

**STANDARDS  
FOR  
DIOCESAN  
NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING  
MINISTRY**

**2022**

*Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

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## INTRODUCTION

Helping couples to deepen conjugal love and achieve responsible parenthood is part of the Church's total pastoral ministry to Catholic spouses. Fulfillment of this ministry includes both education and pastoral care. This means "instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way" (*Familiaris consortio*, 35).

Diocesan Natural Family Planning services must be based on the Church's doctrine and moral teaching, as well as on the accumulated wisdom of the sciences. Concretely, diocesan Natural Family Planning (hereafter NFP) ministry involves the following:

- Instruction on Catholic teaching regarding men and women as made in God's image and likeness; the nature of human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church.
- Instruction on human fertility and procreation including a fundamental education of the fertility cycle and how to interpret the physiological signs of fertility.
- A process for enabling couples to understand motivation and other factors that affect their decision making with regard to responsible parenthood.
- Formation in recognition of the value of moral commitment and spirituality that reinforces human decision making while integrating wholesome attitudes toward human sexuality, chastity, marriage, parenting, and family life as designed by God.

To help couples become proficient and secure in using NFP, dioceses must provide competent NFP services. Such services should call upon the laity (especially the married), clergy, religious, healthcare professionals, and others in related fields.

The *Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry* (hereafter *Standards*) have grown out of a sense of need on the part of diocesan leaders for a nationally consistent, systematic and pastoral training of diocesan NFP teachers. At the same time, the *Standards* are guides for the development of diocesan NFP ministry. They describe the basic program components for strong NFP ministry and set the expectations as to what knowledge and skills the NFP teachers should have as they work within their dioceses in collaboration with the diocesan NFP coordinator and at the invitation of the bishop.

As a ministry of the local Church's efforts directed to married and engaged couples,

diocesan NFP services are unique, because they provide competent NFP education within the context of Catholic moral and sacramental teaching on human sexuality, marriage, and family life. A variety of methods and schools exist in the NFP community. This is a strength, and it typically results in differently trained NFP teachers ministering in the same diocese. Indeed, it is “providential,” says St. John Paul II, that “diverse methods of NFP exist” (July 3, 1982).

NFP diversity is a gift because each married couple is unique and will be interested in the NFP method that best fits their lifestyle. This is echoed in the *Diocesan Plan for Natural Family Planning Program Development* (Committee for Pro-Life Activities, 1984) and in the words of one of the founders of the U.S. bishops’ national NFP program, “The Holy Father urges all in this apostolate to avoid limiting their efforts to only one approach, and also to avoid anything that will detract from a commitment to NFP” (Cardinal Terence Cooke, July 18, 1983).

While a gift, NFP method diversity also presents a challenge: “How do diocesan staff evaluate the integration of Catholic teaching in NFP education as well as the competency of individual NFP teachers who represent a variety of methodologies and approaches to client education?” The *Standards* answer this question by providing the diocesan bishop and his staff with an objective instrument of evaluation and development. Whether a particular diocesan NFP ministry is well established or just beginning, the *Standards* provide clear direction as to which key components are necessary for strong NFP ministry.

## I. STANDARDS FOR DIOCESAN NFP MINISTRY

Diocesan NFP ministry provides instruction in natural methods of fertility appreciation, management, and education in accord with Catholic teaching. It strives to accompany couples as they learn and live the NFP lifestyle. NFP ministry is integrated into the structure of the diocese with an NFP coordinator appointed by the bishop, as well as NFP teachers who are accountable to and work in cooperation with the NFP coordinator. The primary focus of diocesan NFP ministry is to provide quality NFP services to married and engaged couples.

A secondary focus of diocesan NFP ministry is to provide outreach education within the diocese to appropriate groups regarding human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church.

To achieve Endorsement under the *Standards*, diocesan NFP ministry will have the following components:

- A. A statement of program philosophy that includes acceptance and promotion of Catholic teaching on human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church as articulated in authoritative Church documents (see Appendix A). This philosophy is achieved through program goals and objectives.
- B. Opportunities for NFP teachers, couples/clients, and others within the diocese (e.g., young adults, parishioners, healthcare professionals, Catholic school teachers, university students, etc.) to learn Catholic teaching that supports NFP use in marriage including but not limited to:
  1. God created man and woman in His image and likeness—male and female He made them (see Gen 1:27).
  2. God willed that human sexuality affect every aspect of the person and allow man and woman to unite in the unique communion of persons called marriage (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 371–372; 2332–2335; see also *Amoris laetitia*, 9–13).
  3. The nature of conscience and meaning of a properly formed conscience in light of the teachings of the Catholic Church in order to discern the good and avoid evil, especially in decisions pertaining to human sexuality, marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1776–1785; see also *Amoris laetitia*, 222).

4. Chastity is the virtue that “maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love,” powers that God placed in every man and woman. Chastity ensures “the unity of the person” (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2338; see also *Amoris laetitia*, 205–206).
5. In God’s plan, marriage is a permanent, faithful, exclusive relationship between husband and wife (one man and one woman), directed toward mutual sanctification, unity, and parenthood. (see *Code of Canon Law*, 1055.1; see also *Amoris laetitia*, 125).
6. For validly baptized Christians, marriage is a sacrament, a sign of God’s presence in the world (natural marriage is a sign of God’s presence in the world while sacramental marriage is an effective sign of Christ’s union with the Church), and a source of grace for the couple (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1601–1617; see also *Amoris laetitia*, 71–72).
7. The unifying factor between the spouses is conjugal love: that is, an interpersonal love between husband and wife that is free, faithful, permanent, and fruitful—open to life (see *Gaudium et spes*, 49–50; *Humanae vitae*, 9; *Amoris laetitia*, 74, 125).
8. Sexual intercourse is part of God’s plan to enable couples to intensify their mutual intimacy and to bring new life into the world. By God’s design there is an inseparable connection between the two meanings of the act of intercourse: the love-giving or “unitive” and the life-giving or “procreative” (see *Gaudium et spes*, 50; *Humanae vitae*, 11–12; *Familiaris consortio*, 28; *Amoris laetitia*, 80).
9. Decisions regarding parenthood are primarily the responsibility of husband and wife based on a recognition that human life is a sacred gift from God and that the transmission of human life, and the socialization and education of children are both the privilege and prerogative of the married couple. Discernment especially regarding the postponement of conception is a serious matter—decisions should be made by the couple in a spirit of love and generosity, in light of their responsibilities to God, to themselves, to their children already born, and to society in accordance with a properly formed conscience (see *Gaudium et spes*, 50–51; *Humanae vitae*, 10; *Amoris laetitia*, 222).
10. Children are “the supreme gift of marriage” and God has given husband and wife the task to care for and nurture them (*Gaudium et spes*, 59; see also *Amoris laetitia*, 81).

11. If a married couple finds themselves to be challenged with infertility, they are called by God to seek moral solutions while also discerning the nature of their vocation to be open to life (e.g., adoption, foster care, etc.; see *Familiaris consortio*, 14, 41; *Donum vitae*, 8; *Amoris laetitia*, 178–184; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2379).
  12. The family is the foundation of society; moreover, in the Catholic faith, family is also the domestic Church where the faith is lived, learned, and embraced (see *Lumen gentium*, 11; *Familiaris consortio*, 21; *Amoris laetitia*, 86–87; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1655–1658, 2204, 2207).
- C. Diocesan policies and practices that meet or exceed the USCCB *Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry* or adoption of the *Standards* as normative for the diocesan NFP program.
- D. A diocesan NFP coordinator who strives to maintain a lifestyle consistent with Catholic moral teaching, and who
1. Accepts the teaching of the Church on human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), conscience and its proper formation, the virtue of chastity, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church (see Appendix A).
  2. Uses and/or philosophically accepts NFP and does not use any form of contraception, or refers couples/clients for contraception, sterilization, abortion, or reproductive techniques that separate the unitive and procreative nature of intercourse.
  3. Has basic knowledge of and demonstrates respect for all authentic NFP methods that use periodic sexual abstinence as the means to avoid pregnancy.
  4. Has duties and responsibilities that include
    - a) Promoting the diocesan NFP program philosophy and implementing its goals and objectives.
    - b) Coordinating NFP services in the diocese.
    - c) Providing a format for NFP education in marriage preparation programs.



- d) Overseeing the implementation and upholding of the *Standards*.
  - e) Ensuring quality NFP instruction by certified teachers (in-person or virtual), including the recruitment of new teachers and welcoming teachers from different NFP methods.
  - f) Providing opportunities for NFP teacher training.
  - g) Providing periodic assessment of NFP teachers instructing within the diocese.
  - h) Providing an annual meeting for all diocesan NFP teachers.
  - i) Fostering respect and promoting cooperation among NFP teachers and organizations within the diocese.
  - j) Providing continuing education, enrichment, and support for diocesan NFP teachers and couples/clients that may include information, resources (including social media and appropriate NFP support groups), and discussion of NFP science, methodology, and special topics (e.g., breastfeeding, infertility, etc.).
  - k) Developing collaborative working relationships with the staff of appropriate diocesan ministries and community agencies.
- E. Teaching formats, curricula, and materials for couple/client education that conform to the *Standards* (see Section III).
- F. A job description or list of specific duties for diocesan NFP teachers (see *Standards*, Section II).
- G. Accessible and affordable NFP services and resources appropriate to the culture and language of the diocesan population.
- H. Appropriate medical, psychological, moral, spiritual, and educational resources available for NFP teachers and couples/clients.
- I. Record keeping that includes information to provide non-identifying statistical data to the local bishop and the national bishops' NFP Program.
- J. Promotion of NFP, chastity, and fertility appreciation throughout the diocese, especially in programs of: remote (e.g., resources for parents; appropriate curricula for children and youth, etc.); proximate (e.g., young adult sexuality education including appropriate dating behavior, etc.); immediate (e.g., marriage

preparation); and ongoing marriage ministry (e.g., marriage enrichment, etc.).

- K. Resources and outreach education designed especially for seminarians, religious, deacons, and priests to enable them to pastorally support and encourage couples to use NFP.
- L. Periodic self-assessment of diocesan NFP services.

## II. Standards for Diocesan NFP Teachers

Diocesan NFP teachers provide NFP instruction and follow-up to couples/clients under the auspices of the bishop's NFP ministry. The teachers may represent a variety of NFP methods and are accountable to and work in cooperation with the diocesan NFP coordinator.

In NFP ministry, diocesan NFP teachers convey respect for each couple/client and promote their autonomy in the use of NFP. Diocesan NFP teachers encourage couples/clients to grow in their understanding of God's plan for married love and the gift of life by integrating Catholic teaching on human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, conscience and its proper formation, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church in their NFP instruction.

To achieve NFP ministry certification under the *Standards*, a diocesan NFP teacher must attest to the fact that he or she

- A. Strives to maintain a lifestyle consistent with Catholic moral teaching.
- B. Accepts and integrates in his or her teaching the principles of Catholic teaching on human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, conscience and its proper formation, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church (see Appendix A).
- C. Uses and/or philosophically accepts NFP and does not use or promote any form of contraception.

The diocesan NFP teacher must also

- D. Be certified to teach a method of NFP
  - 1. By at least one *Standards*-approved NFP teacher training program (see Section IV); or
  - 2. For teachers who have not received their method certification from a *Standards*-approved NFP teacher training program, meet the diocesan NFP policies and practices especially regarding the integration of Church teaching in NFP instruction.

- E. Successfully complete the NFP ministry certification process of the *Standards*.
- F. Meet the policies and practices of the local diocesan NFP program and work in harmony with its staff.
- G. Be proficient in teaching NFP as it pertains to all phases of the reproductive life cycle.
- H. Use a diocesan-approved teaching format, curriculum, and materials (see Section III).
- I. Use effective teaching and communication techniques.
- J. Demonstrate respect for other NFP methods and willingness to refer couples/clients to them when appropriate.
- K. Maintain client confidentiality.
- L. Not recommend or refer couples/clients for contraception, sterilization, abortion, or reproductive techniques that separate the unitive and procreative nature of intercourse.
- M. Demonstrate respect for couples/clients.
- N. Have basic knowledge of couple communication skills as they relate to learning NFP.
- O. Understand the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of God's plan for human sexuality.
- P. Ensure program quality by
  - 1. Providing instruction and follow-up in accord with the policies and practices of the local diocesan NFP ministry.
  - 2. Maintaining confidential client records concerning personal background, instruction, and follow-up, in accord with the local diocesan NFP program's policies and practices.
  - 3. Cooperating with the local diocesan NFP program's periodic assessment

of its teachers.

4. Providing non-identifying data for the periodic diocesan report to the bishops' national NFP Program.
5. Attending annually at least one NFP educational function sponsored or approved by the local diocesan NFP program.
6. Participating in appropriate continuing education and ongoing self-evaluation.
7. Committing to an initial service period with subsequent offers to teach and provide follow-up for a minimum number of couples/clients or classes per year as agreed upon with the diocesan NFP coordinator.

### **III. Standards for Diocesan NFP Couple/Client Education**

Diocesan NFP couple/client education includes instruction on NFP methodology and integration of Catholic teaching on human sexuality, (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church as articulated in authoritative Church documents (see Appendix A). It includes follow-up during and after formal instruction until the couple/client achieves autonomy. It is adapted to the particular needs and circumstances of the couple/client.

#### Diocesan NFP couple/client education

- A. Is provided in at least four client contact sessions, two of which include individual follow-up with chart review until autonomy is reached.
- B. Includes the following:
  - 1. The integration of Catholic teaching regarding human sexuality, (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church as articulated in authoritative Church documents (see Appendix A).
  - 2. A presentation of couple fertility that describes the reproductive anatomy and physiology of the male and the female, including the role of basal body temperature, cervical mucus, cervical changes, and other symptoms of the female fertility cycle.
  - 3. Instruction on observing, charting, and interpreting the method defined sign(s) of fertility on a day-by-day basis so as to correctly identify the days and patterns of fertility and infertility.
  - 4. The NFP method guidelines for both achieving and avoiding pregnancy.
  - 5. The teaching of abstinence from genital contact and sexual intercourse during the fertile phase of the cycle as the means to avoid pregnancy.
  - 6. An explanation of the importance of the couple's

- a) Motivation and communication.
  - b) Ongoing discussion of their family planning intention.
  - c) Acceptance of their combined fertility.
7. A discussion of factors that may affect the interpretation of the sign(s) of fertility (e.g., nutrition, stress, illness, medication, etc.).
  8. Emphasis on the couple/clients' responsibility for seeking additional instruction for special situations such as difficulties in achieving pregnancy, or anovulatory patterns that may result from breast-feeding or perimenopause, chemical and/or mechanical contraceptive use, or miscarriage/abortion.
  9. Information on the principles that support anovulation during breastfeeding and the benefits of breastfeeding for the health of both baby and mother.
  10. Discussion of the benefits and challenges of NFP.
- C. Consists of follow-up that intentionally offers:
1. At least two personal chart reviews with appropriate documentation.
  2. Appropriate follow-up contacts until the couple/client reaches autonomy.
  3. Assessment of the couple/client's progress in
    - a) Observing, correctly charting, and interpreting daily the sign(s) of fertility.
    - b) Recognizing and understanding the days of fertility and infertility in the cycle and any change in the fertility pattern.
    - c) Following method instruction according to their family planning intention.
    - d) Integrating periodic abstinence into their lives.

- e) Gaining confidence in and satisfaction with their use of NFP.
- 4. Pregnancies recorded and classified.
- 5. Discontinuation of instruction prior to autonomy recorded.
- 6. Appropriate pastoral, medical, psychological, educational, or social service referrals as needed.



#### **IV. Standards for NFP Teacher Training Programs**

An NFP teacher training program may be local, regional, national, or international. It can provide on-site and/or virtual and distance education and training for both teachers and couple/clients. It uses a formal curriculum in accord with Catholic teaching and maintains competent faculty.

To achieve Approval under the *Standards*, an NFP teacher training program will include the following components:

- A. Instruction in Catholic teaching on human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church as articulated in authoritative Church documents (see Appendix A).
  
- B. Natural Family Planning instruction on
  - 1. Development and history of the natural methods of family planning and the necessity to respect all authentic NFP methods.
  - 2. Scientific effectiveness studies of NFP methods for both achieving and avoiding pregnancy.
  - 3. Male/female reproductive anatomy and physiology.
  - 4. Basic information on the prenatal development of the human person.
  - 5. Fertility signs, including the role of basal body temperature, cervical mucus, cervical changes, and other symptoms of the female fertility cycle.
  - 6. Observing, charting, and interpreting the sign(s) of fertility appropriate to the specific NFP methodology.
  - 7. The phases of the reproductive life cycle and special circumstances, including breastfeeding.
  - 8. Guidelines for achieving and avoiding pregnancy in special circumstances and in all phases of the reproductive life cycle, including the teaching of abstinence from genital contact and sexual intercourse during the fertile phase of the cycle as the means of avoiding pregnancy.

9. Procedures for follow-up to help couples/clients achieve autonomy.
- C. Education about contraception (especially its harmful side effects), sterilization, abortion, and reproductive technologies.
- D. Marriage and family life education on
1. The couple/client's need for communication, growth in their marriage relationship, and the integration of periodic abstinence into their lives.
  2. Current trends in marriage, family life, and fertility.
- E. Training in teaching and communication skills in order to acquire
1. An understanding of the proper role and limitations of the NFP teacher, the need for ongoing self-evaluation, continuing education, and access to reliable NFP resources.
  2. Basic communication and problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to recognize when to make appropriate referrals and the process for doing so.
  3. Compassion, tact, discretion, confidentiality, and patience in teaching and follow-up.
  4. Understanding of the basic principles of the teaching/learning process and characteristics of the adult learner.
  5. The ability to implement a variety of educational and class planning strategies.
- F. Training in program management that provides
1. An understanding of the importance of cooperation with diocesan NFP programs and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' NFP Program.
  2. A couple/client education program that meets the standards under Section III above.
  3. Rationales and instruction for record keeping, confidentiality, and program management.
  4. Information on strategies for recruiting clients, community outreach, and

public relations.

- G. Faculty who are
  - 1. Competent in their area of expertise.
  - 2. Experienced, method certified NFP trainers with current knowledge and respect for all NFP methods.
  
- H. Teaching environments that are professional, facilitate learning, safe and/or secure that convey respect for the teacher-candidate, and include
  - 1. For on-site instruction, comfortable and clean environments with appropriate digital and hard-copy resources.
  - 2. Professional virtual platforms that are easy to use, secure, and provide timely feedback to and support of the teacher trainee.
  
- I. Teacher evaluation that utilizes
  - 1. Objective tests and other appropriate means that evaluate the teacher candidate's knowledge of the content cited above.
  - 2. A supervised practicum (either on-site or virtual) for a minimum of six months consisting of
    - a) An assigned supervisor to the teacher candidate.
    - b) The teacher candidate teaching at least six couples/clients in various reproductive circumstances, with follow-up until the clients reach autonomy and/or demonstrate adequate method understanding.
    - c) Ongoing guidance, assessment, evaluation, and documentation of the teacher candidate's progress by the supervisor.
  
- J. Teacher training program evaluation that provides
  - 1. Periodic evaluation of the curriculum by the faculty.
  - 2. Evaluation of the teacher/learning process by the teacher candidates.

## Glossary

<b>Achieving Pregnancy</b>	Couples using NFP to become pregnant.
<b>Avoiding Pregnancy</b>	Couples using NFP to space or limit pregnancy. A couple who is <i>spacing</i> desires more children at some future time but currently desires to postpone pregnancy. A couple who is <i>limiting</i> desires no more pregnancies.
<b>Autonomy</b>	The accurate identification of the beginning and end of the woman's fertile phase, and the couple's confident use of this knowledge to direct their sexual behavior to correspond with their family planning intention.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	A professional ethic that protects the privacy of clients. Confidentiality prevents the disclosure of personal information to any third party outside the realm of NFP instruction without the client's prior written authorization.
<b>Conscience</b>	<p>Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. (<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>, [CCC], 1777)</p> <p>The education of the conscience is a lifelong task.... In the formation of conscience, the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice.... We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church. (CCC, 1784, 1785)</p>
<b>Couple/Client Contact</b>	<p>Teacher-client interaction for the purpose of instruction and/or follow-up.</p> <p>Ideally this interaction should occur face to face (either in person or virtually). Given geographic and time constraints, and distance learning formats, a variety of means can be used to facilitate teacher-client feedback.</p>

**Diocesan NFP Coordinator**

The person appointed by the bishop to coordinate and promote NFP in the diocese.

**Diocesan NFP Couple/Client Education**

Diocesan NFP couple/client education includes instruction on NFP methodology and integration of the Church's teaching on human sexuality (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church.

It includes follow-up during and after formal instruction until the couple/client achieves autonomy. It is adapted to the particular needs and circumstances of the couple/client.

**Diocesan NFP Ministry**

Diocesan NFP ministry provides instruction in natural methods of fertility regulation and education on related issues. It is integrated into the structure of the diocese, with an NFP coordinator appointed by the bishop. The primary focus of the diocesan NFP program is to provide quality NFP services to married and engaged couples.

**Diocesan NFP Teacher**

A diocesan NFP teacher's primary role is to provide NFP instruction and follow-up to couples/clients. He or she conveys respect for each couple/client and promotes their autonomy in the use of NFP. By integrating Catholic teaching on human sexuality, (including male and female complementarity), the virtue of chastity, the proper formation of conscience, the nature of marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the value of children, and the importance of the family especially as the foundation of society and the domestic church in their instruction, a diocesan NFP teacher encourages couples/clients to grow in their marital relationship. Diocesan NFP teachers are accountable to and work in cooperation with the diocesan NFP coordinator.

**Family**

A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family. This institution is prior to any recognition by public authority, which has an obligation to recognize it. It should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationship are to be evaluated. (CCC, 2202)

The family ... is a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. Its first task is to live ... to develop an authentic community of persons. (*Familiaris consortio*, 18)

### **Natural Family Planning**

Methods for achieving and avoiding pregnancy that are based on the observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle.

Couples using natural family planning methods to avoid pregnancy abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the fertile phase of the woman's cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy.

NFP reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life and promotes openness to life and the gift of the child. By complementing the love-giving and life-giving nature of marriage, NFP can enrich the bond between husband and wife.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Church Documents**

Church teaching on human sexuality, conjugal love, responsible parenthood, and marriage and family life are especially contained in the following documents.

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*Amoris laetitia* (2016)

*Deus caritus est* (2005)

*Dignitatae personae* (2008)

*Evangelium vitae* (1995)

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994)

*Donum vitae* (1987)

*Familiaris consortio* (1980)

*Humanae vitae* (1968)

*Gaudium et spes* (1965)

*Casti connubii* (1930)

## APPENDIX B

### *The Standards—A History*

In March 1981 the Administrative Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) established the Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning (DDP) as a program of the bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities. Cardinal Terence Cooke, then chairman of the Committee for Pro-Life Activities, urged this action. During the Synod of Bishops in October 1980, Cardinal Cooke became convinced that the family apostolate must be given priority:

At that world Synod, I was impressed with the variety of family structures in the different nations and cultures, with the similarity of problems that families face, with the contributions that families can make in ministering to one another, and with the importance of the Church's teaching and its pastoral care of families. (Cardinal Terence Cooke, *Address at The Catholic University of America*, Washington, DC, July 18, 1983)

Acting upon this inspiration, and with Cardinal Cooke's encouragement, the bishops of the United States appointed Msgr. James T. McHugh (Archdiocese of Newark), as director. Msgr. McHugh then began to assist dioceses in implementing the Church's teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood, assisted by Mary Catherine Martin, PhD. They took a systematic approach in helping dioceses to expand the availability of NFP services to the local Catholic community. Today, NFP services are found within a variety of diocesan structures (e.g. part of Marriage and Family Life ministry, program of Evangelization and Faith Formation, service of Catholic Charities, or education program in Catholic hospitals).

Having national standards for diocesan NFP ministry was formally recommended by diocesan NFP coordinators in July 1987 at their biennial meeting (Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ). The NFP coordinators called attention to the fact that the need for standardization of diocesan NFP ministry and teachers had been a common concern in the diocesan NFP community. At that conference, participants joined in a thorough discussion of the project. They anticipated possible problems: How would diocesan NFP ministry be evaluated? Could one evaluation process cover different NFP training programs? Among the benefits identified were: NFP teachers certified according to the *Standards* would have the advantage of validation (ecclesial and professional) issued from a body separate from their particular training programs; unity would be encouraged among diocesan NFP teachers; diocesan NFP services would be viewed with greater credibility; and the diocesan bishop would have an objective means by which an external evaluation could be made of his NFP program.

The participants asked Msgr. McHugh to select NFP experts (both diocesan and non-diocesan) who could form a certification committee that would study the best approach to developing standards for diocesan NFP ministry. Within six months of the 1987 conference, invitations to join the committee were sent to ten NFP diocesan coordinators, experts, and consultants (Stephen Burke, MSW, Providence; Carmela Cavero, MS, CNM, San Diego; Donna Dausman, Springfield, IL; Rose Fuller, Portland, OR; Robert T. Kambic, Baltimore; Mary Catherine Martin, PhD, St. Louis; Jay Paulukonis, MSLS, Sioux Falls; Mary Ann Stanton, Cleveland; C. James Statt, MD, Phoenix; and Mary Pat Van Epps, Memphis).



Aided by DDP Assistant Director, Rev. Philip Kraus, S.J., NFPP and staff assistant, Theresa Notare, the Certification Committee began its work in January 1988 and quickly defined priorities, articulated tasks, agreed on a schedule, and identified sub-committees, which would meet between plenary meetings. The sub-committees treated the subjects of: human reproduction and NFP methodology; Church teaching; marriage and family life; teaching and communication skills; and diocesan program development. The sub-committee on methodology prepared the first draft of the *Standards*. This draft was first discussed by the members of the Certification Committee during their June 1988 meeting. The draft was approved as the working document where all other sub-committee work would be integrated.

The Certification Committee sought ongoing consultation informally from diocesan NFP coordinators and representatives of national NFP provider groups. The final plenary committee meeting (April 6-8, 1989, Newark, NJ) synthesized this input and revised the working document. The committee decided to mail the revised document to diocesan NFP coordinators and NFP providers, asking them for feedback. They also would present it for additional scrutiny to participants at the June 1989 national conference of diocesan NFP Coordinators.

Meeting again at Seton Hall University, diocesan NFP coordinators provided the Certification Committee with recommendations for refining the *Standards* draft based on their experience. The approximately 160 participants included representatives from eighteen archdioceses, fifty dioceses, and all of the national NFP education providers. The remaining numbers represented a good sampling of the many autonomous NFP organizations.

The Certification Committee carefully considered all conference recommendations as well as written critiques by national NFP providers and diocesan coordinators at a meeting on November 2-5, 1989, in St. Louis, MO. Several significant changes were accepted. Most notable perhaps was a reorganization of the *Standards* content. Sections concerning teacher evaluation and implementation were removed from the draft document, to be included in a companion workbook. The rationale for this change rested on the fact that “evaluation and implementation” more properly belong to a continuing process, rather than fixed elements of standards. The final draft was mailed to all bishops for their editorial comments. Suggestions regarding the importance of including a standard on NFP outreach education to seminarians, religious, deacons, and priests as well as chastity information to adolescents were submitted and accepted.

The *Standards* cover the following areas: I. Diocesan NFP Ministry; II. Diocesan NFP Teachers; III. Diocesan NFP Couple/Client Education; and IV. NFP Teacher Training Programs. The language is specific and was chosen so as to be easily understood by anyone reading the document. The *Standards* respect and uphold the authority of the local bishop and the integrity of the local diocesan NFP ministry. They are not intended to provide specific answers to all situations that might be encountered when establishing diocesan NFP ministry and providing NFP services. They are intended to provide a

framework within which a conscientious response to such situations can be formulated.

The bishops are indebted to many people for the design and development of this important document. A dept of gratitude is extended to the Knights of Columbus for their outstanding support of marriage and family life. The Order's generous grant to the bishops for the purpose of NFP education and activity has enabled projects such as the *Standards* to be realized. With regard to the 1990 document, gratitude is also extended to: Diane Daly, American Academy of NFP; Thomas W. Hilgers, MD, Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction; R. Patrick Homan, the Couple to Couple League; Hanna Klaus, MD, NFP Center of Washington, DC, Inc.; Mercedes Wilson, Family of the Americas Foundation, Inc.; numerous diocesan coordinators; and the participants of the 1989 National Conference of Diocesan NFP Coordinators.

The 2000 edition of the *Standards* was the result of the first ten years of experience in helping diocesan NFP coordinators implement the *Standards*. During 1999, the NFP National Advisory Board (Donna Dausman, Springfield, IL; Kay Ek, St. Cloud; Richard J. Fehring, PhD, RN, Milwaukee; Janet Kistler, Phoenix; Stella Kitchen, Harrisburg; and Mary Pat Van Epps, Memphis) refined the *Standards* in light of the experience gained from reviewing diocesan NFP programs. In 2000 a significant change was made regarding the document. It was adopted by the bishops' Administrative Committee of Bishops as their own. The 2010 edition represented additional insights from ongoing work with diocesan NFP coordinators.

The ten-year cycle of updating the Standards was paused due to the 2020 pandemic. In 2021, the members of the NFP National Advisory Board (Jennifer Fullin, Diocese of Columbus; Alice Heinzen, Diocese of La Crosse; Cindy Leonard, Diocese of Phoenix; Janet McLaughlin, Diocese of Baker; Karen Poehailos, MD, Diocese of Richmond; and Sheila Reineke, Diocese of St. Cloud), met virtually to update the document. In addition, a request was made to the diocesan directors of Marriage and Family Life as well as NFP coordinators to review the text for updating. The 2022 edition reflects this wide consultation.

The 2022 edition of the Standards for Diocesan NFP Ministry was approved at the November meeting of the U.S. bishops' Administrative Committee.

## APPENDIX C

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARDS

These standards are intended for use in Catholic dioceses in the United States of America. Below are the awards listed for compliance with the *Standards*:

- Endorsement for diocesan NFP ministry;
- NFP Ministry Certification for diocesan NFP teachers; and
- Comprehensive Approval or Standard-Specific Approval (a partial approval) for NFP teacher training programs.

Diocesan NFP coordinators and directors of NFP teacher training programs (diocesan and non-diocesan), are encouraged to read the *Standards* and review the implementation process. Please contact the bishops national NFP Program to discuss which implementation pathway is right for your program ([nfp@uscgb.org](mailto:nfp@uscgb.org)).

Diocesan NFP teachers can participate in the process through a diocesan NFP program that meets the *Standards*. The formal pastoral certification awarded through the diocese creates a strong link between the teacher and the local diocesan NFP ministry.

To learn more about the implementation process of the *Standards*, please contact the bishops' national NFP Program at [nfp@uscgb.org](mailto:nfp@uscgb.org); 1-202-541-3240. See also [uscgb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/diocesan-ministry/standards-implementation-forms](http://uscgb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/diocesan-ministry/standards-implementation-forms).

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To order this resource, contact the Natural Family Planning Program, Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth, USCCB, 202-541-3240; [nfp@usccb.org](mailto:nfp@usccb.org).