

A Compendium of Questions and Responses
Regarding the Diocese of Fargo Policy on the
Instruction of Natural Family Planning for Couples Preparing for Marriage

A. Fulfilling Policy Procedures:

1. What should be done if a couple refuses to take NFP instruction?

To fulfill the responsibility to share the truth in a pastoral way, clergy should clearly communicate to couples preparing for marriage the wisdom of this requirement. In general, the marriage should be delayed when a couple refuses to fulfill this requirement. If a couple is refusing to take the class because of a lack of understanding on the Church's teaching on life and love, the marriage should be delayed to allow for an increase in understanding. If the couple still chooses to refuse, then the clergy should call the Chancellor for specific permission to proceed. In all cases, these types of difficulties should be noted in the marriage file.

2. What is the requirement for couples who have set a wedding date, and are not able to complete a program model by that date; for instance, if they choose to go with the CCL model and their classes do not coincide with finishing within a 4-month period prior to the wedding date?

In light of pre-marriage requirements, the date of marriage should be set with a view toward having the requirements met before that day. Couples should be made aware that they may have to adjust their wedding date to ensure that all pre-marriage requirements are completed. Parishes should make known regularly the time required for marriage preparation through bulletin announcements. If a good faith effort is evident on the part of the couple, pastoral judgment may allow for completion of the training after the wedding day. Documentation of completion must be added to the marriage file which is turned into the Diocese of Fargo.

3. What is the requirement for couples who do not reside, prior to marriage, in the same geographical area? Do they take separate classes?

In most cases, the couples can take the courses in separate geographic locations, since the major teaching methods are found throughout the United States. By working with a local instructor they can make contacts in other parts of the country. It is important that both the man and woman be involved with the training. The responsibility should not be placed only on the woman.

4. Who should be consulted in unique marriage circumstances and questions regarding whether a couple needs to take the NFP class?

Clergy should contact the Chancellor for guidance in fulfilling the preparation requirements for the Sacrament of Marriage. *Couples* should NOT be told to contact the Chancellor or the Respect Life Office. If clergy have questions regarding the availability of NFP teachers or education in fertility appreciation, they should consult with the Respect Life Office.

5. How is the NFP documentation (*Certificate of Completion*) handled with couples who take the NFP training outside the diocese?

Most teaching methods provide a certificate upon completion of the training. This certificate could be used as a proxy for the diocesan certificate.

6. Does the policy intend all priests, deacons and laity to implement NFP instruction for couples whom they prepare for marriage, even if they are married outside of the Diocese?

Yes.

7. Does the policy intend to apply to all who are married “within the Diocese of Fargo” even if they are prepared outside of the Diocese of Fargo?

If NFP classes are offered in the area in which they live, they should be encouraged to attend. The Diocese of Fargo accepts the preparation process of the diocese where the couple is prepared and does not mandate any additional requirements.

B. Resources:

8. How are couples trained to become instructors?

The training to become an NFP instructor is dependent on the particular method of instruction. Billings, CCL and Creighton have different requirements. Couples can be referred to the Respect Life Office or any of the organizations listed above. Contact information for these organizations is available through the Respect Life Office.

9. How do we solicit more teaching couples?

Parishes should seek out potential couples to be trained to teach NFP. The Respect Life Office can help identify couples who may be practicing a method and assist them to meet the criteria to become instructors. Most areas of our diocese have instructors within a reasonable distance. In those areas in which instructors are few, it may take more planning on the part of couples and clergy to receive the NFP training.

10. Are there any other resources available to complete the requirement if classes are unavailable?

Yes, a home study course is available through Couple to Couple League. Please be mindful that the **Home Study Course** is more expensive, requires a greater amount of time and a proficient level of skill using NFP is needed to pass the final exam. To receive the resources to take this course, couples can contact the Respect Life Office for further assistance.

C. Pastoral Concerns:

For the sake of the following discussion regarding the use of hormonal drugs, we will refer to both combined oral contraceptives (COC) and progesterone-only pills (POP) as the “birth control pill”(BCP).

11. How long after stopping use of the birth control pill is the woman able to start class and use a method effectively?

Since this is a technical medical question, it would be a mistake for clergy to counsel couples on this specific consequence of the BCP. It is appropriate, however, to say that the use of the BCP interferes with the body in such a way that it can have long term effects on a woman's gynecological health. For more specific information, couples should seek the advice of a qualified medical practitioner who is committed to Church teaching. All couples who are preparing for marriage will realize some benefit from learning NFP. The use of the BCP, therefore, should not be a hindrance in beginning NFP instruction.

12. Is it policy to require couples to stop using the birth control pill, and what is the pastoral responsibility/response to these couples?

The pastoral responsibility is to always teach the truth: namely, that the use of contraception is immoral. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2366-2371. See question 12 regarding the use of the birth control pill for medical conditions.) It is important to distinguish between questions of morality and questions of policy. The new policy, strictly speaking, is that couples be trained in an NFP before getting married. A close reading of paragraph #68 in *Familiaris consortio* gives prudent counsel in this matter.

"In fact, the faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist in different degrees, and it is the primary duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of this faith and to nourish it and bring it to maturity. But pastors must also understand the reasons that lead the Church also to admit to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed"

"...the decision of a man and a woman to marry in accordance with this divine plan [of marriage], that is to say, the decision to commit by their irrevocable conjugal consent their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity, really involves, even if not in a fully conscious way, an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God, an attitude which cannot exist without God's grace. They have thus already begun what is in a true and proper sense a journey towards salvation, a journey which the celebration of the sacrament and the immediate preparation for it can complement and bring to completion, given the uprightness of their intention." [*Familiaris consortio* n. 68]

Finally, it would be helpful to provide the couple with a copy of the section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Sacrament of Marriage, #1601-1666, and on the Sixth Commandment, #2331-2400. These teachings should be discussed with them. Copies of these sections of the Catechism of the Catholic Church should be distributed to couples in their meeting with the person(s) who prepare them for marriage.

13. What should be done about a woman taking the birth control pill for prescribed medical reasons? How should the topic of possible abortifacient effects and the contraceptive side effect be handled?

Preparing women who are taking the BCP for health reasons to enter into conjugal marital relationships is an issue that has serious moral considerations. The two moral issues that should be addressed with the couple by the preparing minister are the potential abortifacient effects of the BCP and the side effect of temporary loss of fertility.

These couples should seek the advice of a qualified medical practitioner who is committed to Church teaching for the fulfillment of their NFP requirement. A Creighton Model FertilityCare instructor, for example, or even to a doctor trained in Na Pro Technology could be of assistance to them. Such persons are specially trained to deal with both the moral and medical issues involved, and can offer a holistic approach to women's health concerns.

A great deal of dialogue is taking place on the scientific question of whether or not the BCP is a potential abortifacient. Numerous respected professionals argue that there is significant reason to conclude that the use of the BCP can cause abortions. Because of this possibility, couples should be advised to find solutions that do not carry this risk of an abortion.

The value of fertility should also motivate the woman to choose other methods of medical treatment that would not require taking the BCP. It is recognized that the BCP is morally permissible when being used for health reasons by women who are not sexually active.

14. How can clergy help couples deal with the fear of NFP ineffectiveness?

In preparing a couple for marriage, counseling should focus on abstaining from sexual activity before marriage. Both married and unmarried couples should be assured of the scientific effectiveness of NFP methods. A pastoral approach of understanding and encouragement can be helpful in most situations. Couples should come to understand that married love means being open to children and to embracing, with courage, God's plan for love and life in their marriage. The Respect Life Office has resources to assist clergy with this pastoral concern. In addition, clergy may identify parishioners who can provide support to couples in this situation.

15. How should clergy advise couples who are entering marriage where one or both are permanently sterilized?

First, please apply to the tribunal for the relaxation from the requirement. The relaxation will be granted, but a record of it is important to the Diocesan files. Then, as the policy states, couples should receive instruction in the *Theology of the Body* in order to help them understand the full meaning of conjugal love that is both unitive and procreative. Clergy should discuss the moral implications of sterilization with couples or individuals who have been sterilized. It is also appropriate to discuss the possible spiritual and moral benefits of pursuing a reversal procedure. The Respect Life Office can provide contact information for physicians who may provide reversal services at a reduced cost.

16. What should be done in the case of civilly married couples who come to the Church for sacramental marriage?

All who come to the Church for the sacrament of marriage deserve the benefits of pre-marriage training as outlined in diocesan policy. In this respect, couples seeking convalidation should meet the same requirements, including instruction in NFP, as all other couples. If particular circumstances require a different approach, clergy should call the Chancellor for specific permission.