

Natural (and Supernatural) Family Planning

NFP helped us to diagnose our infertility, grow in love and welcome children into our lives

By Christopher Carstens (from Colombia Magazine July/August 2020)

My wife, Marguerite, and I practice natural family planning. We also have eight children. Some would conclude from these facts that NFP “doesn’t work.” On the contrary, we would respond: NFP works better than we could have ever imagined. It has brought extraordinary blessings to our marriage.

In my high school home economics class, in addition to teaching us how to balance a checkbook, iron a shirt and cook a simple meal, offered lessons on artificial birth control. The basic premise was that pregnancy alters one’s life, and that becoming pregnant was a snap – unless, of course, intrusive precautions were taken. As it turns out, the class premise was only half right. Pregnancy and birth are life-changing; but becoming pregnant – and staying pregnant – is often no easy feat.

When Marguerite and I we first married, I thought it prudent to take a little time, start jobs, make some money and get used to our common life. But God thought otherwise and – snap! – we found ourselves pregnant within the first year. And what a joy it was! Married life was already a blessing, and the expectation of our first baby lifted our happiness even high. However, our high spirits crashed when we lost this first baby to miscarriage. This loss was followed by the stillborn birth at 30 weeks of a daughter, Louise. We tried to conceive again, but to no avail. It turned out that pregnancy is no easy matter.

And that’s where NFP comes into our story. NFP helped us diagnose infertility issues and address them safely, naturally and morally. Dr. Louise Smyth, a physician trained in NaProTechnology (natural procreative technology) through the Paul VI Institute in Omaha, Neb., came to our aid. After teaching us to read fertility signs and chart cycles, the problem emerged more clearly. My wife had a progesterone deficiency, and Dr. Smyth prescribed supplementary progesterone injections to help carry the next pregnancy to full term.

There was a second physician who also came to our aid: St. Gianna Beretta Molla. Canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2004, Molla was an Italian pediatrician who, while pregnant with a baby girl, was diagnosed with a fibroid tumor on her uterus. Rather than risk her unborn child’s life, Molla declined radical treatment. She died April 28, 1962, just one week after giving birth. We asked her intercession daily, and we are grateful today to both Dr. Gianna and Dr. Louise for our “Gianna babies.”

Contrary to the popular mindset, the “P” in NFP is for “planning,” not “prevention” – though NFP can also safely help a couple avoid pregnancy should they need to in grave circumstances. In our marriage, NFP has been an essential means to grow and sustain the love between my wife and me and for our children. I don’t think I would be a father, or at least not the father I am without it.

But there’s a familiar saying that is also relevant here: “if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans!” This is also my NFP experience. After marriage, I planned to wait some time before pregnancy and planned for all things to go smoothly. This didn’t happen. Thankfully, a better Father than I had his own plan. It included not only NFP, but joy and sorrow, anxiety and relief, disappointment and gratitude – as well as doctors and saints. It’s a plan my wife and I could never have imagined, let alone executed, on our own.

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