

FROM OUR DEACON



In addition to being the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary time, today marks the beginning of **NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING AWARENESS WEEK**. For this reason, it is appropriate to discuss the Church's teaching on this very important topic. According to the definition provided by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Natural Family Planning, also known as NFP, is the general term used for the scientific, natural, and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or postpone pregnancy.

Contrary to what past generations of Catholics have been led to believe by well-meaning, but misguided sources, the goal of every Catholic marriage is not to produce as many children as physically possible. While the Church teaches that ALL children are a blessing from God, it also realizes that raising children is a tremendous responsibility that should be approached by each married couple with prayerful discernment and great care. The temptation which many married couples face, and to which too many sadly give in, is to resort to contraception in an effort to manage the number of children they have. This contradicts Church teaching and undermines the vow each couple takes when receiving the sacrament of Holy Matrimony of being open to the possibility of children. As we know, some marriages result in many children, but not every marriage is blessed with many (or any) children. The important thing to remember is that we, as Catholics, must never do anything to artificially prevent the generation of new life through the use of contraceptives.

In a time when married couples face so much uncertainty -- in our culture, our economy, and our country, it is understandable to seek ways to responsibly plan the size of their families, but such decisions should be made by both the husband AND wife **together** after much prayer and careful discernment. **Natural Family Planning** provides an effective mechanism for couples to abide by Church teaching while remaining faithful to the vows they made in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. I emphasize the word "couples" because following NFP is not the sole responsibility of the woman; husbands must be just as involved. The NFP journey must be a team effort with open communication. It can be difficult because it requires discipline, communication, perseverance through learning curves, and complete trust in God. But these challenges are also what make NFP so beautiful and worthwhile because it brings couples closer together and closer to God, which is the ultimate goal of every marriage.

I invite and encourage everyone to seek more information about Natural Family Planning by contacting the Arlington Diocese NFP website at: <https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/nfp/>.

~Deacon Rob

