient in estrogen can give the benefits of estrogen therapy with a lower risk of serious health consequences, as well as fewer side effects of excess estrogen such as breast tenderness, bloating and weight gain. Estriol is the least carcinogenic estrogen.

**3. The progestin, the second artificial hormone in birth control pills, can have serious cardiovascular effects.** The second generation-progestins, gestodyne, desogestrel, and norgestimate are associated with

an increased incidence of deep-vein thrombosis (DVT). The 3-5% of Caucasian women who carry a particular gene for blood clotting (factor V Leiden mutation) have a 30-50 fold risk of DVT with these preparations. Levonorgestrel and norethindrone, the first-generation progestins derived from testosterone, increase LDL (bad cholesterol) and decrease HDL (good cholesterol). Unlike these artificial hormones, natural progesterone in the luteal phase (last half) of the menstrual cycle can help eliminate abnormal bleeding, as well as improve PMS and sleep, without the serious cardiovascular risks.

**4. Birth control pills can cause other serious medical problems.** Glucose intolerance, gall bladder disease and hepatocellular adenoma, and cervical cancer are all promoted by oral contraceptive use.

**5. Birth control pills can cause minor health problems and side effects.** Weight gain, depression, and diminished sex drive have all been associated with oral contraceptive use.

**6. Birth control pills promote cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) and are a risk factor for cervical cancer.** The high dose of estrogens in pills cause a larger transformation zone in the cervix, where cell mutations take place. This is an effect independent of and in addition to the other CIN risk factors of HPV (genital wart virus) and multiple sexual partners.

**7. Safer and better ways exist to prevent osteoporosis.** Biphosphonates such as Fosamax, or bio-identical estrogen are safer and equally or more effective. Calcium supplements and weight bearing exercise can also have a beneficial impact on bone density.

**8. Safer and better ways exist for women to prevent pregnancy.** Non-hormonal methods of fertility control have long been considered the safest methods of fertility control. Modern Natural Family Planning methods have a 97-99% effectiveness rate for preventing pregnancy, and have the additional benefit of obtaining valuable information on a woman's own estrogen and progesterone levels from monitoring biomarkers during the menstrual cycle.

**9. Birth control pills can prevent pregnancy by mechanisms destructive to pregnancies that already exist.** Pregnancies occur when breakthrough ovulation takes place, especially when pills are missed. The pregnancy loss occurs typically before a woman has missed a period, before she is aware that she is pregnant. Pills alter the lining of the uterus, preventing implantation of the embryo. Birth control pills also have an adverse effect on ovarian production of progesterone, which helps support pregnancy after ovulation. This means that birth control pills sometimes cause very early abortions, perhaps as frequently as 2%-15% of cycles.

Help  
Wanted!

## Medical Matters - A Work of Art: Beautiful and Complex

Lynn Kerr, MD

**I**f you had a valuable work of art in your home, would you use it as a bulletin board to cover with sketches? Sometimes it seems that is what our current culture has done with women.

**NFP** views a woman's body in its natural state as the norm

When I look at how our culture approaches family planning and women's health, I just want to shout "Don't you get it?!" The human body is so intricate, deserving more respect than it is given by common approaches to control fertility, which frequently rely on either completely suppressing our finely tuned hormonal balance, or destroying part of our body. The hormonal methods of birth control suppress our natural cycle, and replace it with either constant progestin, or a few different levels of estrogen and progestin. Women are much more complex than this! One of our innate qualities is that, hormonally, we are always changing.

Modern natural family planning methods take a much different approach. Instead of taking a healthy woman's body, and "breaking" part of it to make her "socially acceptable", NFP views a woman's body in its natural state as the norm. Through teaching each woman to observe reliable markers that reflect her normal hormonal fluctuations, the woman becomes an expert of her own body. Then, when an abnormality is detected, her knowledge of her body becomes a vital tool in skillfully investigating the problem and designing a treatment to restore

her to her natural state of health. Clearly, this approach is much more in tune with how medicine is practiced, seeking to detect disease, and only give treatment when disorders are found.

Diabetes management has been revolutionized by teaching diabetics to monitor their own blood sugar, so treatment can be finely individualized. There is considerable cost, in terms of the teaching required, the economic cost, and also the discomfort of checking blood sugar several times a day. However, the benefit to long term health clearly outweighs the costs, and self monitoring is a widely accepted, even essential component in the management of diabetes. In family planning, there seems to be some resistance to recommending women learn about their bodies, and keep close observation. However, most women truly enjoy understanding their bodies, the financial cost is very low for a lifetime of fertility management, and fortunately, there are no painful needle sticks involved in making the observations!

In addition to providing an effective means of achieving and avoiding pregnancy, the wealth of information that can be obtained from women who carefully observe their bodies over the years is a great health benefit of natural family planning. NFP records are already utilized to identify women at risk for miscarriage, and for the evaluation and treatment of PMS, postpartum



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Executive Board Member.

depression, infertility, ovarian cysts, and many other common gynecological disorders. Modern natural family planning methods can be invaluable tools in the early detection of disease. Endometrial cancer, cervical cancer, and thyroid disease can present with abnormal bleeding patterns. Evaluation of a woman's chart can also show risks for future diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes in women with polycystic ovarian syndrome. The record of precise observations can reveal risk factors for osteoporosis, and permit diagnostic laboratory tests to be timed to ovulation.

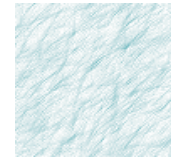
In the future, I believe there is great potential for utilizing natural family planning charts to detect many other diseases. For instance, many women with autoimmune diseases or fibromyalgia will have menstrual abnormalities and further investigation of these abnormalities may hold the key for more effective treatment and understanding of these, and many other disorders.

As more women learn to use NFP, great strides will be made in our understanding, and appreciation, of the beautifully complex creation we are.

## Clergy Corner Culture of Life: NFP

Rev. Marcos Gonzalez

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We never hear about this from the pulpit

Catholic "Does the Church condemn artificial birth control?" and most likely the answer will be "Yes." Ask them to explain why, however, and one is met with a blank stare. The real reason this teaching is "rejected" is because it is simply NOT TAUGHT. One of the comments I hear most frequently from lay people is "we never hear about this from the pulpit." The most practical way to teach the faithful about this is during the Sunday homily. Admittedly, this is not the ideal forum. The homily is not primarily for teaching nor are the time constraints of the Liturgy suited for it. Nevertheless, it is the most practical and effective way to reach the largest number of people.

### COUNSELING AND CONFESSIONAL MINISTRY

One of the most effective and immediate ways of promoting a culture of life and explaining Church teaching on birth regulation is during marriage counseling and spiritual direction in the Confessional. It is in these contexts that most often couples bring up the topic of birth control. These provide excellent "teachable moments".

Fr. Gonzalez provides specific suggestions for parish based NFP in *Creating a Culture of Life Within a Parish: Begin with Natural Family Planning*, a booklet published by CANFP. Available now (in English or Spanish) for special introductory price of \$2 tax and shipping included.

### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

One of the chief responsibilities of a priest is to teach the faith. In fact, it is part of the promises that he makes during his ordination. Every parish has a variety of educational programs and some of these opportunities can be used to promote a culture of life and to properly explain Church teaching in the area of human sexuality.

### WELCOMING SPIRIT BY THE PARISH

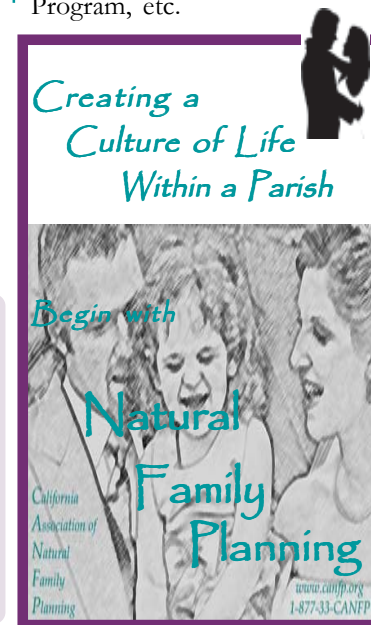
There should be an overall atmosphere of openness to children in the parish. This can be made visible by having a Children's Liturgy of the Word, blessings for children on special occasions, addressing them appropriately during the homily at Children's Masses, encouraging families with children to bring up the gifts during Mass, having special Masses for the parish school and the Religious Education Program, etc.



Rev. Marcos Gonzalez is Associate Pastor at Holy Family Parish in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and on the Executive Board of CANFP

### WORKING WITH OUR PRIESTS

Finally, NFP teachers and other professionals who wish to promote NFP should work with their parish priests. Most priests are hard working and genuinely glad when someone comes up and offers to help out in the parish. If you are an NFP teacher and wish to start classes in your parish, make an appointment with the pastor or Associate and offer your services. Gently invite them to participate when they have time and thank them for their assistance. Encourage your priests to preach about morality in marriage and tackle even the controversial topics. Many priests shy away from preaching about birth control because they do not want to offend. Yet the people have a right to the truth of the Faith and as priests it is our duty to proclaim that truth even when it is not popular. In spite of this remember that priests are human and criticism often stings. So encourage your priests and offer them positive feedback when they do give homilies that challenge.



Visit the CANFP Exhibit  
at the Los Angeles Religious Ed Congress  
MARCH 31<sup>st</sup>-April 2<sup>nd</sup>

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