

A Preachable Message

Posted February 24, 2014 by Benedictine College

By Fr. Matthew Habiger, OSB / A moral theologian, former president of HLI and noted expert on Natural Family Planning, Fr. Habiger is also a monk at St. Benedict's Abbey in Atchison, Kansas.

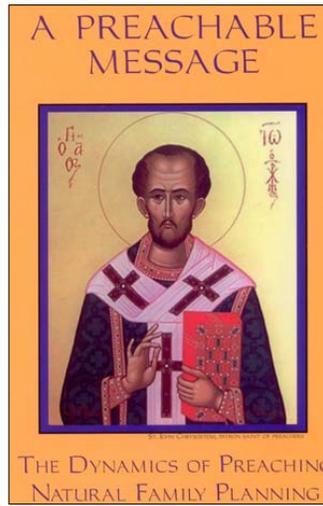
Many clergymen are afraid to address such topics as *Humanae Vitae*, the many harms of contraception and the many blessings of Natural Family Planning. This is especially so when they preach. They are afraid of how their people will respond to the message. Will they complain? Will they go elsewhere? Will the collections drop?

But this is largely a matter of courage. Life is full of difficulties, uncertainties, and unknown outcomes. The virtue of courage helps us to face real life difficulties and simply do what must be done. Add Faith to the mix, and you have supernatural courage. God has a definite plan for marriage, spousal love and family. It is a very good plan. When people know and follow that plan, they develop strong marriages, enjoy a great relationship, and have healthy, happy children.

Marriage and family life today are very fragile. Think of what a 50% divorce rate does to our understanding of marriage. Contraception is a big factor here. Contraception separates sex from babies, and then it separates sex from marriage. Look at the cohabitation rate today. Look at the nationwide 40% of babies born to single moms. Look at the falling number of marriages. Look at the effort to redefine marriage.

Contraception has not brought about the many blessings its early promoters promised us. Just the opposite! Look at the damage done. How can this be turned around and allow people to return to God's plan? How can we once again acquire strong marriages and healthy, happy families?

The beginning of the solution is good preaching. People must hear once again, from the pulpit, God's wonderful plan for marriage, spousal love and family. That is why Sue Ek, national director of the Billing's NFP method, and Dorothy Dugandzic have assembled the second edition of ***A PREACHABLE MESSAGE – The Dynamics of Preaching NFP***. This is great resource for all



clergymen who are called to proclaim God's marvelous plan for us.

It is a collection of: a forward by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, 17 encouraging statements by bishops and priests, a pastoral letter by Archbishop Charles Chaput OFM Cap, 15 homilies by many priests, and prayers of the faithful. After reading some samples below, consider buying a copy and then reflect upon how to best use this tool for advancing NFP in your diocese. Give a copy to your favorite priest. Consider getting this tool into the hands of all the clergy in your diocese.

From **Cardinal Timothy Dolan** of New York: "We face an incredible challenge to preach the truth and beauty of God's plan for life in a culture increasingly dominated by misinformation, lies and individual freedom. ... It is time for us as clergy to reaffirm our commitment to preach God's plan for chaste love, what it means to our salvation and the stability of our society. Our Holy Father explains that the homily is 'the touchstone to measure the pastor's proximity and ability to meet his people.'



"Let me emphasize that this book includes wonderful examples of communicating the joy that comes with living a chaste lifestyle. One the best things about this book is that it is written by clergy, for clergy, to use for the good of marriages, families, and our promiscuous culture. A small band of faithful Catholics are

on the front lines doing their best to promote and defend NFP, and every priest or deacon who preaches about the gift of NFP joins in solidarity with these faithful Catholic witnesses. We can only push back the pervasiveness of the misinformation of our secular culture by taking it upon ourselves to proclaim the wisdom and richness of authentic married love and the gift of NFP."

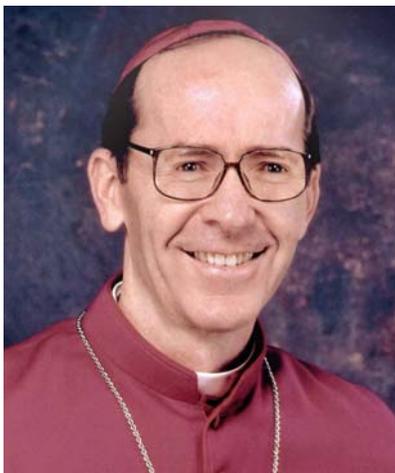
From **Archbishop Charles Chaput OFM Cap.** of Philadelphia: "One of the things that constantly surprises me – I would even say astonishes me – is the number of people who come to talk to me after I have preached

about *Humanae Vitae*. Whether I speak about this teaching directly or as an example within another topic, many come and say how grateful they are that I had the courage to speak about contraception. Almost always, I simply respond that it doesn't really take any particular courage because to speak the truth of Christ without compromise is really part of the essential ministry of a bishop or a priest.



“In the course of priestly ministry, I have seldom experienced any negative reaction to preaching about *Humanae Vitae* and about the importance of NFP for happy marriages and family life. It believe it is very important for our priests not to be

afraid. They will find that the Lord gives them the strength to communicate this teaching in the right way, to speak it clearly. And I believe they will be astonished at the response that such preaching generates in the lives of the faithful.”

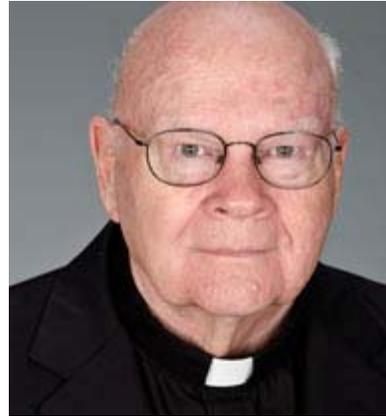


From **Bishop Thomas Olmsted** of Phoenix: “What has been the result of my preaching? Well, I know that couples who practice NFP are encouraged; they're very grateful, and they feel strengthened to continue. And teachers and doctors and priests and others also find encouragement when

someone comes forward and supports the Church's teaching.

“More importantly, every time that I preach on NFP and the Church's teaching in the area of sexuality, I myself grow in my own trust of the truth. I become more confident in my ability to speak about the varied facets of married life, not only NFP, but other aspects as well. If I were to have a doubt about the Church's teaching that would cause me to be silent about any part of it, such doubt would tend to undercut my confidence in other areas. *However, if I really made the effort to preach*

about what are the more difficult parts for some people, my own effort to do so deepens my own trust in the truth, and makes me more grateful for the Church's teaching in this regard. So I would strongly encourage my brother priests and bishops to take opportunities to teach and to explain and persuade others to the goodness of the Church's teaching on sexuality and, in particular, NFP.”



From **Fr. Dan McCaffrey**, founder of NFP Outreach: “I remember very distinctly that when *Humanae Vitae* came out, Pope Paul VI addressed himself to priests in a special way. He begged the priests to preach this message and not to be

afraid to preach it. The Holy Spirit that animates the teaching office of the Church and its preaching is the same Spirit that is in the hearts of our good people who listen to the message; therefore, it resonates within them.

“I can say from experience that there is no question about it: when this message, this good news of NFP, and the god news of God's message and the Ten Commandments are preached to the people in their entirety, the people do listen. Our people do deserve to hear these messages; they have every right to hear them. And when they do hear the message of NFP, their lives blossom; vocations come about in the Church; marriages are enhanced; communication is increased between the couples. This preaching has a great benefit and a great value. As a pastor, I know from many years of experience that this is a very, very preachable message.”

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