

Diocese of Fargo Policy on the Instruction of Natural Family Planning for Couples Preparing for Marriage

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In creating man and woman in His own “image and likeness,” God makes the human person capable of a life of love and communion with others. In responding to this most high calling, man finds his fulfillment in the total gift of self to another, and most especially, in the covenant of marriage, with its profound responsibilities, joys and sorrows.

This total gift of self within marriage is one of love and life. The conjugal act becomes the central point of this renewal of vows to a faithful love, a union of persons, and the empowerment that comes from God alone to be co-creators with Him of another human person. Because of the intimate and total relationship of this love-life union of persons, it becomes crucial that couples preparing for marriage understand the full meaning and purpose of marital love in God’s plan.

Out of a genuine concern for the right formation of conscience, the understanding of the truth, dignity and meaning of human sexuality, and the responsibilities a couple accepts in married love, the Diocese of Fargo now implements the following policy regarding the instruction of couples preparing for marriage in the Catholic teachings of love and life:

1. All couples preparing for marriage within the Diocese of Fargo shall receive an introduction to the Church’s teaching on conjugal love, modeled after John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*, during their interview with their parish priest, deacon, or qualified married couple and through their Marriage Preparation weekend.
2. Marriage Preparation weekends will provide at least a one-hour introduction on the *Theology of the Body*, in addition to a presentation by a natural family planning instructor(s) or qualified couple on the moral and practical aspects of natural family planning.
3. Couples are required to attend a full course of instruction in a method of natural family planning. The Respect Life Office will provide a list of approved diocesan instructors in natural family planning. This list may be accessed on the diocesan Web site under www.fargodiocese.org/respectlife/fertilityappreciation.htm

4. Instructors of natural family planning will complete the *Certificate of Attendance* for each couple, who will in turn give it to their parish priest to become part of their marriage file. Attendance will also be verified on Form A for marriage.

5. Special consideration is to be given to couples who are entering a second marriage. Their past training and experience should be taken into account when setting out a plan of marriage preparation. If they are still within child-bearing years, the above policy (#3) is still an expectation that is omitted only when previous equivalent training is already present.

6. Couples who are beyond child-bearing years, or are entering marriage where one or both have already been sterilized or where there are questions of infertility, are to receive instruction in *Theology of the Body* during their course of marriage preparation so they may have an understanding of the Church's teaching on human sexual intimacy. These special situations are to be addressed by the priest or deacon during the marriage preparation process.

7. This policy takes effect on September 8, 2005, the Feast of the Birth of Mary. Any couple may be prepared in accord with this policy before the effective date. All couples who begin preparation after September 8, 2005 will be prepared in accord with this policy.

As your bishop, I truly desire that during your marriage preparation you may gain a more complete appreciation and understanding of the nuptial meaning of the human body and the truth, dignity and meaning of human sexuality. May the Holy Spirit guide you and fill you with peace. Given at the Chancery on this day, March 19, 2005, the Feast of Joseph, Husband of Mary.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

†Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, D.D.
Bishop of Fargo

Very Reverend Joseph P. Goering
Chancellor

Bibliography of Resources:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2360-2391

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, *Persona Humana*

Pontifical Council for the Family, *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*

Pontifical Council for the Family, *Vademecum* for Confessors Concerning Some Aspects of the Morality of Conjugal Life

Pope Paul VI , On Human Life, *Humanae Vitae*

Pope Pius XI, On Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubii*

Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Guadium et spes*

Christopher West, *Good News About Sex and Marriage*

Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *An Introduction to Natural Family Planning*

Dr. Janet Smith, *Contraception: Why Not*

John Kippley, *Marriage is for Keeps*