



THE VISION

to see the beauty of the gift

After we were married in 1995 Andrew expressed to me that he was not comfortable using artificial birth control.

He couldn't pinpoint why he felt this way. He simply felt that a married couple shouldn't have to use it, especially if they're planning on having children at some point. We remembered hearing about NFP at our Pre-Cana class so I went to the library and found an old book about fertility cycles and charting that provided enough information to get started.

About a year later we decided to start our family and we had our first baby, Elisabeth Ann. Three months after I stopped nursing Elisabeth I was pregnant again. We definitely wanted to have another child, just not so soon.

At this point, we decided that I needed to take an NFP class. Andrew stayed home to watch the kids and this ended up being a big mistake. Eventually, I lost my commitment to NFP because I was the only one making the decisions and felt that the entire burden of family planning was on my shoulders. I was too scared to have another baby and convinced Andrew that we should start using contraception. We were both unhappy with this decision but continued this way for a couple of years; it was a low point in our relationship. We argued often and were not sympathetic to each other's needs. We had reached a major crossroad in our relationship.

We prayed for an answer and placed this dilemma in God's hands. A few weeks later we saw a notice in our church bulletin about the start of a Natural Family Planning class. It was being held after the 5:00pm Mass and the parish was even providing babysitting and free pizza! As soon as we read it we knew God was answering our prayers and we signed up to take the class together.

Using NFP together as a couple has benefited our marriage in so many unexpected ways. First of all, I feel good about it. It's all natural. There are no pills to take and no harmful side effects.

NFP has opened the lines of communications between us. Andrew and I talk about our fertility every month. NFP requires a period of abstinence around the time of ovulation that lasts about 7 to 10 days each month. When couples first hear about this, they get discouraged but they shouldn't. We look forward to the next time we can be together and we appreciate each other even more. Also, we feel the abstinence is a small sacrifice that we make for God every month and we feel good that we can control ourselves for something that we believe in. The abstinence has only made things better for Andrew and I. Each month after the time of abstinence we experience "the honeymoon" effect.

The primary reason for using contraception is to be able to have sexual relations whenever one pleases. This places the emphasis of one's relationship on sex and not on the love between husband and wife. I know that the love Andrew feels for me far outweighs the pleasure he receives during marital relations. Now I feel that our love is complete because Andrew completely accepts and respects me. Sharing the responsibility of family planning decisions has brought us closer as a couple. It's no surprise to me that the divorce rate for couples practicing NFP is less than 5%!

NFP has also relieved us of anxiety regarding our family size. We both feel a sense of peace and have placed our trust in God. Andrew and I took a complete turn around regarding our feelings about having more children. We went from being fearful to peaceful. We consider having another child as a blessing rather than a burden. What we've learned is that raising children requires sacrifices, and as with any sacrifice, there's a reward if you persevere. When we think of all of the wonderful benefits that we have received through the use of NFP, Andrew and I are eternally grateful to our Catholic faith for maintaining its stance against contraception and sterilization and pointing us towards this authentic way of love.

- Tracey Poppalardo