

THE LOVING CHOICE

ARCHDIOCESE OF DETROIT NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING NEWSLETTER

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Help! Help!! Help!!!

Yes, we could all use a little help. There is too much to do with demands from family, work, school (for the kids or ourselves), not to mention extended family obligations, friends, hobbies, and that deserved recreation time spent just on us.

Time is a precious gift that God gives freely to each one of us and He expects an accounting of every minute. As we examine our conscience can we say that our time is used for the real values in life?

As I look at the busy lives of the natural family planning teachers in the Archdiocese of Detroit I find myself in awe of their ability to do all that they do within the same 24 hours a day that we all have been given.

There is a saying that if something important needs to be done ask a busy person. These types of people are the only ones who find time to do what needs to be done!

On the other hand, there was a story going around the internet of how the devils were trying to figure out how to stop people from doing good. Their master plan was to keep good people "too busy" to think or spend time on what is really important in life.

I encourage those of you who are "too busy" to help to reevaluate your busy schedules. Volunteers are needed to advertise NFP, write articles, promote and/or teach the ovulation method or sympto-thermal method of natural family planning as sponsored by the Archdiocese of Detroit.

If you have a few hours or more a year to help, call Dorothy at 313-292-1294.

Summer Reminders



If you find that all of a sudden your mucus patterns are changing check your summer activities and surroundings. Time spent in a pool or in a lake may make it difficult to detect the beginnings of that "wet" sensation. The decrease of dark at night may cause an increase in pre-ovulatory mucus.

Stress is a major reason for cycles to change. Stress can be good or bad. Vacations, although enjoyable, may be very stressful. Travel whether by car, air, or boat is a change in our normal routine. If you travel to different countries your eating patterns will necessarily change. Foods high in sugars as well as caffeine may affect mucus discharges.

Getting in shape for summer activities sometimes involves dieting which may also affect a woman's mucus discharges. Many diet plans eliminate salt, which is the major source of iodine in the American diet. Women may not need much salt, but they do need sufficient amounts of iodine.

For some women, changes in mucus discharges have been directly related to their exercise programs. Chart these activities and see how a specific exercise program affects your fertility.

Couple Prayer

Statistics tell us that less than one in a thousand couples who pray together get divorced. Yet, Robert Ovies, associate director of the Office for Family and Youth of the Archdiocese of Detroit, estimates, from Church related workshops he gives, that less than one in two hundred married couples pray together.

The first excuse couples give for not praying together is that there is no time in their busy schedule. The problem is not insufficient time. The problem is that prayer is not seen as a priority. Everyone receives 24 hours – 1,440 minutes a day. Can't we give back to God 15 minutes each day?

The second excuse is that couples don't know how to pray together. Mr. Ovies recommends that couples who want to pray together and don't know how should follow the direction given in the Bible - "and if my people, upon whom my name has been pronounced, humble themselves and pray, and seek my presence and turn from their evil ways, I will hear them from heaven and pardon their sins and revive their land. (II Chronicles 7:14)

Statistics tells us that 48 out of 100 Catholic couples get a divorce. Couples who are sexually active before marriage have a 65-73% divorce rate after marriage. In Oakland County there are 75 divorce requests for every 100 requests for a marriage license.

Men and women talk differently, think differently and pray differently. If couples would "humble" themselves before God in prayer, marriages will be healed. We have His word! (see p. 3 for more on this topic.)

A SHARING OF ONE COUPLE'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE OVULATION METHOD

When we first started following Natural Family Planning our goal was to postpone pregnancy for a few months until we felt ready to start a family. At this time we had been married for a year and a half and decided to stop using birth control pills. Through our NFP classes and over the next few months our understanding and confidence using the ovulation method was growing. However, we weren't overly concerned with making a mistake because we would have happily accepted a pregnancy if that should happen. After six months we felt ready to start a family. Using NFP, we were soon blessed with our first pregnancy.

After our baby girl was born in June 2000, I developed great anxiety and fear of pregnancy. My body had gone through so much that the memory of being pregnant and the long delivery was still very fresh in my mind, and the thought of going through that so soon again, terrified me. Having a baby is such a life changing experience and adjustment. I wanted to concentrate on bonding and being a good mother to our daughter. I was afraid that if I got pregnant too soon I would feel overwhelmed with taking care of two children and our home. I wanted to enjoy our baby and not have to compromise my time with her. I was petrified about making a mistake.

To add to my anxiety, my cycles never returned to the pre-pregnancy pattern that I was familiar with. My first menstruation occurred eight weeks after delivery. I was frustrated with my charting because I found it difficult to decipher the different mucus patterns. I was having watery mucus instead of the stretchy egg white kind and my dry days were never dry. Even though I never had true dry days before I was pregnant the characteristics of the mucus that I considered to be like a dry day were not the same as I was having now.

Including the necessary six-week post delivery abstinence, it had been 14 weeks after the birth before our first attempt at sexual relations. Difficulty in charting was the main cause for my resistance towards any sexual relations. As a result of this extremely long period

of abstinence, there was a large amount of tension between my husband and me. After being diagnosed with amenorrhea, I had to take hormone pills for ten days during the months of November through January. After taking the hormone pills my cycles became more regular, but I was still having extreme difficulty with deciphering my mucus. This led to further periods of extended abstinence. By November my husband felt very frustrated with me and I felt very resentful that he didn't understand my fears and confusion. I wanted to give up NFP because of the strain and stress our marriage was going through, but my husband wouldn't let me. Things got so tense that my husband urged me to call and talk to our NFP teachers because he couldn't live like this much longer. I called and explained my dilemma. We set up an appointment so that my husband and I could meet with them. It was good to see our teachers again. They helped reinforce our basic knowledge of the ovulation method and, most importantly, helped us realize that we needed to communicate more.

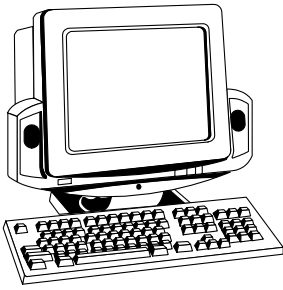
Since my mucus patterns were so hard to decipher we used a basal thermometer to give us a sense of if and when ovulation occurred. Our teachers also pointed out to us that because I was exercising two nights a week, the watery mucus could be caused by exercise or by the hormone pills. This helped me to be more aware of when I noticed the watery mucus. They also suggested blocking out all light in our bedroom at night because light and darkness during sleep can affect a woman's fertility and infertility.

Through many discussions we gained more understanding of our concerns and how we can make NFP work for us. Slowly but surely the tension went away and we became more understanding of each other. We experimented with my charting descriptions. Before we met with our NFP teachers, I used too many descriptions and made it too complicated and confusing. For example wet, sticky, clear would be a description for one day and clear, watery, sticky would be another day. I would also interchange the words tacky and sticky throughout my mucus patterns and I would get confused. I wasn't consistent and I made

it too difficult for myself because I was so paranoid. Then we tried to simplify my descriptions, but we simplified too much. Anything that didn't have egg white characteristics was described as a dry day because I always have some kind of discharge. I did not feel confident or comfortable with these descriptions. For the next cycle, we finally came up with descriptions that work for us. This is what we use: tacky (opaque in color and stretches less than ½ “), stretchy (usually clear, but can be yellow or white, stretches ½ - 2”), eggwhite (contains the characteristics of an egg white), cl (clear in color), sl (slippery when wiping and in feel), y/w (yellow, white, tacky mucus that dries crusty, can be thick – this is what we consider my dry days). We also continue to take my temperature and I wear a sleep mask to block out all light in our bedroom.

By February I was off the hormone pills and my new descriptions were working. I could see the changes in my mucus patterns and with each new cycle my confidence grew. My husband has been more understanding and he reviews my chart with me and I feel more like partners. We make time for talking, holding hands, and cuddling. We still want to avoid a pregnancy so when we both agree a time is safe we plan for a “Champagne Night” where we talk, toast and share a special evening together. We try having two “Champagne Nights” a month and we plan to increase that number.

This path we have chosen has been very trying on both of us and I wanted to give up several times, but thanks to the support of my husband, our NFP teachers, and prayer, things are finally getting better. Marriage is a special gift from God. It is something to be cherished and not taken for granted. The waiting and planning is part of the beautiful process that helps strengthen and bring us closer together. Every time we share a special evening together we realize all over again that the strong closeness, love and tenderness we feel for one another is exactly what God has intended for all of us.



NFP and The Internet
By Colleen Moscone

Today, people go on the Internet to get information on just about any subject imaginable. Vast amounts of information are attainable at the click of a mouse. This is a very appealing resource, especially for young people.

When searching the web to learn more about NFP, numerous sites with a vast amount of information can be found. Basically there are three ways that NFP sites offer their services online. The first is by offering NFP charts to print and fill in by hand. The second is to offer computer programs to download. And third is to offer support through e-mail addresses for advice and information.

The internet user must use caution though, when referring to various sites. Be certain that the person who is offering advice is a qualified NFP instructor. While the internet can offer a plethora of information, there is no governing authority to validate the information posted on a web site. Enjoy browsing the web, and remember it is critical to consult reliable sources before practicing NFP.

The official Billings Ovulation Method website is www.woomb.org; woomb stand for World Organization Ovulation Method – Billings. Another website with information on the Ovulation Method is www.billingsmethod.com. The archdiocese has a web page with a wealth of information. Check it out! www.archdioceseofdetroit.org.

Eventually TLC may be made available on line!
We will keep you posted.



Couple Prayer

There are a number of resources in many bookstores designed to help couples in the challenges and experiences of couple prayer.



However, the first decision a couple must make is do they *want to pray together*.

Is praying together something they both value in and of itself?

If the answer is No – then no matter what the couple does, praying together will not be a rewarding experience. If one partner feels coerced into praying, resentment and anger will be the fruits of attempting to pray together. For these couples prayer is often looked at as a magic system that will solve their marriage problems. After all statistics say that couples who pray together have a lower divorce rate.

Prayer doesn't work that way.

Prayer doesn't change the other spouse. Prayer changes me!

Prayer changes a couple who is truly "one flesh".

To pray as a couple we need to be united as a couple in other areas of our marriage. Otherwise we are praying together as two individuals, not as a couple that has been united as one through the Sacrament of Marriage. Couple prayer is as intimate as the sexual act in marriage. Both marital sex and couple prayer involve a unique relationship between the couple and God.

The sex act in marriage is a renewal of the wedding vows. These two individuals give themselves to each other totally – body and spirit – in such a way that they are no longer two, but "one flesh". Couple prayer is an encounter in which two individuals give themselves to each other so that they become "one spirit".

If a couple decides that they do want to pray as a couple their next step is to look at their ways of communicating with each other. Communicating spiritually (praying) works well when a couple practices healthy communication skills in all other areas of their life. The reality of life tells us that we are human beings who may know what is right and good, but as Paul says, "I do not do what I want..." (Rom 7:15) Paul's message is not one of discouragement, but one of encouragement. Although we often fail, the rewards of successful couple prayer are well worth the struggles.

Just as all things that God creates can be misused the same is true with sex and prayer. When this happens the Bible tells us, "leave your gift at the altar and go first and be reconciled..." (Matt 5:24) This is where most of us find ourselves at various times in our relationship with our spouse. Sex as well as prayer becomes a tool to reward or punish each other. That is when we need to "humble" ourselves, ask forgiveness of each other and strive again to experience sex and prayer as God intended its use.

The "how to" of actually praying varies with each couple. Some couples pray using the rosary and Bible as well as spontaneous prayer, others include singing and times of silence. Some couples pray for an hour or more at a time while others opt for 10-15 minute segments throughout the day. Some couples schedule a specific place for prayer while others will pray while walking, doing chores, or talking on the phone when they are at a distance from each other.



Creativity is the keyword that makes couple prayer a success for any specific couple. Circumstances change and being too rigid on the specifics of how, where, when, and what to pray often ends up with finding "no convenient time to pray".

