and their fertility.

The challenge to us throughout the centuries has been not giving themselves totally. The Catholic Church's teaching is that deliberate or the Creighton Model) is a truly modern and effective way to plan one's family, understand the miraculous function of the human body, and bet

These methods are highly effective. When learned and used correctly and conscientiously, Natural Family Planning is effective in avoiding pregnancy 99.5%* of the time. Research has documented its effectiveness in achieving a pregnancy in the first cycle of use at 76%. Why isn't every married couple learning and using NFP? Good question. Perhaps it is because too many people simply don't know the truth about it. NFP is not a repackaged version of the old calendar-based “rhythm method”—a misconception even doctors have today. Unfortunately, medical training in this area, in most cases, is often nonexistent or inadequate.

In addition to the medical benefits of using NFP, other benefits include the enhancement of the married couple's sexuality and placing responsibility for fertility on the man and the woman equally. This leads to a more loving cooperation in matters of sexuality and family planning. By learning NFP, the married couple comes to a deeper understanding of the physical aspect of sexuality and how it relates to the spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of life as well.

Finally, Natural Family Planning is a versatile method that can be used in all stages of reproductive life. The observations a woman makes as a user of NFP can be extremely helpful when seeking the assistance of a physician, should a reproductive problem arise, in the transition from one stage of life to another. These observations can help the physician diagnose and treat such problems as PMS, ovarian cysts, recurrent miscarriages and infertility.

Natural Family Planning is easy to learn, inexpensive, and quickly becomes second nature to the married couples who use it. But most importantly, NFP brings together the physical, spiritual and emotional aspects of a couple's fertility to enrich marriages by following God's teachings and plan for their married lives.


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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING:

Billings Ovulation Method Assn (USA)
(651) 699-8139 www.Boma-usa.org

The Couple to Couple League
(800) 745-8252 www.ccl.org

Family of the Americas Foundation
(800) 443-3995 www.familyplanning.net

FertilityCare Centers of America
(602) 390-6600, ext. 117 www.fertilitycare.org

Marquette University Institute for NFP
(414) 288-3854 www.mu.edu/nursing/NFP

Natural Family Planning International
(740) 459-9663 www.nfpandmore.org

Northwest Family Services

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

One More Soul
(800) 307-7685 www.onemoresoul.com

For a Directory of NFP-Only Physicians and NFP Teachers, please visit www.onemoresoul.com.

You may also find help at a parish or diocesan NFP office or at a Catholic hospital in your area.

Dr. Jose Fernandez is a family practice physician in Kissimmee, Florida.
As a family physician, I was trained that the only way to plan families effectively was to use artificial contraceptives, IUDs or sterilization. Although these artificial methods had side effects, I was taught in medical school that they were worth the risk. Moral consequences were not to be considered since our faith life had nothing to do with our bodies, right? I was constantly reminded that one's bag of morals and life ethic should be left at the doorway to medical education. I was there to serve the desires of my patients whether they wanted birth control pills or tubal ligations. My personal feelings, regardless of Church teaching had nothing to do with my practice of medicine.

To be honest, I never knew what the Church really taught on this subject. Even if I had known, I thought it could not impact the way I practiced medicine.

At the beginning of our marriage, my wife and I used oral contraceptives, but after our first child, we switched to the Sympto-Thermal Method of Natural Family Planning. This decision was not really based on faith, especially at this point in my life. I was made to feel I would be abandoning my patients and that I would be denying them a service I had provided in the past. After all, what would my patients say to me if I told them that I had stopped prescribing contraceptives and would no longer perform vasectomies or tubal ligations, just because of my Church’s teaching?

Through it all, my wife gave me the inner strength to know that I was on the right path. As I grew in my Catholic faith, I realized that God’s plan for me, my family and the patients I cared for had to do with, not only what I was doing, but also the way I was doing it. My wife was instrumental in helping me pick up the pieces. In many ways, she showed me I had not entered into a profession called medicine, but rather I had entered into a vocation—a way of life—one that was very personal. She showed me that my faith and values at home should and could impact my practice of medicine.

Since that soul searching, I have become a strong advocate for Natural Family Planning and the Culture of Life. To my surprise (and the surprise of my colleagues) my patients did not feel abandoned. Some were curious as to why I had made this decision and said they admired me for standing up for my beliefs. My patients did not feel the physician was no longer there for them, just because I chose to no longer prescribe contraceptives. They were curious as to why I had made this decision and said they admired me for standing up for my beliefs.

I find myself each day trying to be more faithful to God, as a husband, as a father, as a parent, and as a physician. I am called to address not just the patient's physical needs, but also her spiritual needs. I seek to help her in her search for meaning in her life. I tell you my story not out of pride, but rather as a way to encourage you in your own journey of faith. As a Catholic, a husband, and a physician, I hope to bring to your attention three things:

1. The effects of artificial contraception on the mind, body and soul
2. The Church’s gift of Natural Family Planning and its effectiveness, and
3. The reaffirmation of God’s plan for you in your married or single life through the understanding of your bodily cycles.

**HUMANA VITAE**

In my renewal of the Catholic Faith, especially with regard to my medical practice, I learned that God indeed has a plan for each of us: A plan transmitted through His Church, taught through its Magisterium, and presented (among other ways) in the form of an encyclical called Humanae Vitae. Written in 1968, this document outlines the Church’s teaching on conjugal relationships and responsible parenthood. It taught that, while artificial contraception in any form is morally wrong at all times and for any reason, natural fertility regulation may be used whenever there is a serious need to avoid pregnancy. This reason could be a medical, psychological, social or economic, temporary or permanent one. 

Humanae Vitae not only detailed the evil of contraception, but also stressed the serious consequences that would befall society if we fell away from the Church’s teaching. As anyone can see, we have fallen away, with estimates of contraceptive use among Catholics and non-Catholics alike as high as 90%. The consequences have been devastating in terms of skyrocketing marital infidelity and divorce. Pope Paul VI’s predictions that an increase in contraceptive use would lead to men regarding women as objects of desire and would allow governments to wield technological and economic power in population reduction programs have been overwhelmingly fulfilled (cf. Humanae Vitae, 17).

**THE “PILL” VS NFP**

**How It Works**

The modern-day birth control pill is made up of two types of artificial steroids that mimic the effects of naturally occurring hormones, estrogen and progesterone. These artificial hormones are formulated to act singularly or in combination, and may be taken by mouth, injected or placed beneath one’s skin. Their effectiveness relies on three mechanisms:

1. Suppressing ovulation
2. Impeding migration of sperm, and
3. Inhibiting implantation of the embryo in the uterus.

The Pill is very effective if used as directed. It can prevent or terminate (more on that later) pregnancy 98-99% of the time.

So then, if it is so effective, why would I as a physician not prescribe it? Because I believe, as a Catholic physician, I am called to address not just the patient’s body, but the personal unity of body, mind and soul.

**THE BODY**

The effects of artificial contraception can be devastating, depending on a woman’s genetic make-up, weight, length of time and type of contraceptive taken. Modern-day contraceptives have potent cardiovascular effects. A woman’s chances of suffering a heart attack, a stroke, or blood clots are increased significantly, even at the lowered dosages in use today as opposed to higher dosages given when the Pill first came on the market over 50 years ago.

Contraceptives also have a potent carcinogenic effect. They raise a woman’s chances of suffering cervical cancer, liver tumors and breast cancer. Contraceptives are linked to increased incidence of migraine headaches, vaginal infections, gallbladder disease, changes in vision and a host of other clinical problems, including death.

Perhaps most sadly, all modern artificial contraceptives can cause early (chemical) abortions. They do this by making the lining of the...