

Why use Natural Family Planning?

1 Natural Family Planning accepts our fertility.

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is a comprehensive acceptance of the divine gift of fertility within marriage, wherein the couple monitors their fertility to determine fertile and non-fertile phases for the purpose of either achieving or postponing pregnancy. It is not to be confused with the older and significantly less effective “calendar rhythm method” which estimates and projects the couple’s fertile and non-fertile phases by observing when these phases occurred in previous cycles.

2 NFP has a strong scientific basis.

The greater effectiveness of NFP is due to a much more precise and systematic approach in which, *depending on the method*, couples observe changes in the woman’s cervical mucus, temperature changes and/or other signs to determine fertile and non-fertile phases. Since both cervical mucus and temperature are responsive to the chemical/hormonal changes that regulate fertility, NFP users are able to accurately determine when they are fertile and when they are not. The outmoded calendar rhythm method was more of an educated guess that relied heavily on the often erroneous assumption that fertility cycles are the same from month to month.

3 NFP is a powerful tool for achieving or postponing pregnancy.

NFP users are able to determine their fertility by simply observing their cervical mucus and/or temperature and charting it. The process takes only minutes a day, and with the observance of a few simple rules yields an effectiveness rate for postponing pregnancy equal to or better than any artificial contraceptive methods. In fact the Couple to Couple League, an international Natural Family Planning organization in Cincinnati, Ohio, cites numerous studies, including one conducted by the U.S. government, that show the Sympto-Thermal Method of NFP, which combines temperature and mucus observations, can be used at the 99% level of effectiveness for postponing pregnancy. It is also highly effective for *achieving* pregnancy and is used by many couples as a means of overcoming difficulties conceiving.

4 Natural Family Planning is safe, healthy, and inexpensive

Natural Family Planning does nothing to chemically alter a woman’s natural cycle and it makes use of no invasive or prophylactic measures such as IUDs, diaphragms, condoms, and spermicides to interfere with a woman’s fertility. There is no cost to NFP except a meager fee for classes, a basal thermometer, and charts. Mucus-only NFP users pay only for charts. Compare this to the cost of pills, condoms, diaphragms, injections, doctor visits, treatment for side effects, chemicals, and implants, and the cost difference is obvious.

5 NFP is as effective or more effective than contraceptives.

NFP meets or exceeds the effectiveness rates of all contraceptive methods if used properly. In fact, all the methods of NFP can be used at the 99% level of effectiveness to postpone or avoid pregnancy.¹ “Several well-designed trials by the World Health Organization have shown that Natural Family Planning... has had an effectiveness rate when used correctly that is better than OCPs (oral contraceptive pills), that is, less than a 3% rate of pregnancies per year... One of the largest trials (of 19,843 women performed by the World Health Organization in India) showed the failure rate to be 0.2 pregnancies per 100 women yearly—a rate that is significantly better than almost all artificial methods of contraception.”² Some simple rules must be followed to achieve this level of effectiveness but this is true of artificial contraception as well. The misuse rates of condoms and pills are startlingly high and typically exceed those of NFP users.³ One distinct advantage of NFP over contraception is that it is immediately reversible unlike IUDs, injections, implants, and sterilization.

6 NFP contributes to the health and welfare of the marriage

Unlike contraception, which acts as an inhibitor of one’s natural fertility, NFP keeps it intact and works within it. In this way it is not a rejection of the gifts that husband and wife have to offer each other. The marital embrace is a complete gift of self to one’s spouse—nothing is held back. Yet these gifts are not reducible to a sharing in the physi-

ological aspects of fertility. The marital act is a visible sign of the reality that two have become one; that in the covenant of marriage each spouse belongs fully to the other—*nothing is held back*. In the act of making love, spouses say with their bodies what they intend with their hearts. If fertility is withheld, this covenant expression is weakened if not wholly disintegrated. It becomes a conspicuous reservation in which, in keeping with the expression “actions speak louder than words,” spouses say, “you can have all of me except my power to give life.” It is not hard to understand why many married people feel used, even betrayed, by contraceptive sex; for implicit in this mutual withholding of self is a mutual *rejection*. Sex that does not accept the fullness of the other can easily become self-directed, reducing sex to a matter of self-indulgence and physical gratification, so much so that it becomes a wedge instead of a bond. Perhaps this is why divorce rates for NFP users are between 1/10 and 1/25 of the overall divorce rate in the United States in the 90s.⁴ Indeed, a study conducted by the *Family of Americas Foundation found only 16 women ever divorced among 505 NFP users, a rate of 3.6%!⁵*

7 NFP is consistent with the life of faith

There is no greater happiness and fulfillment than a life lived in and through God. Eliminating obstacles to this relationship is a positive choice, freeing us to love as fully as possible. The Church teaches against contraception not to impose arbitrary prohibitions, but to safeguard marriage and to deepen the expression of marital love.

NFP is morally very different from contraception.

The following comments are taken from the pastoral letter **Of Human Life** by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

It's hard to see the difference [between NFP and contraception] when the emphasis is placed on "artificial" versus "natural" methods. People rightly point out that many things we use are artificial but not immoral. So it's important to realize that the Church doesn't oppose artificial birth control *because* it's artificial. Rather, what the Church opposes is *any* method of birth control which is *contraceptive*, whether artificial devices, pills, etc. are used or not.

Contraception is the choice, by any means, to *sterilize a given act of intercourse*. In other words, a contracepting couple chooses to engage in intercourse and, knowing that it may result in a new life, they intentionally and willfully suppress their fertility. Herein lies a key distinction: Natural Family Planning (NFP) *is in no way contraceptive*. The choice to *abstain* from a fertile act of intercourse is completely different from the willful choice to *sterilize* a fertile act of intercourse. NFP simply accepts from God's hand the natural cycle of infertility that He has built into the nature of woman.

Regarding the issue of intention: Yes, both couples [the contracepting couple and the couple using Natural Family Planning] may have the same *end* in mind—to avoid pregnancy. But the *means* to achieve their common goal are not alike. Take, for example, two students, each of whom intends to excel in school. Obviously that's a very good intention. With the same goal in mind, one studies diligently. The other cheats on every test. The point is, the end doesn't justify the means—in getting an education, in regulating births, or in anything else.⁶

NOTES:

¹ Kippley, John & Sheila. *The Art of Natural Family Planning*. The Couple to Couple League Intl (CCL). Cincinnati: 1996; p. 3.

² Kahlenborn, Chris, M.D., *Breast Cancer: Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill*, One More Soul, Dayton, Ohio, 2000, p.39.

³ Ibid., p. 146. The Guttmacher Institute, a research institute affiliated with Planned Parenthood, cites failure rates for the condom as high as 18.5% (low 9.8%), and for the Pill failure rates as high as 8.7% (low 3.8%).

⁴ Ibid., p. 288. The Couple to Couple League (CCL) estimates the divorce rate among NFP users at between 2% and 5% as opposed to the general divorce rate of approximately 50% in the U.S. in the early 90s.

⁵ Rossini, Ellen. "Are You Man Enough to Take the NFP Challenge?" *Columbia*. Knights of Columbus. July, 2002, Vol. 82, No.7, p.18.

⁶ *Of Human Life: A Pastoral Letter to the People of God of Northern Colorado on the Truth and Meaning of Married Love*, Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M., Cap., Archbishop of Denver, July 22, 1998, available from One More Soul.



This pamphlet is drawn from Chapter 8 of *Called to Give Life* by Jason T. Adams. Jason is a theology teacher at Carroll High School in Dayton, Ohio, where he resides with his wife, Linda, and their two children, Timothy and Bridget. Jason and Linda have used Natural Family Planning to successfully postpone and achieve pregnancy throughout their marriage, and have shared their testimony to its benefits in Pre-Cana, RCIA, young adult/youth groups, and other venues.

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WHY USE NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

from *Called to Give Life*

by Jason T. Adams

