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## Natural Family Planning Federation of America, Inc.

Msgr. John J. Seli

Modern man is becoming increasingly aware of his many individual and social responsibilities. In addition to his own good will, he needs information and education to enable him to assume these responsibilities freely and consciously.

The Natural Family Planning Federation of America, Inc., grew out of the awareness of man's need for education in order to grow in freedom, self-knowledge, and responsibility to his full potential as a human person. One of these areas of responsibility which is of vital concern for men and women is their responsibility as parents. Here, too, self-knowledge and autonomy are essential factors in their quest for true freedom.

The Natural Family Planning Federation was organized out of a recognized need for an institution which concentrates its attention on Natural Family Planning. As an outgrowth of an international Natural Family Planning Conference held in Washington, D. C. in June, 1973, the Federation became the voice for the over 200 agencies, organizations and groups in the United States that have dedicated themselves to assisting couples "to practice upright and truly human responsibility."

While the last decade has seen the development of a national family planning program, it has also witnessed the development of an unfortunate misunderstanding of Natural Family Planning meth-

ods. The simplistic and misleading referral to the various methods of Natural Family Planning as "rhythm" has not only removed a very effective form of contraception from a significant number of families, but it has also forced others, in their concern to be responsible parents, to turn to methods which are not in keeping with their moral commitment.

Growth as a person is a gradual and continuing process in which the surmounting of difficulties seems to play a necessary part. This developmental process applies to all aspects of the person including his sexuality with its physical, psychological, interpersonal, spiritual and procreational components. Men and women need to understand and integrate these components at every stage of life. Within marriage this development takes place best where there is a loving, generous, faithful and stable relationship.

In human development, it must be recognized that the family unit is the cornerstone of society. In the family we have man, considered as a person, husband and father; woman, considered as a person, wife and mother; child, present actually or potentially, to be respected as a person from conception. Thus, married couples, facing their responsibility of parenting, must be involved in a dialogue which leads to a choice of a way of life. It involves more than a choice of a family planning technique. In this context, natural family planning may be de-

efined as a dialogue leading to responsible parenthood, based on an educated awareness and acceptance of the natural fertility cycle; and abstinence in married life becomes a loving part of this dialogue.

The Natural Methods approach to family planning is not medically oriented, neither is it contraceptively oriented. It is primarily educational. Beginning with the very preparation for marriage, couples are helped to understand that the knowledge they have of themselves and the other is what is important to them and to their marriage. The better they understand each other, and themselves, the greater the possibility of their being happy in their marriage.

The Natural Family Planning Federation seeks to invite married couples to this kind of responsibility, and to do it in such a way that it increases their humanness, their sense of belonging to the human family. In no way are we developing a program which will demean human life or make it less valuable, but we hope to give to people who so desire, the kinds of choices which should be open to them if the decisions they are to make concerning family size are to be mutual, made in a trusting, open fashion, with the kind of up-to-date knowledge which should be theirs.

In providing this service, the Federation not only provides for those whose moral and spiritual criteria of Natural Family Planning are those outlined in Hu-

*Before his association with the newly formed Federation, Msgr. Seli was Vicar for Family Life in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and Director of Pittsburgh's Family Life Center. The following article describes the work of the Federation based on Natural Family Planning — "a dialogue leading to responsible parenthood, based on an educated awareness and acceptance of the natural fertility cycle."*



manae Vitae and Vatican Council II, but also gives positive alternatives to others, who, for medical or other considerations, are constrained from using artificial contraception. The purpose of the Federation is not to tell people whether or not they should have children or how many they should have, but rather to help them to think about the responsibility they have as parents, and, secondly, to provide them with the information they need, so that the decisions which they make concerning their family will be decisions made from an informed conscience.

By definition, then, we are dealing with couples. Decisions concerning family involve both the husband and the wife, and we have determined that any instruction given should include both. In this dialogue the couple is informed not only of the necessity of thinking together, but reminded of the love they have for each other. One of the elements in family planning according to the Natural Methods is that the husband and wife are brought together to know each other more intimately. They begin not only to see each other as persons having wants and desires, but also to see themselves as being able to help their partner in marriage to satisfy these wants and needs.

When a couple can be brought to see the tremendous part they can play in the life of their partner in marriage, the marriage takes on a new dimension. The

marriage ceremony is pre- on the husband giving himself to his wife, and the wife giving herself to her husband and each of them saying in effect: "I want to give you the best possible gift I can give — namely me." The exchange of selves which takes place in the marriage ceremony is an exchange of gifts which are of the utmost value. The worthwhile values of this giving ought to carry over into their married life together. Ideally, then, one is a husband doing everything he can to make his wife happy, and a wife doing everything she can to make her husband happy. This, of course, is the ideal situation, but ultimately it ought to be the goal for which married couples should strive.

In the Natural Methods of family planning one of the necessary components is the time of abstinence. This is the time within the fertility cycle when the couple is required to abstain from marital relations for a period of time which they themselves determine from the observations concerning ovulation in which they have both participated. They are asked to use this time not simply as time when they, as it were, absent themselves from each other, but as time when they become more present to each other.

What we then have is the determination of a couple to make love to each other in every possible way outside of having sexual intercourse. Some might think that this is an exercise in frustration,

but according to the testimony of the couples who use the Natural Methods, it is a time of courtship, a time of preparation, a time which reminds them of the period prior to marriage when they wanted so much to have intercourse but because of their determination to wait until marriage, they could not and did not have intercourse. This did not diminish in any way the tremendous desire or attraction they had for one another.

We transfer this into the context of marriage, and once again we have a time each month when courtship takes place, a time when the attractiveness of the partner is increased and perhaps understood to a greater extent. When the time comes again when they may have intercourse according to their plans, this can be done with a renewed freshness and appreciation.

The Federation is offering not merely a methodology of family planning, but a way of life where in married people can be brought to appreciate each other more intimately, the desire for each other being renewed again and again. It initiates a search for new ways in which a couple can say to each other, "I love you," not only through sexual intercourse but in the many other ways of sharing common to their lives. The time of abstinence, instead of being a negative element in their lives, becomes a time of positive searching out of ways to express this love and friendship for each other.

The Federation seeks to provide leadership, guidance and education in the Natural Methods of family planning so that they may be used intelligently as a true and valid means of promoting parental responsibility and the welfare of families.

In a recent survey using the Federal government's own criteria, a minimum of 800,000 low income Catholic couples were identified as meeting the criteria for subsidized services. This number does not include many others who for moral or medical reasons desire to use the Natural Methods but cannot because adequate instruction is not available. Using the Federal cost data, the funds needed to provide services to those of low income are \$18 million a year. This is approximately 10% of the present government support of family planning services.

The new Federation will combine existing resources of the over 100 family planning groups across the country into a unified effort to improve training, establish program standards, initiate essential research, provide a sound financial basis, and provide such technical assistance as is needed by the Natural Family Planning organizations to secure funding. Basic to the entire program is the commitment to put the "family" back into family planning and to lay aside the myths concerning Natural Family Planning. At the present stage of development, the Natural Methods offer a positive

alternative to those seeking to fulfill their parental responsibility and will assist them in successfully pursuing their decisions within the confines of an informed conscience.

Of special importance to the new Federation is a Research Center being developed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania under the leadership of John J. McCarthy, M.D., board certified obstetrician and gynecologist. The Center has developed a prototype computer model which will provide an accurate identification of the day of ovulation. Preliminary experiments with this model have shown the computer to be very accurate.

The Federation incorporators met early in October to chart out the work of the organization. Because the demand for Natural Family Planning services have come from many groups which represent the whole spectrum of religious and medical persuasions, the Board asserted the need for the corporation to be nonsectarian and confirmed the appointment of a Protestant minister, Robert J. Carlson, to be Executive Vice-President of the new organization.

The Incorporators Board has as its present membership: Most Reverend Vincent M. Leonard, D.D., Bishop of Pittsburgh; the Honorable Genevieve Blatt, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Mr. John Ball, Newington, Connecticut; John J. Brennan, M.D., Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Mrs. Isabelle Collora, Dallas, Texas; Rev. Msgr. Robert Deegan, Los Angeles, Cali-

fornia; Mrs. David Ek, St. Louis, Missouri; Hanna Klaus, M.D., St. Louis, Missouri; and Msgr. Dino Lorenzetti, Buffalo, New York.

To accomplish its basic purposes, the Natural Family Planning Federation has established a national headquarters in Washington, D.C. This office will provide the focal point of leadership, guidance and education in the field of Natural Family Planning. The Federation will promote and encourage the acceptance of Natural Family Planning by individuals as well as the general public and promote governmental support for the provision of natural Family Planning services.

The Federation will seek to make available Natural Family Planning services to all persons who desire them by means of both public and private agencies. It will sponsor and conduct scientific research aimed at improving and improving methods of Natural Family Planning and the delivery of Natural Family Planning services. In carrying out its work, the Federation will cooperate and work with other agencies and organizations, both public and private, national and international, interested in Natural Family Planning. These activities of the Federation will be conducted so as to act as a service organization to its members and to assist them to develop and expand Natural Family Planning services in local regions as well as to stimulate and facilitate communication between the various members.