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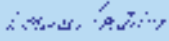
Love

The natural approach to family planning

We invite you to learn more about natural family planning and the Christian dimensions of sexuality.

We hope that this leaflet will open up new and exciting horizons for you!


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We love each other passionately! We'd prefer not to have children right away because we want to explore and deepen our love before becoming parents.

This leaflet provides a concrete answer to this very legitimate desire. It proposes a way of life that includes a natural, safe and effective means of family planning. It also offers some Christian reflection on sexuality that goes beyond the choice of family planning methods.

Life is complicated enough! Why use a complicated method?

Why bother to monitor fertility cycles, to plan for periods of abstinence, to interpret the signs of fertility, and to postpone intercourse? Answer: Because this approach rests on a set of values and gives meaning to a couple's loving sexual relationship. That is what we hope you find here.

Can a couple accurately determine the days and times that are most favourable to conception and those that are least favourable?

Yes, and it goes without saying that having loving sexual relations no longer automatically means conceiving a child.

Why is the Church concerned about family planning?

The Church believes strongly that Christian couples are willing and able to respond to the call to live their love to the fullest. This love is expressed in a special way through sexual relations between husband and wife. We hope to show you how to discover love's rich meaning.

The natural approach to family planning offers a set of values that helps couples integrate their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. The Church believes that integrating these is the most direct route to marital happiness.

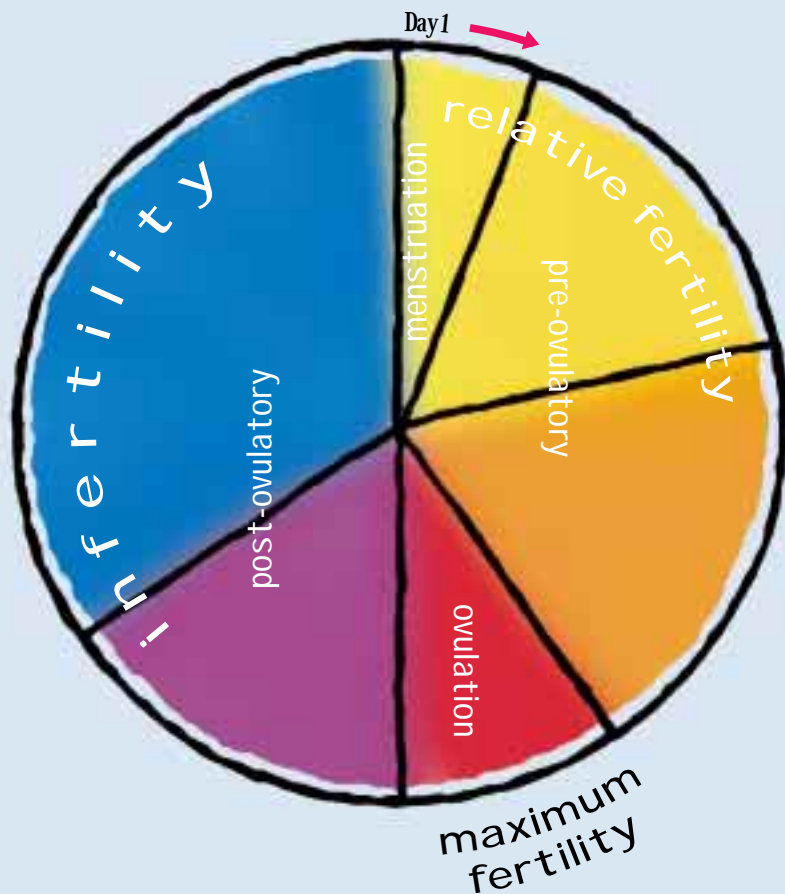


Natural family planning an overview

What is it?

Natural family planning involves adapting a couple's sexual relations to the rhythms of the fertility cycle. By monitoring a number of the woman's physical and physiological signs, the couple can, without too much difficulty, keep track of the fertile and infertile phases of her cycle and so plan the most appropriate times for intercourse.

In other words, natural methods involve limiting conception (or, when the couple is ready, planning to conceive) using an approach that is in harmony with the fertility or infertility that is present cycle after cycle.



How does it work?

- A woman's fertility is cyclic. Each cycle includes only a few maximum fertility days. The focus on natural family planning is thus the female cycle, which repeats over and over from puberty until menopause, regulated by ovarian hormones.
- Each cycle passes through the following phases: "relative" fertility, increasing fertility, maximum fertility, and finally infertility. These phases can be identified by observing a variety of typical indicators.

Note: Men, however, produce sperm 365 days a year from puberty until virtually the day they die.

anning view

Is it difficult?

It simply involves observing and interpreting the signs of fertility and infertility. Couples do, however, need instruction and guidance from a qualified individual or couple before they are ready to take control of their own fertility. (*Your diocese will be able to give you information on organizations with special expertise in natural family planning.*)

Does it work?

When it is followed perfectly, the natural method involving periodic abstinence is comparable in effectiveness to “the pill” when the pill is used perfectly (R.A. Hatcher M.D., MPh; James Trussell PhD, et al. *Contraceptive technology – 16th revised ed.*, New York, Irvington Publishing Inc., 1994, p. 113). However, it is important to realize that the effectiveness of any method rests entirely with its users. This natural method is based on scientifically determined rules that must be understood and strictly followed.

What is the difference between natural family planning and contraception?

In the course of a woman’s natural cycle, her body undergoes regular changes to prepare to receive a fertilized ovum – in other words, to prepare for pregnancy. This process is repeated cycle after cycle.

With contraception, the couple postpones pregnancy by using chemical, mechanical or surgical means to interfere with the meeting of sperm and ovum.

With natural family planning, the couple determines the fertile phase of the cycle and postpones pregnancy by abstaining from intercourse during this phase.



What do couples say about natural family planning?

Some couples use this method because it matches their personal philosophy. Other couples find it helps them express the full range of their sexuality. For still other couples, the negative aspects of other methods tip the scales in favour of natural family planning. In each case, the couple willingly accepts the advantages and disadvantages of this approach because it is in sync with their values.

Natural family planning: it sounds good, but...

What else does natural family planning offer?

Bruce – The natural approach means, first of all, respecting the natural order of things. It has allowed us to control our sexuality instead of it controlling us.

A better understanding of fertility makes good health sense. With natural methods, fertility can be totally and effectively managed without health risks and without chemical or surgical intervention. The risk of pregnancy is minimal. Besides, good health practices are a lifelong investment.

Why make life more complicated when there are other effective methods available?

Céline – This method has brought us closer together. We have come to know ourselves and our fertility better. By accepting life in its natural state, we gain deep respect for the work of God.

It is a matter of values and meaning. Let's be honest. It is difficult to accept and successfully integrate the reality of the fertility cycle in married life, day after day. Moreover, there is no magic guarantee of happiness if you do use this method. *It remains a way of living* that, as many have discovered, can lead to unexpected joy and fulfilment. It demands a daily commitment to respect the other, loving attention and good communication.

The problem with this approach is that you can't make love whenever you want!

Claire – The natural approach has helped ease the pressures associated with contraception and the physical side effects that go with it. Our physical and spiritual communion has deepened.

The natural approach involves accepting that you can't have intercourse during certain times in the woman's cycle. While it's true that this does not sound very attractive, particularly when you are passionately in love, the challenge is to make temporary abstinence into something that both fulfils the need for closeness and enhances intimacy.

Many couples have found that natural family planning allows them to discover the joys and rewards of modulating their passion according to the natural rhythms of their partner. All lovers would agree that human sexuality is much more than simply the physical union of a man and a woman. It is a language of communion, a vehicle of tenderness and the ultimate act of intimacy.

How can the desire for sexual intimacy be reconciled with the reality of fertility?

Perhaps by appreciating the manifold dimensions of human sexuality and understanding what is truly involved in a loving sexual relationship.

The sexual act is one of the most important manifestations of the love between a man and a woman – the ultimate act of giving. It has three dimensions: the genital, the erotic and the relational. Through these three aspects, which are classified differently by various authors, flows the love of two human beings who give, receive and offer themselves to each other with tenderness.

The genital dimension – physical intimacy. Sexual intercourse establishes a wonderful physical communion. It is an act of life – the life of the couple! While not every sexual act is aimed at procreation, procreation cannot be separated from sexuality, since it is an integral part of the genital dimension. This dimension is about the capacity to conceive or not to conceive.

The erotic dimension – where the sexual joining of bodies culminates in intense physical pleasure. Pleasure is one of the driving forces of life, and its intensity depends directly on the intensity of the love and mutual acceptance involved. This pleasure in turn produces profound joy as the heart and tender feelings combine to bring a sense of completeness. This dimension is about mutual respect and the promotion of the other.

The relational dimension – where the couple's intimacy develops the married relationship. This dimension of sexuality involves accepting the "risk of the other." It is on this level that each partner comes to fully accept the other, with all his or her strengths, weaknesses, hopes, dreams and fears. This dimension is about commitment, permanency, and uniqueness.

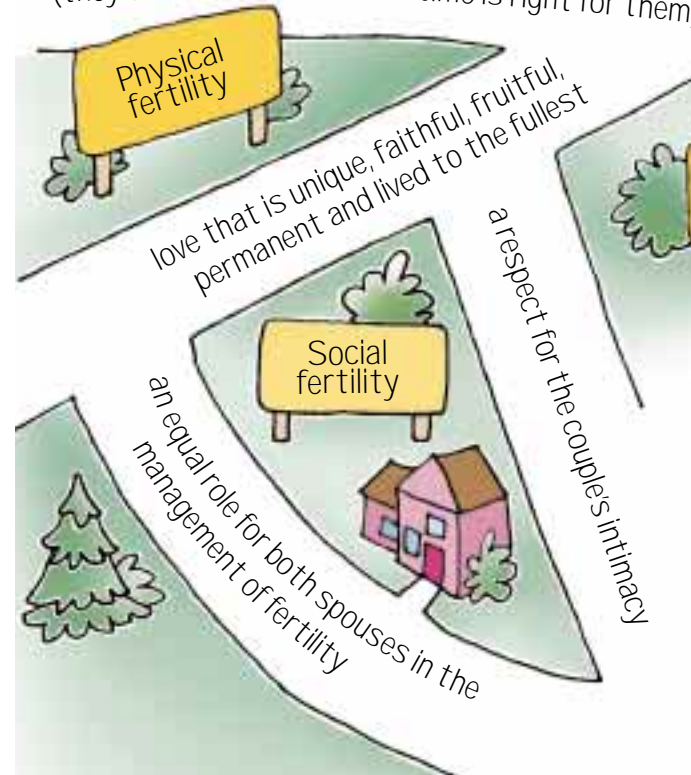


The dimensions

Man and woman: Realizing

An approach connected with
life plan and rooted in a system
of values

the reversibility of the natural family planning method
(they can conceive when the time is right for them)

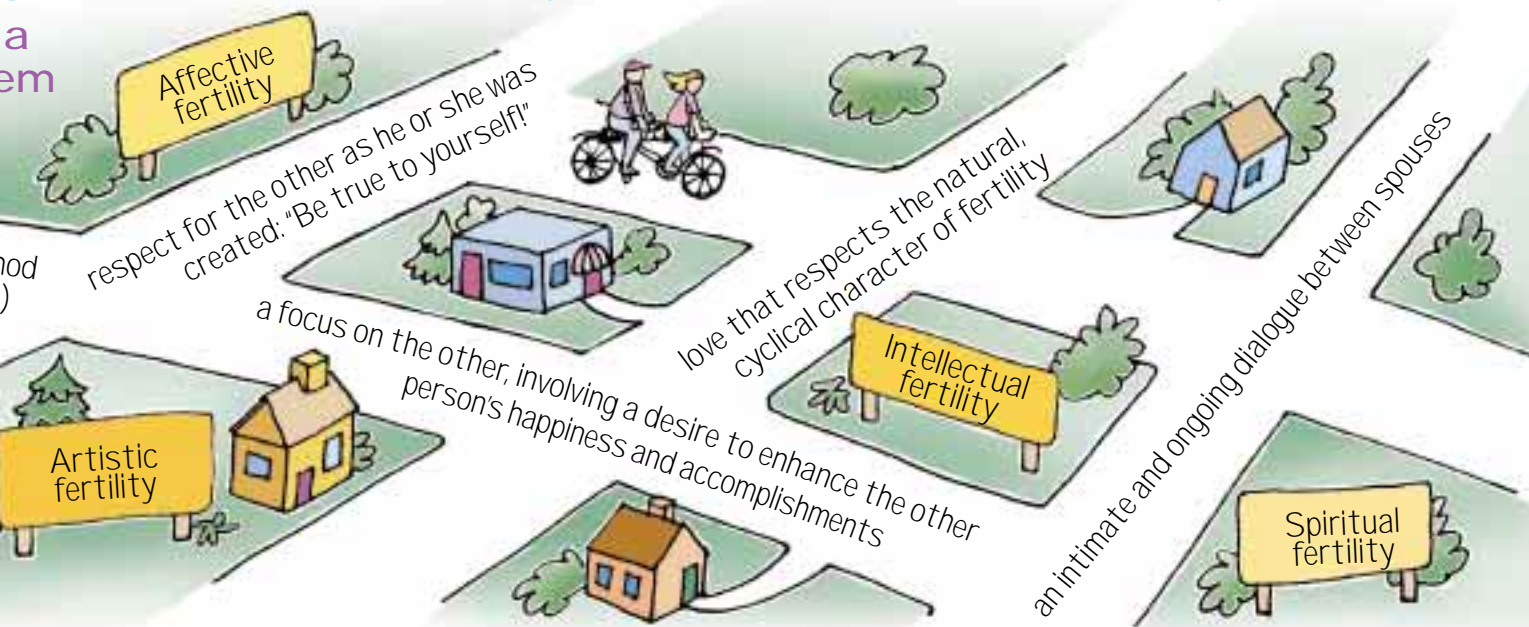


The great and beautiful desire for a loving sexual relationship develops within a network of interconnected values. True love goes far beyond sex; it is a process that gradually merges two hearts into one. This occurs through communication, listening and caring, which are demonstrated in a thousand different ways.

It includes choosing the other, day after day,
in order to love him or her in all his
or her glorious difference.

Dimensions of human sexuality

Reaping the fruits of humanity and the promise of fertility



The Church says "yes" to Love

■ *The Church believes that because men and women are created in the image of God, they are inherently called to love, fashioned by love, and oriented towards love.*

■ *The Church's concern for the couple is, we hope, God's concern. The Church calls today's men and women to love through the total gift of themselves. It is convinced that couples can find love while responding to the call to grow and flourish within the context of their Christian vocation: to be fruitful in all aspects of their lives.*

■ *In the Church's view, Christian couples must remain open to life in planning the timing for and the number of their children. They are responsible for managing this procreative potential. They must critically examine, in all generosity, the quality of the conjugal and family environment they can provide and their capacity to be open to new life. They must realistically assess their physical, financial and psychological resources in order to ensure that each of their children has the opportunity to grow in a loving, stable home environment.*

All family planning methods are based on a set of values. The Church believes that natural methods express the indivisible link between loving union and the procreative potential of intercourse in the context of married love. For this reason, the Church sees natural family planning and not contraception as the morally acceptable choice. By discovering the *universe of meaning* contained within each sexual act, you will appreciate the breadth and depth of this link.

The gift of love in life always manifests God's presence.

The challenges posed by family planning, great as they are, are only one aspect of sexuality, of the life of the couple and, in fact, of life itself! There are many other important aspects to the Christian way of life.

As a young couple, believe in your love and in the living Christ. If you do this, then no matter how difficult life gets, you will find your way.

*"By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards [the] most high calling to parenthood." (Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, no. 12)*



COLF

This leaflet has been produced by the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Copies of the leaflet are available from the COLF offices at 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1. Tel: (613) 241-9461 ext. 230, Fax: (613) 241-8117, E-mail: OCVFCOLF@ccc.ca

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