

What Do We Do Now?

Making the Switch from Contraception to Natural Family Planning

Discovering the Truth about contraception can be one of the most defining moments in a couple's marriage. But quite often, the joy of this discovery is accompanied by fears, doubts, and many questions. My husband Larry and I experienced all of the above in January, 2002 when, after 13 years of marriage, we finally decided to live our lives according to **God's** plan for love and life. **We literally threw out the contraception.** This was the best decision we ever made, and we have never looked back. It was THE defining moment in our marriage.

Today, we continue to celebrate our conversion with joy. We celebrate the beginning of a whole new way of life together and a whole new way of loving each other. But we also vividly remember how difficult it was to be in the middle of this conversion process. Our transformation wasn't so "joyful" when we were actually going through it. To be honest, we were a mess. We stayed up night after night until the wee hours of the morning trying to figure out, "HOW ARE WE GOING TO LIVE THIS???" Discovering the Truth about love wasn't enough. What to do with this Truth proved to be a far greater challenge.

Perhaps you have struggled with the issue of contraception. Perhaps you have ignored the Church's teachings in your marriage for many years. Perhaps you or your spouse has been sterilized. But now, for whatever reasons, you find yourself wanting to change, wanting something better, wanting authentic love and unity in your marriage. This longing is the first step on the road to holiness and healing. *Do not ignore this longing!* The road ahead may be filled with obstacles; it may be frightening and uncertain. But take comfort in Sacred Scripture, set your foot to the path, and

take one tiny step forward. I hope the following suggestions will encourage you on your journey and help you take the next step. Be not afraid! Joy awaits you! Authentic love and real freedom await you! Just say "yes" and take one tiny step.

#1 Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation

No matter how often Larry and I may have rationalized it, using contraception **was** a sin in our marriage. In order to start anew, we needed the grace of this sacrament. This was the first and most important step for both of us. It was through the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we resolved to "never go back."

Find a priest who understands the Church's teaching. Make an appointment if necessary, and do not delay in confessing this sin. Resolve to amend your life. It doesn't matter what you've done, where you've gone, or how long you've been away—NO sin is too great. Remember, you can just throw out the contraception—or you can throw out the contraception AND experience redemption, mercy, peace, and healing through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The choice is yours.

#2 Gain Knowledge of the Truth—Read, Read, Read!

Larry and I literally had to re-learn how to love each other. We didn't know that every sexual union was meant to be a renewal of our marriage vows; we had never heard that real love is free, total, faithful, and fruitful. We didn't understand **why** the Church says what it says, and we were still unsure about many issues regarding sex. But when we discovered the *Theology of the Body*, it



was like finding "the pearl of great price" for our marriage. The *Theology of the Body* is a collection of talks given by Pope John Paul II on the meaning of human sexuality. The truths revealed in the *Theology of the Body* reflected the deepest desires of our hearts. We immersed ourselves into this teaching in order to understand the language of our bodies and how we communicate. It was only then that we saw the beauty of God's original plan for our sexuality. This is what we had been searching for! Our hearts were transformed, and to this day, we are still in awe of the *Theology of the Body*.

You may have many questions that are still unanswered. Perhaps your spouse considers the Church's teachings to be a burden and is therefore reluctant to change. Pray for faith and reason; search for answers! Gain knowledge and understanding of authentic love—the only love that satisfies. Read books or listen to CDs together. Re-learn the meaning of your marriage, and immerse yourselves in Truth.

Go to www.OMSoul.com for a wealth of resources. I recommend the following to get you started: *Good News About Sex and Marriage* by Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners* by Christopher West, *Contraception: Why Not* by Professor Janet E Smith, "Prove It, God!" . . . *And He Did* by Patty Schaefer.

#3 Take a Class on Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is fertility awareness that is simple, scientific, and reliable. It is basic knowledge that can be used either to achieve a pregnancy, or to avoid a pregnancy when there are serious reasons for doing so. Many people don't realize, however, that there are different methods of NFP—all of which are in harmony with Church teaching. The most widely used methods include the Sympto-Thermal Method, Creighton Model, Ovulation Method, and Marquette Model. Each has different levels of instruction and different physical observations. Find out which

method is right for you and sign up for a class. Both spouses should attend together. A National directory of NFP Teachers and NFP Centers is available at www.OMSoul.com (800-307-7685). Call your Diocesan Family Life Office or local Catholic hospital for information



about classes in your area.

#4 Switch to an NFP-Only Physician

This may sound drastic but, if it is at all possible, find an NFP-only physician. For me, this was a very important step—one that I didn't want to take, because I "loved" my former Ob-Gyn who had delivered all our children. Soon after our conversion, however, I realized that his practice of prescribing contraception no longer fit with our values. I couldn't follow his advice, and I didn't agree with his assumptions.

When I found my new physician, I felt as if I had truly come home to an entire practice that understood me and valued my fertility as a gift and a blessing—not a disease or an inconvenience that needed to be "controlled." Despite a much longer commute to this new practice, it has been well worth it!

An NFP-Only physician will affirm your decision, help you make the switch, and lend great support with medical truths and NFP experience. If you have been given hormonal contraceptives for "medical reasons," an NFP-Only physician can evaluate the underlying problem and utilize natural hormones or surgeries to restore proper function of your body. An NFP-Only physician may also be able to assist couples who seek sterilization reversal. Because physicians have such a powerful influence on their patients and have a relationship built on trust, it is crucial that you find an NFP-Only physician.

Go to www.OMSoul.com/nfp-only.php to find your nearest NFP - only physician. If none is available in your area, ask an NFP teacher to recommend an NFP - friendly physician. If switching physicians is not possible, you may need to educate your current physician. Get materials, take them to your physician, and encourage him/her to learn the scientific facts and moral reasoning behind modern methods of NFP. Unfortunately, many physicians remain unaware and uneducated in this area. You can help change that!



#5 Connect with Others

When Larry and I converted to the Church's teachings, we knew five other couples who did not use contraception. That's it—five other couples out of our entire parish, list of acquaintances, colleagues, neighbors, and relatives. But these five couples were more than enough. These were the families we had always admired and respected. They soon became our confidants and closest friends. It felt so good to be able to talk with them! We swapped books and CDs; we swapped stories and experiences; we shared laughter and tears. Through it all, we witnessed their joy and learned how beautiful marriage can be. They encouraged us, taught us, and loved us throughout our entire journey. We are forever grateful.

Chances are, you know of at least one other family that practices NFP. You may not know them well, but you probably know who they are. Perhaps their marriage and family life have been an inspiration to you. Seek them out and share your story. The best place to look is within your own parish. These families can be a tremendous support for you. I strongly recommend that men seek out other men who have gone through this journey. Despite the initial awkwardness

of discussing these personal issues, it can be most encouraging. You are not alone!

#6 Remain Grounded in Sacred Scripture

There were so many Scripture passages that strengthened me when I was afraid or confused. Two verses in particular were crucial at these times: *Mark 1:17* "They dropped their nets and followed him."

I knew that contraception was my "net," and I needed to drop it in order to follow Jesus. *Luke 5:37* spoke to my heart as well: "No one pours new wine into old wineskins." I wanted "new wine" in my marriage. But in order to get that, I had to get rid of the old wineskins. There was no other way. . . . The truths of these scriptures helped me to stay focused on God. His Word sustained me throughout this journey.

Pray for wisdom, strength, perseverance, and purity. Read the Bible. I recommend reading the following verses over and over again: *Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 1:9-11, Ephesians 1:3-4, and Ephesians 3:14-21*. Let them sink into your heart and speak to you personally. Know that you can be pure and blameless; know that you can be rooted and grounded in real love; trust that through grace you will be strengthened with power and Truth!

Finally, I share with you the life-changing question that Larry asked me after reading *Good News About Sex and Marriage*. I was extremely confused, frightened, and in turmoil after discovering the truth about contraception, and I didn't know what to do. He simply asked, "What do you want for our marriage?" I replied, "I don't know. . . but I want what's in that book."

That was it. That's how we began our journey together—reading, learning, praying, and talking. Then we took one step at a time to build the marriage we had always wanted. With time our communication, our physical relationship, and our entire lifestyle changed for the better.

May you be abundantly blessed as you discover God's plan for your marriage, and may you be steadfast in your search for Truth. Make the switch. It could be THE defining moment in YOUR marriage.

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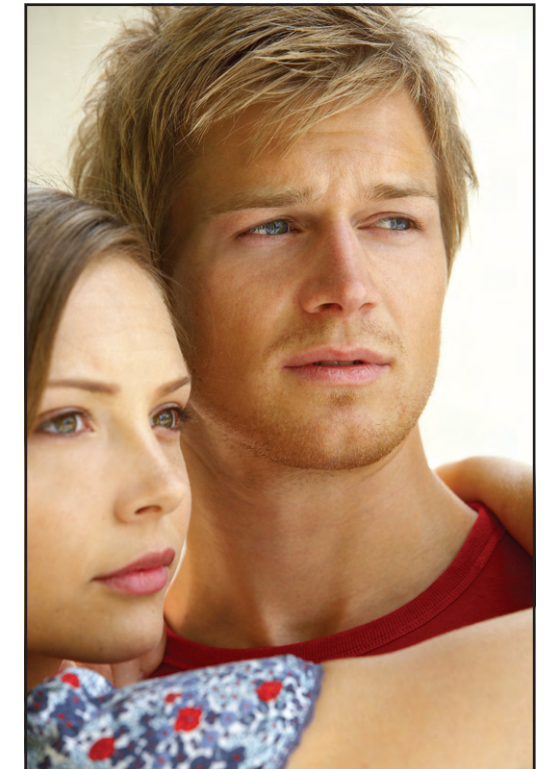
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Billings Ovulation	Billings Ovulation Method Association	www.boma-usa.org	651-699-8139
Creighton	Pope Paul VI Institute	www.popepaulvi.com	402-390-6600
Marquette	Marquette U. School of Nursing	www.marquette.edu/nursing/NFP	414-288-3854

For a directory of NFP-Only Physicians, NFP Centers and teachers go to www.OMSoul.com/nfp-only.php

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by **Patty Schneider**



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