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NFP and Infertility

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The beginning of the Disney/Pixar movie “Up” touchingly illustrates the issue of infertility in a brief montage. It shows a young couple falling in love, seeing visions of babies in the clouds, decorating a nursery, and then sadly learning in a doctor’s office of the diagnosis of infertility. NFP can be used to help people conceive, through targeted intercourse during fertile times. However, there is a careful orchestration of hormones, glands, and reproductive system functionality within two separate people that miraculously coordinate to co-create a child with God. If even one of these components is off-key, conception difficulties occur. It is often challenging to determine precisely why a couple cannot conceive. Many people will not know in this life why they are infertile, and the pain of infertility can cause deep suffering.

In vitro fertilization and most other reproductive technologies are against Church teaching (see *Donum vitae* and *Dignitas personae*), since (among numerous reasons) they separate the unitive and procreative aspects of the marital act, and they treat children as commodities. Adoption, although very worthy, is not always the answer. Some couples aren’t ready for the risks involved, or can’t afford the tens of thousands of dollars often required. Sometimes couples face the cross of others thinking that since they don’t have children, they must be contracepting.

How can our understanding and practice of NFP help us with the difficulty of infertility, or to be empathetic towards others experiencing it? Utilizing NFP can be a school of sacrifice. Abstaining during fertile times is difficult. However, practiced correctly, and without a contraceptive mentality, this difficulty is turned into a sacrifice for love of the other, and for the good of the family. Also, one can offer difficulties to the Lord, to transform into a redemptive offering. Infertile families can likewise give their suffering and unfulfilled longing to conceive a child to Him. God uses this suffering to glorify His name and bring about the salvation of souls. All of us are in fact called to give everything to God, and to serve Him, even in the suffering of infertility.

NFP also helps couples to remain focused on giving themselves totally to another. NFP does not utilize barriers between spouses, thereby allowing complete self-gift to the other. Even if an act of marital love does not bring about conception, the spouses still give themselves fully, and offer complete acceptance of the other. One “speaks” a word of full and fruitful love to the other with one’s body. This fruitfulness enriches one’s life and confers an openness to the good of others, both within and outside of the marital bond. Infertile couples are a sign to the world that the fullness of life is found in spiritual fecundity and the complete gift of self in love.

“The Hope Retreat: A Day of Support and Healing for Couples Struggling with Infertility” (Sat., Apr. 17, 2010), presented by FertilityCare Practitioners, will be a time to help couples step aside from daily struggles, focus on their marriage, learn coping techniques, and receive spiritual and emotional support and encouragement. See www.fertilitycarefriends.org/hoperetreat.html.