



Called
to the
Joy
of Love



**WEEK FOUR:
THE METHODS**

2022 FERTILITY AWARENESS MONTH

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“CAN A FERTILITY AWARENESS METHOD BE FOR US?”

When we were preparing for marriage at a different church, the priest preparing us was really nice and we had known him for years. We had many great discussions with him during our preparation about the importance of prayer in marriage, how to handle discussions about finances, and other topics. However, the topic of marital sexuality and planning our family was glossed over. I wonder if he was uncomfortable with it as well. He told us we were both adults who were serious about our faith, and to follow our best judgment. He mentioned that contraception was considered wrong in the church, but that he really felt the teaching would change when the current Pope (John Paul II) would die and a new Pope would take his place.

Well, that Pope did die a few years later, and another took his place, but that teaching wasn't going away. We moved to Charlottesville shortly after that and saw an announcement on the front of the St. Thomas bulletin about NFP classes. We had never thought about learning NFP—we just figured that everyone took this teaching with a grain of salt, except for really pious large families who attended daily Mass. Not us. We were not newlyweds; we were both working outside the home, and we had children in middle school! We were not really thinking of having more children at our age, and feared what if it doesn't work? Or, even if this were a good thing, isn't it a bit too late?

I think God was working on us though. A few months later, I found myself mentioning my concerns in Confession. I was afraid that Father would berate me for not following this teaching for 15 years. I realized that I had nothing to fear. He was really very gentle, and recommended that we look into those NFP classes.

I talked to my husband, and all of a sudden, we found ourselves sitting face to face across the table from an NFP instructor. No judgment was there either, and we were both surprised to learn that NFP isn't the rhythm method, that there's a lot of science behind it and it's really effective. We learned that it can help me to know my body better as I navigate through my reproductive years and learn to recognize when problems may develop so I can talk with my doctor.

With time and patience, we did learn NFP. It hasn't always been easy. Honestly, sometimes it's been really hard. We had already learned in our marriage that challenges faced together help us to grow if we keep communications open, so we hung in there and worked it out. Our instructor was there for professional advice, and at times for hugs. The grace from the sacraments helped too—not only the graces we received on our wedding day, but the ongoing reception of Confession and the Eucharist. I can honestly say we are stronger as a couple thanks to this.

What would I say to fellow parishioners who

are wondering if this can work for them, is it too late, is it too hard, or fear of talking about this in Confession? I encourage you to give it a try. Start researching online. Talk to an instructor. Talk to one of the priests. You'll be surprised at how much grace there is for the journey, and that you too are called to deepen the joy of love in your family.

Yours,
A mom in the pews

I hear stories like this frequently. Our Parish has required a course in a Fertility Awareness Based Method (FABM) as part of marriage preparation for about 15 years. The Friars understand the importance of this Church teaching for young couples, and are making sure that they learn at least the basics, setting them up for success before entering into the Sacrament of Marriage. However, St. Thomas Aquinas is a transient Parish with people frequently coming and going. It's possible you didn't learn about NFP before. Or maybe you learned it, but really didn't think it would work so you filed the book away after your class. Let me address the most common fears I've heard:

1) Does it really work? Yes. We distinguish between method efficacy ("perfect use") and "typical use" rates of effectiveness. Method efficacy rates range from 95-100%, depending on the method used. Actual user rates are lower, ranging from 86-95%, again depending on the method used. Lower numbers reflect calendar-based methods that are not often used. (For comparison, actual user rates of effectiveness for birth control pills range from 91-93%.)

2) Is this the "rhythm method"? No. This would be similar to asking if antibiotics have progressed since penicillin was developed in the 1940s. Rhythm method was a great start in the 1950s, but you'd be amazed to learn how much research goes into modern methods on an ongoing basis—and how many hours of continuing education I spend on this to help my patients! Home hormonal monitoring is now a part of certain FABMs. I remember my excitement when digital basal thermometers replaced mercury ones. Now there are thermometers you can wear on your arm that auto-feed results to an app on your phone!

3) Is there a method for me? "I don't like taking temperatures." "I like these cool monitors." "I want it as simple as possible." Is there a method for me?" Yes! Check out the FACTS about Fertility website (factsaboutfertility.org). There is truly a method for everyone. Part of my job working with Fertility & Family in the Parish is to help you find

the method that will work best for you. Don't hesitate to reach out if you need advice or would like to discuss the different FABMs, and check out the information below about our free upcoming training for Parishioners.

4) Isn't this too stressful on a marriage? Couples worry about the pressure of charting, or the times of abstinence, stressing a marriage. This is not as simple of an answer as each couple is unique. I will say that by watching many couples over many years, I have worked with couples for whom these issues are more challenging than others. That's where the importance of good communication comes in—between the couple and with their instructor or someone else who can help. It is achievable, and can be a beautiful, grace-filled journey working to strengthen, not stress, your marriage, as testified to in the letter above.

I encourage each of you to approach this prayerfully, with an open mind and heart. As our Parishioner stated above, living the joy of love in a more profound way is possible when you approach planning your family from the perspective of your love for each other and your love for the Lord.

Curious to learn more? Come to our training on July 26th, the Feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne! (see below)

As always, please feel free to reach out to me with individual questions.

God bless!
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Upcoming FREE Virtual Training:

Catholic Teaching on Fertility
& FEMM Model Introduction
Tuesday, July 26th at 7PM.

Register at stauva.org/fertility-family
to receive Zoom link