



*We are fearfully and wonderfully created, and our fertility—both women’s and men’s—is part of our creation, a gift present at the time of our conception. Does God really want for us to reflect upon this gift only at certain times in our lives, like when we’re married and planning a family? Or does He want us to integrate this gift into the entirety of our walk as Catholics?*

## **WEEK ONE: “WHAT DOES FERTILITY AWARENESS MONTH MEAN FOR ME?”**

*Dr. Karen Poehailos*

I’m excited (also humbled and a bit nervous) to introduce the first-ever St. Thomas Aquinas Fertility Awareness Month. You may be wondering what a Fertility Awareness month means for you. As God’s people, we are all “Called to the Joy of Love”, our theme for this special time as a parish. How that looks may be a bit different for each of us. Over the next few weeks, we will explore all aspects of the gift of fertility, no matter our state in life. We will look at how the joy of love is reflected in the love between spouses, the love within a family, and moments when this love may be difficult (and the joy not so obvious), as with infertility and miscarriage.

July is the perfect month for this topic. July 25, 1968 was the date of the release of *Humanae Vitae*, an encyclical by St. Pope Paul VI which discussed the beauty of marital love and how fertility is meant to reflect God’s design of love and life. From July 24th-30th, the Church will celebrate National NFP Awareness week. Finally, July 26 is the feast day of Sts. Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. What better way to celebrate the union between life and love than to remember those whose love brought Our Lady into the world? We ask them to be our patrons throughout this journey and in these conversations. On their feast, we will offer a special training opportunity (details below).

As many things have changed over the years (we would never have discussed “googling” something 25 years ago), so has the world of fertility awareness and appreciation. We hope you will journey with us to learn something new this month. For years, we have used the term “NFP” (Natural Family Planning) to refer to methods of using the God-given pattern of fertility in women’s cycles to help married couples achieve or avoid pregnancy at a given time. Now we increasingly refer to these as “Fertility Awareness Based

Methods” (FABMs), which better describes the scientific advancements of the methods that can be used to track fertility. FABMs are extremely important, and we will dive deeper into those later this month, but fertility is so much more than just FABMs.

We are fearfully and wonderfully created, and our fertility—both women’s and men’s—is part of our creation, a gift present at the time of our conception. Does God really want for us to reflect upon this gift only at certain times in our lives, like when we’re married and planning a family? Or does He want us to integrate this gift into the entirety of our walk as Catholics? We can be fertile and fruitful at every stage of life.

Men, this goes for you, too! We usually think of women first when the topic of fertility is discussed, and in diagnosis and treatment of infertility. However, fertility is biological to both, and it engages our emotions and our spirituality. It touches women and men alike, as well as our relationships with all those we are called to love—our parents, children, siblings, etc.

As a physician, I see many couples with infertility or recurrent miscarriages. What I’ve been describing as a gift doesn’t feel like a gift to these families. What about the families who are trying to be faithful to the Church teachings, but find themselves worried about another pregnancy that they feel would be too difficult at various levels? Or a family that has already been blessed with several children, and feels God calling them to more children, but keeps suffering miscarriages without explanation?

Like all gifts we receive from God, there can be crosses. These fertility-linked crosses are unique to each couple. The God who knows us and loves us infinitely also suffers with us in these difficult situations. As someone who has been involved in NFP ministry both at the Parish and professionally since 1996 (yikes!), I think one mistake we’ve often made is overly to emphasize the ease and benefits of practicing Fertility Awareness in marriage. There are benefits to be sure, but I’m here to say that I also recognize the extreme difficulties some couples face. I’ve been moved by the examples of so many with whom I’ve been privileged to work who have found it difficult yet still persevered. They can feel very alone when they see amazing photos of happy multigenerational families when their own story has been very different.

As a Parish we want you to know that we see you, we hear you, and we want to share the cross with you. The path to salvation goes through the Cross, but God does not intend for us to carry our crosses without support. Our Lord Himself had Simon help share that load in a small way on His way to crucifixion. You also are not alone.

It’s our hope that this series will help you look at fertility from the aspect of gift and challenge, of joy and suffering, and of life and love—in its entirety, not just in the season of marital love.

This month of Fertility Awareness will culminate in something new and exciting: a virtual, in-house Fertility Awareness training designed for couples preparing for marriage, but open to the entire Parish. Whether you’re new to FABM, struggling with your own fertility, or just curious, mark your calendars! Join to learn more about the Catholic teaching on fertility as well as have a FREE intro session in the FEMM model, which showcases many of the scientific advancements of the FABMs. No cost, no obligation.

I hope you’re as excited as I am about this exciting adventure for our Parish. I’m grateful to Fr. Walter and the Parish staff for helping make this a reality.

**Upcoming FREE  
Virtual Training:**  
Catholic Teaching on Fertility  
& FEMM Model Introduction  
Tuesday, July 26th at 7PM.

Register at  
[stauva.org/fertility-family](https://stauva.org/fertility-family)  
to receive Zoom link

**NEXT WEEK, PART TWO: “The Talk”.**