



Natural Family Planning: Think outside the pill

By Jessica Smith

FAMILY PLANNING COORDINATOR

If imitation is the highest form of flattery, Mac's marketing gurus should fancy themselves flattered.

Two relatively unknown Lansing seminarians garnered over 35,000 hits for their four commercials called "NFP vs. Contraceptives," low-budget spoofs on the imitable forerunners, "Mac vs. PC." Instead of poking fun of the PC's alleged — I'm not endorsing any brand of computer here — nuisance and complexity, the seminarians (and later, their

friends) playfully prod contraceptives like the Pill, Patch, and Shot as uncool, dangerous, and less romantic alternatives to the much hipper, safer, and loving Natural Family Planning (NFP).

These commercials, which can be seen on my NFP Blog, www.nfpworks.wordpress.com, say or allude to three things I'd like to propose in a series of three articles: NFP is simple, effective, and is the secret to the best and most authentic love. These are challenging proposals, and I say: *let them challenge you.*

NFP, like faith, is not a cookie-cutter, saccharine solu-

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— Jessica Smith

Family Planning Coordinator, Diocese of Madison

tion to our perceived problems. Like anything worth doing in life, it's challenging and takes self-discipline and commitment. But I guarantee the rewards are more gorgeous and everlasting than you can imagine. NFP isn't just natural — it's *supernatural.*

NFP is simple

When people ask me what I do, my new line is, "I break stereotypes for a living." This way I get intrigue and inquiry.

If I say, "Family Planning Coordinator for the Diocese of Madison," the response is usually, "Oh," followed by awkward silence and covert judg-

However, if I use the former method, I get to say things that blow people's minds like, "Yes, NFP is simple. And it works, too."

To the point — what exactly is it, and how does it work? Natural family planning, or NFP, is a method of achieving or postponing pregnancy by observing the changes in a woman's body that naturally indicate her fertility.

It has nothing to do with the old "Rhythm Method" (a.k.a. "Vatican Roulette"), and treats you like a person, body and soul.

Women are relatively infertile, believe it or not. Any couple can pinpoint the woman's



Jessica Smith

time of ovulation by recording changes in her temperature, cervical mucus, and/or cervix. Then, by abstaining from sex during the fertile period, a couple is able to space births appropriately. They can switch to try to conceive at any time.

NFP is simple, but when I write simple, I don't mean easy. It has clarity of purpose and single-minded focus — love and life. Married couples can use NFP to either achieve or postpone a pregnancy. It is life-giving and open to life.

When couples use it, they say with their entire person — body, mind, and soul — "I love you so much that I give myself to you, *totally.*" They give everything, including their fertility. Other methods are duplicitous and say with their body language, "I love everything about you — except your fertility."

One of my favorite questions (and I've heard this from pastors and parish leaders, even), is "Isn't NFP just Catholic contraceptives?" To summarize briefly: NO. Allow me to quote Jason Evert's "Love, Sex & Babies":

"Because NFP is so effective in regulating births, it is possible for couples using NFP to retain a 'contraceptive mentality' and close themselves off from the gift of life. Therefore, NFP must be

Continued on Page 7A



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