
WHY TEACH FERTILITY APPRECIATION IN A PREGNANCY HELP CENTER?

At Elizabeth's New Life Pregnancy Help Center, our philosophy is to be present to the needs of the women who come to us by providing peer counseling, material assistance, prenatal medical care, emotional support, friendship, spiritual guidance, education—whatever the needs may be. It is by being present to them that we reach women with love, influencing them to choose life for their babies, supporting them in that decision, and helping them to change their lives for the better. Lisa and I have come to see this as the living application of the slogan “Love them both.” An integral part of truly loving these women as God does is telling them the TRUTH – in Love – about marriage, sexuality, and chastity – the Truth that the world does not give.

The women who come to the Center are often not prepared to hear and accept the Truth we present to them. They have been conditioned by the world's message: instant-gratification, pleasure above all, and casual sex without strings. They have been taught that contraception is the world's greatest invention, that children are a burden, and that babies can be disposed of. Some have never been taught what is right and good – not from their parents or families, not in school, and often not even in their churches. If they are told these things, it is by way of “Don't Do This” or “Don't Do That” without the reasons behind it. As a result, some clients have little or no basis on which our counselors can talk to them about chastity or morality.

The short counseling session with a client is often not enough time to lay the groundwork necessary for the client to consider chastity or secondary virginity. A *Fertility Appreciation* class is another opportunity to teach these clients, to lay the foundation, and to encourage them to change their behavior. The class gives us more

time to present our case to the clients, in a way that is different from one-on-one counseling. The clients share their experiences and observations with each other, often validating in their eyes what we are trying to teach them.

In teaching *Fertility Appreciation* to our clients, we are trying to give the skills and information they need to form their consciences and make good choices. The primary goals of our class are: 1) Teach God's plan for sex and marriage, 2) Promote chastity or secondary virginity among unmarried women, and 3) Promote Natural Family Planning and generous self-giving within marriage in preference to contraception.

Really, though, the purpose and reach goes much further. We want them to realize the beauty and complexity of their fertility and the immeasurable value of their life and sexuality. We want to inform them of the physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational risks and harms of using contraception. In addition, we want them to be aware of the abortifacient effects of many types of contraception including the pill, IUD, Norplant, Depo-Provera, and the patch.

It is our responsibility to share the knowledge and Truth we've found. They have a need and a right to know how their bodies work, the purpose of sex, God's plan for sex and marriage, the harms of artificial contraception, and that Natural Family Planning exists and is highly effective and worthwhile. Armed with this Truth, they can begin to turn their lives toward constructive relationships, freedom, and joy.

We can never be wrong about giving people information with which to make good moral choices. We are not culpable or responsible for the choices that others make (provided our coercion or lies do not directly cause their choices). We may, in the end, be culpable for withholding the truth by not telling them.”

— Fr. Bill Kramer
St. Luke's Church, Beavercreek, OH

IS IT RIGHT TO TEACH FERTILITY APPRECIATION TO OUR CLIENTS?

In this class, the women learn the basics of their fertility and are introduced to the ovulation method of Natural Family Planning. Some are concerned that by teaching an unmarried woman to read her fertility signs, we are encouraging sexual activity without the potential consequence of making a baby. It is, however, impossible to give women the full understanding of how their bodies work without also informing them of the observable signs of when they are fertile and when they are not. While providing this information, we also teach them about the natural law (and therefore God's law) concerning their sexuality – both the moral imperatives of God's law and the consequences of not living by God's law concerning sex. The information presented in the class is strongly oriented toward use within a marriage relationship and would be very difficult to use in a situation of adultery or fornication.

Women have the right to know how their bodies work as well as the right to know the effect contraceptive drugs and mechanical devices have on their bodies. Spreading this Truth is so critical because it is a basis for positive behavior change, which is our best hope for overcoming the problems of women and of society that are brought into our centers every day. Our clients are unlikely to get this message anywhere else.

In the “Artificial versus Natural Family Planning” video used in the class, Dr. Jerome Lejeune sheds light on this situation. He says, “I think the reason why NFP is not widely used by everyone is in fact because of two things: first, a man must have love for his woman and second, he must have respect for her physiology. And it cannot be used if you have random partners or if you do not have a real conjugal law.” By conjugal law, he means an understanding and respect for

God's law for sex. Consequently, our clients are unlikely to use NFP without respecting God's order for sexuality, which is chastity. In talking to a priest about the class, he said, “We can never be wrong about giving people information with which to make good moral choices. We are not responsible for the choices others make, but in fact we may be culpable for withholding the truth.”

Through this class, we try to instill in the clients a sense of the wonder and gift of their fertility and of pro-creating with God in bringing new life into the world. These are ambitious goals. We're planting seeds. Only God knows if and when these seeds will germinate and bear fruit. However, God does sometimes let us see the fruits of our efforts to encourage us.

We have had several clients tell us later that our class helped them choose chastity. We've also had several married clients learn and practice NFP. They were pleased with the understanding it gave them of their own bodies. One client, after sitting through our class, confided in us that she had an appointment to get an IUD the next day, and that, after listening to our presentation, she decided not to go. We've been amazed how God has used this class to change lives.

STRUCTURE OF A FERTILITY APPRECIATION CLASS

The class has 2 parts.

Part one covers philosophy and biology. We talk about how a woman's natural fertility works, and how wonderfully God has made our bodies. We discuss God's plan for sex, how the female reproductive system works, and the naturally occurring signs of fertility in a woman's cycle (mucus).

We talk to them about God's plan for sex and marriage and discuss the twofold Natural Law purpose of sex – “**Bonding**” and “**Babies.**”

Bonding – We talk about chastity, the emotional

and psychological effects of pre-marital sex, and WHY sex is for marriage. We tell them that sex speaks the language of the body and what it says is “I give myself to you completely and accept you completely not just now but for always.” We tell them how this bonding produces effects which are great for marriage, but it is disastrous outside of marriage – often causing couples to overlook serious problems with their partner.

Babies – The ‘two become one’ so completely that nine months later you’re picking out a name for that ‘one.’ Openness to life when you have sex with your spouse is like saying, “*I love you so much that I want to make another person just like you!*” By withholding our fertility in sex, we put up a barrier to our love and union.

We explain the consequences of breaking God’s Natural Law for sex by using sex outside of the purposes for which it was created. We stress to them that IT’S NEVER TOO LATE – even though they’re not virgins, it’s never too late to choose chastity.

We show the video, “Appreciating Your Fertility” and explain the female reproductive system using a poster, talking about all the parts, what each does, and what happens in a woman’s normal cycle.

Part two of the class reviews all the concepts covered in part one—especially God’s plan for sex and marriage, and the naturally occurring signs of fertility. We show the video “Artificial vs. Natural Family Planning” and then discuss the effects of artificial contraception, covering each method of contraception in detail.

We then discuss Natural Family Planning, which is the way God gives us to be able to postpone a pregnancy for a justifiable reason. This is done by learning the naturally occurring signs of a woman’s fertility so that the couple knows when to have and when to abstain from sex. We include several important points in our discussion of NFP including the scientific proof of the method, its low cost (money and time), moral acceptability, high success rate in a wide variety of

cycle situations, reversability, and ease of use. We stress that THIS IS NOT THE CALENDAR RHYTHM METHOD (the old rhythm method was only 65% effective – modern NFP is 98-99% effective if used properly). We tell them basically how it works day to day for a couple – charting, decision-making, and showing mutual respect. Lastly, we relate the many advantages of NFP including improved communication between husband and wife, increased respect and understanding, relationship building, reversibility (can be used to achieve pregnancy), and the decreased divorce rate of couples practicing NFP.

“When we first started working on this class we expected the clients to sit there and stare blankly at us as so often happens in a classroom setting – but we’ve been pleasantly surprised. Clients often share their own experiences, adding credibility to what we have said. They ask questions that are relevant and usually very astute; they answer questions when asked; and we often receive comments of amazement that they’ve never been told these things. We attribute this to the very intimate nature of the subject matter as well as the casual, comfortable, matter-of-fact way in which we try to approach it.”

Ross & Lisa Novack (developers of the Fertility Appreciation class)

The following resources will help you prepare for teaching Fertility Appreciation at your center or church.

AUDIO TAPES

- Pauline Economon speaking on “Benefits of Teaching NFP in the Pregnancy Help Center,” from the 1997 Heartbeat International Conference, available through Heartbeat International (888) 550-7577
- Dr. Janet Smith’s talk “Contraception, Why Not,” One More Soul (800) 307-7685
- Dr. Chris Kahlenborn’s talk “Contraception, What a Woman Needs to Know,” 1998, One More Soul.

BOOKS

- Mercedes Arzu Wilson, *Love & Fertility*, Family of the Americas Foundation, Inc., 1986, (800)443-3395.
- Dr. John and Sheila Kippley, *The Art of Natural Family Planning*, 4th edition, Couple to Couple League, 1996 (800) 745-8252
- Sheila Kippley, *Breastfeeding and Natural Child Spacing: How Natural Mothering Spaces Babies*, Couple to Couple League
- Mary Beth Bonacci, *Real Love: Answers to Your Questions on Dating, Marriage and the Real Meaning of Sex*, Ignatius Press 1996
- Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love*, Translation of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, with commentary, by Janet E. Smith, New Hope Publications
- Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), Pauline Books and Media, 1981
- Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), Pauline Books and Media, 1995

VIDEO TAPES

- Appreciating Your Fertility*, Family of the Americas Foundation Inc., 1993
- Love & Fertility*, Family of the Americas Foundation, Inc., 1989
- Natural vs. Artificial Family Planning*, Family of the Americas Foundation, Inc.
- Sex Has A Price Tag*, Pam Stenzel, Creative Youth Resources/ Youth for Christ

(All available from One More Soul)

The Fertility Appreciation class plan developed by the Novacks is available free from One More Soul.

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P.TFA

1846 North Main Street
Dayton, Ohio 45405-3832
(800) 307-7685
www.OMSoul.com
OMSoul@OMSoul.com

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Teaching Fertility Appreciation in a pregnancy help center

“Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
Matt 5:19

“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.” John 8:32

by Ross & Lisa Novack
In conjunction with
Elizabeth’s New Life Center