

God's Design For Marriage



*The Truth About
Sex, Marriage,
and Your Catholic Faith*

1 What does the Catholic Church say about sexual love?

The Church teaches that the conjugal union is an expression of total love between a man and woman who have permanently committed to each other in the sacrament of marriage. This life-long commitment expresses unconditional love, acceptance, and total self-giving on the part of the spouses. The sexual union of husband and wife seals and renews their marriage covenant. To believe that human sexuality is merely instinctive or simply pleasurable severely undervalues it.

Over the years, the Catholic Church has written extensively about sexuality and its role in marriage. In 1968, Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical, or letter to the world, entitled *Humanae Vitae*. This letter was written to all people of good will concerning the transmission of life and the regulation of birth. In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI recognized conjugal love as rooted in God's love and His plan for His people. Paul VI saw married sexual love as very sacred, the dynamic element in every marriage. Conjugal love images God's love for His people by being total, faithful and fruitful.

God designed the sexual union to be both unitive (love-giving) and procreative (life-giving). Sex is unitive because it unites husband and wife in a profound bond, strengthening their marital relationship. Sex is also procreative by remaining open to the transmission of new life. God designed the sexual union to allow us to participate in His supreme act of creation. Sexuality, then, is not merely a matter of biology, nor is it simply a source of personal pleasure. It is an expression of total, self-giving love.

2 Why does the Catholic Church care about my marital relations with my spouse?

The Church wishes to safeguard your relationship with your spouse and with God. Sexual love seals and renews a couple's marriage covenant before God and radically unites a man and a woman. By following God's design for marriage, a husband and wife allow themselves to be open to receiving God's grace, strengthening their marriage bond and aiding each other in their path of holiness.

The Church also wishes to protect the good of society. Stronger marriages lead to stronger families. Stronger families lead to stronger societies.

Consider how the misuse of sex because of contraception has gravely exploited women, dramatically increased the spread of diseases, greatly contributed to the rising number of divorces, and directly influenced the vast number of abortions.

3 Does God expect us to have as many children as physically possible?

Children are always a wonderful gift and blessing from God. For just reasons spouses may need to space the births of their children. When planning their family, married couples must prayerfully consider important conditions such as their emotional, physical, and psychological well being, financial means, and other obligations. They must also consider their responsibilities toward God, each other, and their extended family. By practicing **Natural Family Planning (NFP)** as a morally acceptable means of child spacing, a married couple honors God's design for marriage.

4 What is Natural Family Planning (NFP)?

Natural Family Planning, or NFP, is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve or postpone pregnancy. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. To postpone pregnancy, couples using NFP simply abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the brief fertile phase of the woman's cycle. In doing so, the spouses always remain open to life because they don't do anything to impede the procreation of a new child. They simply abstain from sex.

NFP is highly accurate in determining when the woman is most fertile.

Couples who wish to achieve a pregnancy can take advantage of the fertile time of the cycle. Natural techniques to achieve pregnancy have a higher success rate than in-vitro fertilization.



5 What is the difference between NFP and contraception?

Sex with contraception is the body saying, “I don’t give all of myself to you” or “I don’t love you unconditionally — you have to change part of yourself before we engage in sexual love.” In both cases, the body is not speaking a truthful love but is speaking a lie. And the Catholic Church says no human deserves to be lied to, especially in such an intimate moment of marital love.

- Contraception deliberately blocks conception via barrier or chemical methods. Since NFP does not block or suppress conception it is not a contraceptive. Couples simply adjust their behavior. If they discern through prayer that it is not an appropriate time to conceive a new child, they simply abstain from sexual relations during the brief fertile phase of the woman’s cycle. Contraception is anti-life while NFP is pro-life.
- With NFP no harmful, synthetic chemicals or devices enter into a woman’s body as do with the pill or other birth control. With every drug there are potential side effects. Chemically shutting down the natural process of a woman’s reproductive system may have harmful side effects such as irritability, weight gain, and an increased risk of cancer.
- NFP is easy to learn and unlike the use of contraception, there is no cost involved in practicing NFP.

6 Isn’t NFP the “rhythm method”?

Modern NFP methods are not so-called “rhythm” methods, which date back to the 1930s. When couples understand a method and follow its guidelines, NFP is 99 percent effective at determining the exact days when a woman may be fertile. Natural Family Planning is completely reversible so it can be used to space children one month and achieve conception the very next month. This fact is something that artificial methods cannot claim.



7 Is NFP effective if I have irregular menstrual cycles?

Yes. Even though a woman may have irregular menstrual cycles, the signs that a woman's body displays when she is ovulating are the same for everyone. The woman becomes keenly aware of these signs — whether they appear every month or not.

NFP can be used during breast-feeding, during an illness, just before menopause and in other special circumstances. Once a couple understands this information, they may use it if they discern through prayer that there are just reasons to postpone a pregnancy.

NFP helps a woman become more aware of her body and her health in a way that might not have been possible before using it.

8 How does practicing NFP benefit my relationship with my spouse?

By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, NFP enriches the bond between husband and wife. The key to successful use of NFP is cooperation and communication between husband and wife. Couples who use NFP soon learn that they have a shared responsibility for family planning. Husbands are encouraged to “tune in” to their wives' cycles. Both spouses are encouraged to speak openly and frankly about their sexual desires and their ideas on family size. In fact, NFP encourages couples to explore different ways to express their love to one another, thus improving intimacy and nurturing love.

Many couples that leave unnatural methods of birth control find an improved marriage relationship with NFP. This has been confirmed by scientific social studies, and by informal surveys showing an extremely low divorce rate —under 5 percent— among couples practicing NFP. One survey showed that less than one percent of responding NFP users had been divorced and remarried.

9 What if I have been prescribed the pill for medical reasons?

Much research has been conducted in recent years in the area of women's health. More natural and cooperative methods exist of treating illnesses that respect a female's fertility and menstrual cycle rather than shutting it down with the pill or other forms of birth control. Consider asking your health care provider for other options. NaPro Technology, developed by the Pope Paul VI Institute, is becoming widely known and used. NaPro Technology has effectively treated reproductive disorders such as abnormal bleeding, PMS, and infertility. For information on this technology visit www.popepaulvi.com.

10 Can hormonal birth control such as the pill work as an abortifacient or harm a woman's body?

Yes. An abortifacient causes an early abortion. Abortion is an act of direct killing that takes the life of a tiny human being — a life that begins at conception.

- The pill, the patch, or other hormone related birth control can work in one of three ways: (1) they can prevent ovulation (releasing an egg from the ovary); (2) they can cause mucus in the cervix to change so that if sperm reach the cervix, the sperm are not allowed to enter, and; (3) they can irritate the lining of the uterus so that if the first two actions fail, and the woman does become pregnant, the tiny baby boy or girl will die before he or she can actually attach to the lining of the uterus. If the third action occurs, the woman's body rejects the tiny baby and he or she dies. This is called a chemical abortion.
- Medical research also shows that oral contraceptives cause excess production of progestagens. Over time, these actually age a woman's cervix. There is a strong chance that a 30 year-old woman who has been on the pill since the age of 18, has the cervix of a 45 year-old woman thus making it harder to achieve pregnancy. Recent studies have also shown that the pill or other hormonal contraceptives may increase the risk of breast, cervix, and liver cancer.

Adapted from "Sex, Marriage, and Your Catholic Faith - Are They Compatible?" © 2004 Diocese of Pittsburgh



“The transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties and hardships.”

*-Pope Paul VI
Humanae Vitae*

Online Information About Natural Family Planning:

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/>

Couple to Couple League
<http://www.ccli.org/>

Pope Paul VI Institute
<http://www.popepaulvi.com/>

For more information on Natural Family Planning please contact the Catholic Diocese of Youngstown: Office of Pro-Life, Marriage and Family Ministry at 330-744-8451 ext. 273

Or contact your local NFP instructors...

Ashtabula County

Dan and Margaret Sartor
440-474-4178
E-mail: dsartorplumbing@ncweb.com

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330-424-9427

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330-758-6474
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330-527-5196
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330-628-3609
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Stark County

Mercy Medical Center, Women's Pavilion, Canton
330-489-1329 or 1-800-223-8662

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