



LIFE MATTERS

The Newsletter of the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Rockford
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What Method of Family Planning Should We Use?

by Deborah Irwin, M.Div.

Engaged and married couples often ask themselves how children will play into their married life. Most married couples revisit this question several times throughout their marriage as their circumstances change. How can you know what is best for your marriage?

Forms of Contraception

Some forms of family planning are contraceptive. The origin of the word emerges from a combination of *contra* (meaning “against”) and *conception* (meaning “receiving life”). Contraception means intentionally preventing conception (the union of egg and sperm). Contraceptives include:

- hormonal methods such as the pill, the patch, and IUDs
- barrier methods such as condoms and diaphragms
- permanent sterilization such as tubal ligations and vasectomies

However, hormonal methods are not only contraceptive, but also may act as abortifacents. One of the methods through which hormonal contraceptives work (and it happens!) is to prevent implantation (the attachment of the newly created life to the lining of the uterus). Because this new life therefore cannot receive the nutrients it needs, it is aborted out of his/her mother’s body.

What Does the Church Say about Birth Control?

The Catholic Church opposes all forms of contraception because they work against the two purposes of the marital embrace: procreation and the unity of the married couple. Married couples have stated in their wedding vows that they will accept children lovingly from God. The use of contraception rejects God’s design for life and instead opts for sterilizing the marital act. The Church teaches that each marital embrace should be open to co-creating new life with God.

Contraceptive use also prevents making a total gift of self because the whole person, inclusive of fertility, is not being offered to the other. This becomes an obstacle to the full union of spouses.

The Alternative: Natural Family Planning

Church teaching states that decisions regarding parenthood are primarily the responsibility of the couple, who make decisions based on the recognition that human life is a sacred gift from God. Decisions about parenthood

should be made by the couple in a spirit of love and generosity, in consideration of God, themselves, children already born, and society. The Church invites couples to consider a morally acceptable alternative to contraception: Natural Family Planning (NFP).

NFP teaches scientifically accurate methods for tracking the fertile phase of a woman’s cycle. NFP can be used to postpone, avoid, or achieve pregnancy. When used to postpone or avoid pregnancy, NFP differs from contraception in that instead of opposing God’s gift of life through rendering a sexual act sterile, the couple simply chooses to abstain from the marital embrace during the woman’s fertile phase.

Ten Benefits of NFP

So why would a couple choose to use NFP?

1. *Reliability.* The effectiveness for avoiding pregnancy is just as high as, if not higher than, any contraceptive. NFP is not the old-fashioned rhythm method.
2. *Availability.* All couples can use NFP, regardless of regularity of cycles, age, whether breastfeeding, or level of fertility.
3. *Versatility.* NFP can help couples achieve or avoid pregnancy.
4. *Moral.* NFP allows couples to use their bodies as designed by God. Although it can be used immorally, it is a objectively good and therefore differs from contraception which is inherently evil.
5. *Harmless.* There are no harmful side effects.
6. *Joint Responsibility.* Both spouses, not simply one, are responsible for their family planning.
7. *Builds Marital Relationship.* NFP encourages more communication between the couple about family intentions because it is a cooperative method of family planning.
8. *Inexpensive.* Ongoing costs are only a few dollars a year.
9. *Natural.* It works with the human body as God created it.
10. *More intimacy.* NFP, when used to avoid pregnancy, requires only a few days of abstinence per cycle. NFP-using couples find many non-genital ways to be intimate when they are abstaining.

—Deborah Irwin is the Natural Family Planning Coordinator for the Diocese of Rockford. For more information on Natural Family Planning, please call the Respect Life-NFP office at 815-399-4300 x382 or visit our website: <http://www.rockforddiocese.org/respectlife/nfp>