

It's time!

*Say "Yes" to God's plan
for married love.*



HOW THE METHODS OF NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING CAN HELP MARRIED COUPLES LIVE GOD'S PLAN FOR THEIR MARRIAGES

Catholic teaching on love, sex, and “responsible parenthood”¹ is a resounding “YES!” to God’s plan for husband, wife, and marriage. When a man and woman marry, their “Yes” to each other should also include their “Yes” to God’s plan for married love. Why?

God is the author of marriage

God is the creator. He created men and women in his image (Gen 1:27). And, God is the author of marriage as well. God designed married love to be total,² fruitful, faithful and exclusive. Marriage was created to mirror God’s own Trinitarian love. Married love therefore rejoices in the other and is respectful of God’s design. This means that husband and wife offer themselves to each other as a gift. There is no “taking” here, just “offering” and “receiving.” There is no exclusion, like denying God, one’s person, or fertility. Anything that counters the meaning and beautiful integrity of the marital act and God’s call for life is avoided (e.g. contraception, sterilization, pornography, IVF, or surrogacy).³

God willed that married love involves the whole person, with reason, a well-formed conscience in God’s truth (that’s what Church teaching is!), and fertility. It also means that husband and wife understand that openness to new human life is not an “add on” but an essential element of married life—indeed God himself entrusted husband and wife with the gift of life.⁴ This is true whether a couple is fertile or not. Married couples ought to prayerfully discern when God is calling them to bring new life into the world, not treat it in a casual way.

What does all this have to do with Natural Family Planning (NFP)?

Catholic teaching on the nature of human sexuality, marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood reflects God’s loving design. The significance of NFP methods is that they are the *tools* to help husband and wife live that

reality. This is because the methods of NFP respect God’s plan for married love. They do nothing to harm God’s design. That is why the Church supports NFP use in marriage.

NFP—good medicine

Natural Family Planning is the general title for the scientific and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or postpone a pregnancy. NFP methods provide fertility education that is informative and practical. NFP helps husband and wife to live healthfully and honestly with their combined fertility.

The facts of human reproduction form the basis of all NFP methods. Specifically, NFP methods attempt to identify the “fertile window” of husband and wife. The fertile window is the combination of information about the woman’s day of fertility (ovulation, which occurs only within a 12-24 hour period) and that of the man’s fertility (sperm, which can live in a *fertile* woman’s body for up to 5 days). When a woman is fertile, her reproductive hormones will send messages that yield specific and observable signs. Recognizing the pattern of those physical signs forms the basis for most NFP methods.

NFP methods

The majority of NFP methods are based on the daily observation of the woman’s signs of fertility.⁵ This takes some effort to learn. NFP methods provide guidelines to help couples identify the fertile and infertile time in the wife’s cycle. Pinpointing their “fertile window” (the number of days within the menstrual cycle when they are likely to conceive), is the central focus of NFP methods.

Being able to accurately identify the couple’s fertile window is key to successful use of NFP. When a couple realizes that God is calling them to have a baby, they may use the fertile window to conceive. When spouses decide that it is time to avoid a pregnancy, they will abstain from sex during

the fertile time. Periodic sexual abstinence is the NFP means to avoid a pregnancy. No drugs, barriers, devices, or surgical procedures are ever used.

NFP works!

Any couple can use an NFP method. The key is to learn the method well, be aware of God's will for your marriage, and apply the guidelines consistently.

When looking for an NFP method to learn, you should know that there is no "best method." All NFP methods are based on solid science. Choosing a method depends upon how much fertility information a couple needs and can live with!

NFP, it's time!

It's time to give NFP a chance! The benefits are many. NFP provides sound fertility education. It is environmentally safe and has no harmful side-effects. NFP education is also economical. Most providers charge fees for class (or an on-line course) and any resources—that's it!

Most importantly, NFP respects God's plan for married love. It promotes respect for one's spouse, the virtue of chastity, self-sacrifice, and mindfulness regarding the meaning of married love. It may not always be easy, but if a couple perseveres, NFP can actually help them deepen their relationship with each other and God!

Endnotes

- 1 To learn about Catholic teaching on responsible parenthood, see: www.usccb.org/nfp/what-is-nfp/responsible-parenthood.cfm
- 2 Married love "involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter—appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity and aspiration of the spirit and of the will" (*Familiaris consortio*, [FC] no. 13). Married love is the most deeply personal union found among men and women (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], no. 1643). The marital union calls husband and wife to become one flesh, one heart and one soul (see FC, no. 13). It therefore "demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in ... mutual giving; and it is open to *fertility*" (FC, no. 13).
- 3 On contraception and sterilization, see the papal encyclical, *Humanae vitae*, which discusses the nature of conjugal love and responsible parenthood and the moral prohibition of contraception at http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html. On pornography, see the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on anti-pornography and other resources at <http://www.usccb.org/cleanheart>. For a summary of Catholic teaching on the moral prohibition of some assisted reproductive technologies see <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Life-Giving-Love-in-an-Age-of-Technology-2009-2.pdf>.
- 4 In fact, the Church teaches that when they marry, husband and wife receive a "kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state" (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 48). Part of their sacred "duty" is to become parents if it is God's will in their marriage.
- 5 A handful of NFP methods are based on the research of women using the classic methods. These other NFP methods use a formula (algorithm) to calculate the woman's fertile time. See <http://www.factsaboutfertility.org/resources/overview/standard-days-method>.

Learn more about Church teaching that supports NFP use in marriage at www.usccb.org/nfp/catholic-teaching/index.cfm

Read more about NFP methods at www.usccb.org/nfp/what-is-nfp/index.cfm

To learn an NFP method see www.usccb.org/nfp/find-an-nfp-class.cfm



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