

# Talking about

the Church's teaching in *Humanae Vitae* is one thing...living it is another. The many couples we know who are dynamically doing so remind us that the promise of God's blessing is real, and that authentic self-gift in marriage is possible.

Two such couples share their stories below.

## The choice to live freedom

Colleen and I met playing Rugby in college. She writes, when she can, and I am an architect and craftsman. We both love fun -- hiking, skiing, reading, and having friends over for dinner. We have been married for twelve years and have been teaching Natural Family Planning for more than five years now because we feel like we have tapped into an amazing secret and want everyone else to know about it.

I am Jewish and although Colleen is Catholic we didn't always have a great deal of respect for the truth the Catholic Church teaches. We were living together in Oregon before we were married and were contracepting. Too many people think that they know what the Church says about sex and contraception -- that it is all bad. They think NFP is some weird convoluted Catholic thing intended to give people a hard time because the Church doesn't like sex, marriage and especially women! But really, nothing could be further from the truth.

We decided to take an NFP class after hearing about it at our marriage preparation course. The more I thought about it, the more what we had been doing bothered me. I am a pretty green guy and using synthetic hormones that could hurt Colleen as well as the world around us for our sexual convenience was unsettling to me. I am so grateful to the couple who taught us about NFP: the very simple, useful and peaceful tool for married couples to understand their fertility, increase their respect for one another and live in harmony with each other, their children, God and the world.

Today there can be a lot of mistrust between married people. So many people live in broken homes, suffer from divorce and from unrestrained sexual appetites. Those of us called to marriage are called because God wants us to light up the world with our marriages, to

change the world with our love. In order to do that, we need to understand the true nature of love.

Love is not an emotion, it is a choice; it is a choice to place the other person's well being ahead of our own; to offer our own self in service and as a gift to the other person. We choose to love even in painful times, even when the other person is not acting loving towards us, or else we don't have love in our marriage. Selfishness is what can kill a marriage, a sense of entitlement to love and sex. When we marry we don't plan to be selfish, but we have to overcome it in ourselves or we kill love.

Switching from contraception to chastely using NFP was, quite honestly, hard for me. I had accepted NFP from a scientific point of view -- it clearly worked as advertised. My heart accepted it. It was what I wanted for Colleen's sake and mine. But changing my expectations of what our sexual relationship would be was more difficult than what I would have liked to admit. There were times I resented that I couldn't approach my wife, times when I wanted to push the limits and rules we had been taught. But I persevered and I changed. This has had repercussions not just in the personal relationship with my wife, but also in our relationship with our children and with other people as well. I have become a better man.

Colleen and I have been very blessed with five children. People may think this shows that NFP doesn't work, but the opposite is true. I think NFP couples tend to have larger families because they trust each other more. They understand that their fertility is a shared responsibility with each other and with God. Learning about the amazing systems God created within us, and that He did so specifically to show us that our reason for existence is to love and make a gift of ourselves to others, is really what NFP is all about for us.

- Dave Toder

