



by Loree
Lippsmeyer

Menopause and Mental Health

Heading into menopause or know someone who is?

Have no fear as women have been going through this very normal, natural phase of their life since women have been around. Upon cessation of a woman's menstrual cycle for one year, a woman is considered menopausal. There is no one way to navigate menopause. As you would guess there is a wide gamut of feelings and views of it. Experiences can range from a sense of freedom, to feelings of grief and loss; from having many symptoms to not having many at all. While it is true that each person will experience this phase of life in a way unique to them, whatever way you experience it, I assure you there are many others who have experienced it similarly. You are not alone.

I have spent over 15 years helping to lead the Mother Daughter Program, a program designed by Mary Pat Van Epps for girls 9 to 16 and their moms to come to understand the great and beautiful mystery of the gift of their fertility and femininity and God's design for it in their life. Every time I do a presentation at one of these programs, I am happy to proclaim the truth of God's glorious design for our



sexuality and make clear the message that God in his goodness and mercy always prepares us for what is in the future. We speak this message to those young women embarking on puberty and adolescence and what a help that is to know God has prepared them for puberty and adolescence and is there with them through it, whatever their experience of it may be. It strikes me that we are at a similar juncture again during menopause, being another time of change in our womanly bodies, and how helpful that message may be for us as well. Here too, God has already prepared us for what is happening in all the changes and all the feelings we are going through and will go through in the future. He has prepared us and is with us in it as well, whatever the experience of it may be. He is merciful and we can trust him.

Looking at this stage of life from a human development and mental health perspective we see there are many development tasks laid before women at this stage of life that could affect mental health. During the time most women experience menopause the tasks at hand include launching children and starting to refocus on their relationship as a husband and wife; a focus on the marital system as a dyad once again and renegotiating the marital relationship. Also, many couples at this stage are tasked with caring for aging parents and let's not forget, it is also a time when people tend to deal with midlife crises. Menopause is a time of transition from one stage of life to another. What we know about transitions and mental health is that most humans feel challenged by transitions even if they are welcome.

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All Good Gifts

We live in a culture that purports to support women, but in reality, mocks them

As an unmarried man, I do not feel qualified to write much of anything about premenopausal, menopausal or postmenopausal experiences. I have never experienced a menstrual period in my life and I have not had a spouse who has. I did, however, grow up with ten sisters (and one brother). While I was pretty oblivious to what my sisters went through as they entered puberty and as they continued to mature into adulthood, I learned early on that it was not a good idea to ask one my sisters, in the midst of a disagreement (i.e. fight): "Are you having your period?" That question was not met with gratitude. The question just made my sister angrier. Of course, I knew it would. That's why I asked it.

My confession aside, why would my sister react so angrily to such a question? I suppose she was angry because she would have known that I was asking the question not because I was genuinely concerned about her physical well-being. Rather, she knew that by indiscreetly casting a light on an intimate truth about her body, I was not coming from a place of wonder, but of mockery. That's what upset her. We live in a culture that purports to support women, but in reality, mocks them. As long as women and men are allowed to abort their children, we are not supporting women. As long as women and men stifle the gift of their physical fruitfulness through pills and other man-made means, we are not supporting

women (or men for that matter). A woman's menstrual cycle is part of God's design for spouses to bring new life into this world and, with God's grace, to nurture and form those lives in this world and for the world to come so that heaven be abundantly populated.

Indeed, when a young woman has her period for the first time, rather than make certain she has all the information to stymie her fertility, it should be an occasion for celebration. Recently, I took in a television (streamed) series, when in fact, this celebration took place. The series, called "Dark Winds", is a murder-mystery show which depicts life on a Navajo reservation in Arizona. One episode portrays a young woman who experiences her



first menstrual cycle. The Navajo puberty ceremony called "Kinaalda" is portrayed with detail and attention. While I do not have the space to go into the details of the ceremony, suffice it to say that it is clear



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that a young Navajo woman's Kinaalda is an occasion for much joy, as it should be.

What does a woman's first period have to do with her last which is the main focus of this edition of CANFP News? Once again, the answer lies in the truth that the beauty of the woman's fertility is all part of God's design. God created women in the way that He did because He is a God of goodness and reason. It is good that God gave man and woman to each other in marriage in Paradise (Gen 1:27-28,31) and it is reasonable that spouses be given the gift to bear children for a defined period of time so that they could raise their children and yet "live to see their children's children". (Nuptial Blessing, Rite of Marriage) "All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above, so thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord for all his love." (All Good Gifts, Godspell)

Director's Desk

Sheila St. John

Graduating to Mentor



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Have you graduated from NFP?

Congratulations!

You are now a mentor!

Perhaps this is your first introduction to the benefits of charting your cycles. Or... perhaps you have charted your cycles for years, or even decades.

Maybe you learned to chart your cycles in your teen years, using it to navigate what is often a phase of irregular cycles to predict your period, or inform diagnosis and treatment of painful periods, pms, or other dysfunction. Maybe you first learned of modern methods of Natural Family Planning as a couple preparing for marriage, and used it together throughout your married life to space pregnancies. Perhaps you first learned NFP when your whole life changed with the birth of your first child, and healthy and natural ways to plan your family and being open to life now took on a deeper meaning. Or you may have discovered the benefits of advanced scientific methods of charting fertility when your own fertility eluded you, and you found yourself unable to conceive, or suffering recurrent miscarriages. Some of you may be late to the whole charting thing, turning to it for the first time to navigate the twilight years of fertility that we call perimenopause.

Some of you have never had the benefit of good instruction in NFP. You relied on an app to tell you fertile or not, or patched together your own system, often adding on a few extra days of abstinence to compensate for lack of confidence in your self devised method.

I hope many reading this benefitted from instruction by a trained teacher, or several, as you may have found you preferred one method of NFP over another at various times in your life. Your initial consults may have been as a newlywed, or breast-feeding mom, or grieving a miscarriage, and now in a blink of an eye, you are navigating hot flashes!

You may be among those who have now gone a year without periods, and "graduated" from cycle charting. Like most graduates, however, you are not "done", but only beginning a new era.

However long you used NFP, and in whatever life circumstances, you accumulated a wealth of experience, wisdom, and insight that equips you to mentor those still in the charting years. The perspective of the graduate can be a guiding light to those still navigating the waters, and a source of information to those who may never even have heard of NFP, let alone spoken to someone who successfully lived it.

I am thrilled when I am invited to speak to audiences beyond the childbearing years! I do not have the opportunity often, because it is assumed that the topic of NFP is not relevant to that age group. That could not be further from the truth. Young couples using NFP are often barraged with cynicism and comments from peers and family members that betray a

lack of knowledge of modern NFP. I recall one young couple whose Catholic Grandma pressured them to stop using NFP and go on depo-provera, which she offered to pay for, out of concern she would interrupt her grad school with an unplanned pregnancy. Educating those beyond childbearing years on the benefits of Natural Family Planning is educating the mentors of the next generation.

NFP graduates have much to contribute to the conversation! Have you graduated from NFP? Congratulations! You are now a mentor! You are in a unique position to be a source of support and information--as a Mom/Dad, Auntie/Uncle, Grandma/Grandpa, Godmother/Godfather, trusted friend, colleague, church volunteer, or other mentor roles. Stay informed, and share your lived experience and wisdom of the years with those you encounter.

We welcome and value the support and involvement of our NFP graduates here at CANFP. We invite your expanded involvement, so all may benefit from your experience! Go to <https://canfp.org/get-involved/> to explore opportunities!

MEET MEMBERS...

Maria Elena and Deacon René Burgos

Ovulation Method Instructors in the Los Angeles region, Maria Elena and René Burgos have been married for 34 years, and have five adult children, and three grandchildren.

René was born in El Salvador and Maria Elena in Mexico.

They met at Christ the King Church in Hollywood, where René was in the youth group and Maria Elena in the choir, and have always served in the same parish.

During their premarital retreat they learned of an Ovulation Method class at a nearby church, and knew that it was just what they needed to start their marriage off properly. While learning the Ovulation Method, they experienced it as great blessing for couples, and an essential element for a happy marriage.

Maria Elena is an only child and René comes from a family of five siblings, and they both wanted a large family, so together they decided to have children soon. God blessed them with a beautiful little girl, Elizabeth Maria, born on Thanksgiving Day in 1991. Maria Elena breast fed her, and when she returned to work her

fertility began to return. Finding it a somewhat difficult time to use the Ovulation Method, they consulted their instructors, Lilia and Alejandro Morelos.

Lilia and Alejandro invited them to attend a new course they were offering, reviewed their charts, helped them to understand their cycles during breast feeding, and invited them to prepare to become instructors themselves. Maria Elena and René gladly accepted the invitation, seeing it as an opportunity to share with other couples the blessing of knowing their own bodies and their fertility. They became certified instructors of the

warriors of natural planning, including Dr. Janet Smith. They were inspired by them all to continue their ministry, helping Hispanic couples break free from the clutches of artificial contraceptives.

They have found knowing and belonging to the CANFP family important to their ministry throughout this time.

While they continued to give group courses and information on premarital weekends in Spanish, their family continued to grow, with the addition of Stephen Rene, Martin Benedict, Monica Michelle, and Theresa Elena.



MEET OUR MEMBER
is a regular feature of CANFP NEWS, coordinated by CANFP Professional Member Peggy Stofila, who lives in Torrance, where she works part time as a Physical Therapist and teaches the Creighton Model FertilityCare System.

same parish where they met almost four decades before.

Maria Elena and Deacon René continue their commitment to sharing the importance of Natural Family Planning, especially through providing information on premarital weekends. Having heard many married couples over the years say "no one

told us" or "we have not heard about this", they believe that if we want a healthier, happier society, the only way is for couples to know and use Natural Family Planning.



Maria Elena and Deacon René Burgos, professional members of CANFP, teach the Ovulation Method in the Los Angeles Region



Maria Elena y Deacon Rene with the Doctors Billings (left) and with Dr. Janet Smith (above) at the CANFP 2018 Faithful To God's Design Conference

Getting the word out about NFP! 2024 Highlights to date

EXHIBIT OUTREACH

- West Coast Walk for Life *San Francisco*
- Los Angeles Religious Ed Congress *Anaheim*
- Converging Roads Conference *Menlo Park*
- Diocese of Stockton Respect Life / Family Life Annual Event *Modesto*
- National Conference of the Catholic Family Life Association *San Diego*

STUDENT OUTREACH

- Stanford University *Palo Alto*

CLERGY OUTREACH

- Deacons in formation *Archdiocese of San Francisco*

PARISH OUTREACH

- Parish Visit *Bakersfield and Pasadena*
- 1,000 Engaged Editions mailed to every pastor in California

CANFP NEWS

- 1500 print copies distributed
- 1600 e-news subscribers received 17 emailings plus social media

CANFP.org

- 18,000 page views
- 10,000 NEW users

Sharing the good news throughout California!
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2024 CANFP Income to date: \$32,000
2024 CANFP Expenses to date: \$52,000
Your end of year donation is appreciated, to help us meet \$20,000 deficit by year's end.
Donation envelope enclosed
Online donations can be made at canfp.org

Coming in Jan. 2025!
Monthly Zoom Meet Ups for NFP Professionals

Discussing topics such as:
Chart Reviews PCOS
Unusual Bleeding TOB and NFP
Balancing Hormones Miscarriage

Medical Matters

Gretchen Marsh, DO

Navigating Menopause

The years leading up to menopause are called the perimenopause years and are as different as each woman is

Menopause is a natural process that marks the end of a woman's reproductive years when menstruation permanently stops. It is defined as one year without menstruation and typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 with the average age around the world at age 51. Menopause occurs because the ovaries slow and then stop releasing eggs. The eggs are held in sacs called follicles which produce estradiol and then progesterone and so when there is no more egg release, there are no more follicles to produce estradiol and progesterone. Progesterone loss occurs earlier in the years leading up to menopause resulting in anxiety/depression, sleep dysfunction, shortening of cycles. Later estradiol loss results in hot flashes, skin dryness, hair loss, decreased libido, weight gain. Additionally, women will have decreased testosterone which will further compound decreased libido and weight gain and energy levels.

The years leading up to menopause are called the perimenopause years and are as different as each woman is. For some the perimenopause is very short and for others, it can be many years. Many women are usually working, taking care of children and teens and

elderly family members and think their symptoms are from their life responsibilities, not realizing that the perimenopause is affecting them as well.

Natural Family Planning/FertilityCare Charting is an exceptional way to navigate the perimenopause into menopause not only for family planning but for health reasons. For instance, there are many documented cases at the St. Paul VI Institute where women who had learned to chart Creighton model FertilityCare System noticed unusual bleeding in their late 30s to early 40s and a cancer was discovered. Furthermore, a woman in her later 40s can monitor her bleeding and watch for unusual signs that may not be associated with perimenopause. Family physicians and gynecologists can order certain labs and pelvic ultrasounds and also offer an endometrial biopsy. Think of an endometrial biopsy as an advanced PAP smear which is done in the office. This gentle sampling of the endometrium (inside of the uterus that flows during the menses) can help to determine if there are abnormal cells or just extra thickening due to hormone changes. Gynecologists can also perform hysteroscopies in the office where they look inside the uterus with a tiny camera and also get small biopsy samplings of the endometrium.

Teacher taught, medically researched NFP methods also

help women in perimenopause with hormone replacement therapy if they choose to use it. Initially women can notice lower progesterone symptoms of anxiety/depression, sleep dysfunction, PMS, and changing cycles. They can easily start bio-identical progesterone at the correct time of their cycle to help with these symptoms. Stabilizing the cycle with progesterone also helps to build confidence in the chart of fertile and non-fertile days which often times is very confusing during perimenopause.

Furthermore, with charting, a woman can easily start bio-identical estradiol when she develops hot flashes, low libido, hair loss, dry skin and vaginal tissues. Initially she may use a very low dose through out the cycle or just after ovulation so as to not suppress any possible ovulation. After menopause and with proper screening (up to date PAP smears and mammograms), women will adjust the hormone replacement therapy to every day. Starting hormone replacement therapy is best done within the year of menopause, if not before, if they are going to use hormone replacement therapy. Bone loss is slowed with use of estradiol at the time of menopause. The Menopause Society, formerly North American Menopause Society (<https://menopause.org/>) is an excellent source of information for guidelines for both physicians and patients.



And not to be overlooked are the fundamentals of excellent nutrition

Other medicines and supplements can be used to help symptoms of menopause if wanted. Magnesium at bedtime is helpful for anxiety, leg cramps, and sleep. Melatonin is helpful for sleep especially since we produce less of it with age. Melatonin affects progesterone levels though more so in younger women. Ashwagandha is helpful for anxiety either in the day or at bedtime. It should not be taken if wanting to conceive. Methylfolate (active folate rather than synthetic folic acid), Vitamin B12, and Vitamin D in foods and supplements round out basic nutrition for all.

And not to be overlooked are the fundamentals of excellent nutrition (mostly fresh green leafy and colorful vegetables and fruits and very little processed

carbs and foods, nothing but water after dinner until breakfast), regular daily activity such as a daily brisk walk of 20-30 minutes, and good sleep habits (reduced screen time especially in the evening, a cool relaxed bedroom, little light at night).

Women who have learned to chart prior to menopause will have a better understanding of their health when they are in menopause, especially if they are using hormone replacement therapy. For instance if they develop any vaginal spotting, they will be more likely to seek medical advice and potentially avoid developing cancer. Learning to chart especially by a trained teacher from adolescence through menopause is a great gift across a woman's lifetime.



Gretchen Marsh, DO, is board certified in Family Medicine by the American Osteopathic Board of Family Physicians and certified as a NaProTechnology® Medical Consultant (NaPro) and Creighton model Fertility Care System (CrMS) teacher since 2001. Dr. Marsh sees patients through telehealth on MyCatholicDoctor.com and in person at fertilitycarecenterofreno.org. She and her husband, Jon, have five sons.

CANFP

"On the Road"

Deacon Steve Budnik addressing Stockton Diocese Respect and Family Life gathering, featuring presentation by **Dr. Lynn Keenan**, Immediate Past President of CANFP, and info table staffed by **Maryjah Nunez**, Executive Board of CANFP.

CANFP Professional Members/Physicians, **Lynn Keenan, MD, Robert Chasuk, MD, Gretchen Marsh, DO, and Mary Davenport, MD**, with CANFP Executive Director **Sheila St. John**, at meeting of the International Institute of Restorative Reproductive Medicine, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

CANFP exhibit at the National Conference of the Catholic Family Life Association in San Diego, Sept. 25-27, 2024.

Uncharted Territory

Continuing to Live the NFP Lifestyle After Menopause

Joan Noyes



Joan Noyes, Professional Member of CANFP, is a veteran NFP teacher in the Los Angeles region.

There are as many ways of living out love for post-menopausal NFP users as there are couples

If ever there were a time for patience, tenderness, and creativity in marriage, the years during and following menopause would be it! Skills learned during the childbearing years---communication, deferred gratification, self-control, and empathy---are more important now than ever before for NFP couples.

For some women, the transition to menopause is calm and peaceful. For others, menopause can wash over them like a tidal wave, repeatedly knocking them over, month after month. There are many factors at play during this mysterious time of change that comes to all women. Hormonal changes can cause a myriad of symptoms, both physical and psychological. This “change of life” may be happening to his wife, but it affects the husband as well.

The finality of menopause can be challenging for the couple who were never able to have children, or for those who were unable to conceive again, despite a desire for more children. Even those without a history of impaired fertility may have regrets over not having had more children. Grief over miscarriages, stillbirths, or neonatal deaths can surface, spill over, and loom large again during menopause. Loss of fertility can be a devastating blow, and both the man and woman may experience loss, and even grief.

Sharing feelings about physical or psychological changes is vital during and after menopause. Both husband and wife need reassurance that they are still lovable, and that the desire for intimacy persists, and is mutual.

The “courting” phase of abstinence while practicing NFP no longer exists. This can be an adjustment for both husband and wife, and communicating needs and feelings is important in these new circumstances. Women need to know that their husbands do not consider them an object, always available, just because menopause has retired that cycle of fertility and infertility.



Some couples have found it helpful to plan “date nights” in advance, so both partners feel their needs are acknowledged and have time to prepare for a romantic interlude.

Love is the key to understanding and appreciating one another. Patience and empathy are the tools that will make that happen. For some couples, health problems could already be a factor in their intimate life. The couple’s doctors are a resource for navigating physical conditions they may experience. Others may find that moving past fear of pregnancy could herald a joyful new era of freedom.

There are as many ways of living out love for post-menopausal NFP users as there are couples.

There may be unresolved issues from the past if the man and woman had been unequal in their commitment to NFP or had differing feelings about it. Validation of one another’s feelings facilitates new growth. Regardless of past differences, the post-menopause years can be a time of healing and new understandings for the couple. Mutual affection will help both man and woman to navigate this time of change and upheaval.

Compromises which honor the needs of both husband and wife will help love continue to grow. Reassuring one another of their value and attractiveness can help weather the storms of advancing age and diminishing vitality. The old formula of lots of hugging, saying “I love you” every day, and ample patience and forgiveness will go a long way toward coping with menopause. Praying together is more important now than ever.

If you are an NFP couple struggling with menopause, take heart! You already possess the tools you need to get past any challenges and to create a beautiful new future for yourselves. Do not be afraid to ask for help in remembering how to use those tools, or to ask for help from your medical professionals. Remember how much you are loved by God and that He is always there for you, ready to help and guide you! ■

MIEMBROS DESTACADOS...

Maria Elena y Diácono René Burgos



Somos René y Maria Elena Burgos, instructores del Método de Ovulación en Los Ángeles, CA.

Tenemos 34 años de casados y cinco hijos adultos, de los cuales dos están casados, dos solteros, y una comprometida en matrimonio. Además, tenemos tres nietos. Ambos somos inmigrantes: René es nacido en El Salvador y Maria Elena en México.

Nos conocimos en la Iglesia de Christ the King en Hollywood, donde René estaba en el grupo de jóvenes y Maria Elena en el coro. Nos casamos en noviembre de 1990 y siempre hemos servido en la misma parroquia.

Durante nuestro retiro prematrimonial nos enteramos de que iban a haber unas clases del Método de Ovulación en una iglesia cercana y vimos que era justo lo que necesitábamos para comenzar nuestro matrimonio como Dios manda. Al aprender el Método de Ovulación vimos que era una bendición muy grande para la pareja y un elemento esencial para un matrimonio feliz.

Nosotros deseábamos tener una familia grande, porque Maria Elena es hija única (y quería tener la experiencia de vivir en una familia con más hijos/hijas) y Rene viene de una familia de cinco hermanos (y quería tener la experiencia de vivir en una familia como la suya). Así que juntos decidimos tener hijos pronto. Dios nos bendijo con una linda niña al año de casados, que nació el día de Acción de Gracias de 1991 y le pusimos por nombre Elizabeth Maria. Maria Elena le dio de amamantar y cuando ella regresó a trabajar, su fertilidad comenzó a regresar y fue un

tiempo algo difícil para llevar el Método de Ovulación. Por lo tanto, decidimos consultar nuevamente con nuestros instructores, Alejandro y Lilia Morelos.

Los Morelos nos invitaron a venir a un nuevo curso donde revisaron nuestras gráficas y nos ayudaron a comprender nuestros ciclos durante la lactancia. Estando ahí nos invitaron a prepararnos para hacernos instructores. Vimos la oportunidad de compartir con otras parejas la bendición de conocer nuestros cuerpos y nuestra fertilidad. Aceptamos gustosos y ese fue el inicio de nuestra preparación como instructores.



Maria Elena y Diácono René Burgos con Mercedes Arzu Wilson

Durante ese tiempo tuvimos el gusto de prepararnos para la certificación como instructores con Family of Americas Foundation, de Mercedes Arzu Wilson. Tuvimos el honor de conocer en persona a los Doctores John y Evelyn Billings, quienes fueron invitados por la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles. Además, hemos conocido a muchos otros pioneros y guerreros de la planificación natural, como la Doctora Janet Smith. Todos ellos nos han inspirado a seguir con este apostolado ayudando a las parejas hispanas a librarse de las garras de los anticonceptivos artificiales. De aquí, se puede entender la importancia de haber conocido y pertenecer a la familia de CANFP.



Maria Elena y Diácono René Burgos

Mientras tanto, nuestra familia fue creciendo y nacieron nuestros otros hijos: Stephen Rene, Martin Benedict, Mónica Michelle, y Theresa Elena. Nosotros continuamos dando cursos en grupo de PFN y dando información en los fines de semana prematrimonial en español.

En 2017, René respondió al llamado de Dios al Diaconado Permanente y comenzamos nuestra preparación. (En muchas diócesis, se requiere que la esposa del candidato a diácono asista a los cursos junto con su esposo.) Debido al mayor compromiso de tiempo dado a la preparación para el diaconado, decidimos reducir las clases de PFN en grupo. Sin embargo, seguimos dando información prematrimonial. En el año 2022, René fue ordenado Diacono para la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles, asignado a nuestra parroquia de Christ the King.

Nuestro compromiso de compartir lo importante que es la Planificación Natural Familiar se ha mantenido por todo este tiempo sobre todo dando la información en los fines de semana prematrimoniales. Una de las razones es que hemos oído a muchas parejas casadas decir “nadie nos lo había dicho” o “nunca nos hablaron de esto”. Nosotros creemos que, si queremos una sociedad más sana, y más feliz, la única manera es que las parejas conozcan y usen la Planificación Natural Familiar. ■

Clergy Corner

Deacon Dave Gould

Reflecting on My Life with NFP

we used our understanding and knowledge of NFP to help guide us through Carlin's time of perimenopause and then into the season of menopause in our "golden years."

I first heard the term "natural family planning" when I was attending a Catholic Engaged Encounter Weekend with my wife-to-be, Carlin, as we were going through the steps of our marriage preparation, way back in the day. Now mind you, I was just shy of turning 25, had attended Catholic schools from 1st grade through high school, and had heard many hundreds of homilies at Sunday Masses up to that point, but the term "natural family planning" never reached my ears, until the brief talk on "Intimacy in Marriage" at our Engaged Encounter Weekend.

After the talk when the couples were given the time to share our thoughts with each other, Carlin asked me what I knew about NFP. I told her "Nothing" as I had never heard of it before. And she, growing up in a non-religious family and being the classic "none," had never heard of it as well. But in trying to live a faithful Catholic life, my ears perked up and I thought "If this is the Church's teaching, why have I never heard of NFP before?" And on Carlin's part, she was trying to live a healthy lifestyle and was intrigued with the mention of NFP being healthy for your body. So that is the point of when NFP entered our lives, and how grateful and blessed we have been since then for that moment in time.

But with all the excitement and work to be done in planning our wedding, the awareness of NFP sat quietly in the back of our minds. However, it was just a couple months after we were married that I



happened to see a small article in the local newspaper where we were living announcing that a Billings Ovulation Method NFP class was going to be offered at the community hospital. That rekindled our interest in wanting to know more about NFP, me from the Catholic teaching perspective and Carlin from wanting to know about its positive health aspects. So, we signed up, took the class, and the rest is (our) history! Not only did we start using NFP when we finished the class, but we were practicing NFP even before Carlin finished the RCIA program and was brought into the Catholic Church! A friend sometime later, when Carlin mentioned using NFP, told her "Wow, you really are Catholic!"

NFP became a valued part of our lifestyle. We used it initially to postpone a pregnancy knowing that I would be transferred in my job to parts unknown within a year and then used it after our move to plan our four pregnancies in the years to come (one ending in a miscarriage). And then, as we aged, we used our understanding and knowledge of NFP to help guide us through Carlin's time of perimenopause and then into the season of menopause in our "golden years."

As I look back on how NFP has so beautifully impacted our life, I am so thankful for the presenting couple at our Engaged Encounter Weekend for mentioning Natural Family Planning, however brief it was. Had it not been for making us aware that NFP even existed, who knows how this aspect of our married life would have turned out! And to share how wonderfully our NFP lifestyle evolved, Carlin became so fascinated with knowing how her body was working and how beautifully God had designed us as male and female, she became a Billings Ovulation Method teacher. She has taught NFP over the years to many couples, including helping some who have had difficulty achieving a pregnancy.

Which brings me to an important point as I reflect back on the use of NFP in our life. That one mention of NFP brought us to a lifetime

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of understanding of just how beautifully man and woman, husband and wife, are made, that is to complement each other, to work together in the glorious dance of creating life in God's grand design for us. Many times in our time of fertility, when we were desiring to achieve or postpone a pregnancy, I felt in awe of this grand design, in awe of the knowledge we had of just how wonderfully we are made and how NFP had brought us to this understanding. And an important aspect for me has been living in respect of my wife, of how her body works, and to appreciate the



gift of her fertility and not fear it. Was it easy? Not always. I learned pretty early on how to interpret her chart and make appropriate plans, if you know what I mean and I think you do.

And now, as we are settled comfortably into our golden years, there is no more charting to be done, but the respect and appreciation of how our bodies

work together as husband and wife still hold me in awe and I even joke with Carlin that maybe she will be like St. Elizabeth and who knows, maybe we'll have to find another baby name!

But as I reflect back on those years of fertility, I thank God for giving me the strength, courage, and understanding to use the beautiful gift of sexuality in our marriage in the ways He designed us, not temporarily or permanently stifling our fertility with chemicals, devices, or sterilization, but working with our fertility.

And to carry on the message of NFP, we do our best to bring forth the "best kept secret in the Catholic Church" when we teach the session of our local OCIA (formerly known as RCIA) class each year on the Sacrament of Marriage. And it doesn't matter if the OCIA participants are beyond their fertile years, as it is important for women at any age, even grandmothers, to hear this teaching of the Church and pass it on the younger women in their families. And further, as a Deacon, I try to incorporate the term Natural Family Planning into a homily on occasion, but especially during Natural Family Planning Awareness Week in July. You never know when someone might think, "I've never heard of that before" and want to learn more.



Deacon Dave Gould, and his wife Carlin, long time Professional Members of CANFP, reside in the Santa Rosa region, and rare the recently retired Family Life Coordinators for the Diocese of Santa Rosa.

And one final thought. When I became knowledgeable of and understood how NFP worked and how it was the teaching of the Catholic Church in accord with how God made us, it made me aware that if the Church makes this stand and does not give in to contraception, it truly must be the Church that Jesus established, for it has not conformed to the "changing times" or to the "desires of man," but has stood firm from the beginning of how we were designed in the image of God (Genesis 1: 27).

And that understanding gives real meaning to Romans 12: 1-2: *"I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."*

Ask the Expert

Discontinuing Birth Control Pill at 51

Question

I am a healthy 51 year old woman. I've been on the birth control pill for the past 17 years (Mircett). I am also on high blood pressure meds. I recently went in for my annual physical. My doctor decided to change the birth control pill to something called Yaz. The doctor said it is better for someone who is on blood pressure meds. My insurance doesn't cover Yaz, and quite frankly after reading the information on Yaz, I decided to just not take any birth control pills anymore. It's been a month since I've been off the pill. I thought I would have gotten a period and I haven't. What should I expect? Also, is there a chance that I could get pregnant?? Thank you for your insight. *Karen.*

Answer

Dear Karen, Congratulations on your insight to read up on this birth control pill; most women just do what their doctor recommends. You are in the reproductive category of both post pill and premenopause. In either case you may be anovulatory, experience a lack of menses for several months, have cycles that are irregular, experience episodes of unusual bleeding, or have hot flashes. There is always a chance you could ovulate resulting in a pregnancy, however with your long use of birth control and your age, it is less likely. You can learn NFP, and chart your cycles, to gain more insight into whether you are ovulating or not. *Winnie Neill*

Should I be Worried if Period Does not Start on Time After Stopping the Pill?

Question

I am 45 years old and have been on birth control pills on and off, mostly on, since age 21. My husband is 48. I just got off my birth control pills about two months ago, after being on them for about five years this time. I had a really light period after that, but now I think I'm about 2 1/2 weeks late. I took a home pregnancy test last Saturday that is supposed to tell if you're pregnant before you are late, and it was negative. Should I be worried? *Melissa*

Answer

Dear Melissa, You stated that you have been off and on the pill for years and one of the side effects of the birth control pill is irregular cycles and light menses. Your natural reproductive age would be pre-menopause which includes both symptoms. However at the age of 45 you can still be fertile and ovulating. You didn't mention your use of any family planning which could be your concern about a pregnancy. Considering all these factors, I would like to suggest the use of a natural family planning method. Learning about the signs of fertility or lack of them will be helpful as you navigate pre-menopause and greatly reduce the fear of an unplanned pregnancy. You can check our website for more information and the location of the closest NFP instructor. *Winnie Neill*



Winnie Neill, a Professional Member of CANFP, is a certified FertilityCare Practitioner, and taught NFP 23 years in the Sacramento region. She served on the Sacramento Diocese NFP Advisory Board, the American Academy of NFP Board and the CANFP Executive Board. She and her husband Bob have been married 63 years.

Ask the Expert

Vasectomy Nightmare

Question

My husband is 31 years old and had a vasectomy done in Savannah, Georgia on Jan. 12th. Two days later, I had to rush him to the emergency room because he was completely black and blue and the size of a softball. The E.R. doctors sent him for an ultrasound and found that his left testicle was just a piece of dead meat. They couldn't do anything because the surgery was done in Savannah, so they transferred him to Memorial Medical University Hospital in Savannah. On Jan. 15th, at 3:50am, my husband was taken into surgery to have his left testicle removed. After waking up in recovery he was released.

&

Two weeks after having his left testicle removed, he developed a surgical infection. This has been one horrible year so far, because we are still going through more and more. Last month he was sent to MCG in Augusta Georgia to see a specialist there. The specialist found that his right testicle was sewn to his scrotal sack. July 2nd, my husband underwent another surgery...this time to release his right testicle from the sack. He went for a checkup last Friday, and the doctor said that he was healing up nicely, but there was still a chance of him losing the right one too. My question is . . . Is this normal procedure for a vasectomy? *Andrea*

Answer

Andrea relates the tragic story of her husband having significant post-operative complications from a vasectomy. He had bleeding from the procedure that resulted in a softball-sized collection of blood on the left side. This necessitated an exploration under anesthesia during which removal of the left testis was done, this too being complicated by an infection two weeks later. Furthermore the vasectomy on the right side caused the testis to adhere to the skin and impaired its mobility, also necessitating yet another surgery to free these adhesions. She asks the rhetorical question: "Is this normal for a vasectomy?" The answer is of course "no". As most of you know I have never done vasectomies because I believe sterilization a violation of God's plan for marital love. It injures a healthy part of the body and interferes with the great gift of fertility. That being said, my first urologic partner had no such qualms and did approximately 5000 vasectomies in the course of his career. Never once did he have a complication even remotely related to the above. There are many websites devoted to a discussion of vasectomy. If one is curious regarding the whole gamut of potential complications I would review a reputable source there, e.g., something published by the National Institute of Health. *Gregory Polito, MD*



Gregory Polito, MD, is retired from private urological practice in the Los Angeles region, which featured a specialty in vasectomy reversal.

Seminal Fluid and Enlarged Prostate

& Question

What are the chances of increasing your seminal fluid? I read that an enlarged prostate may have an effect? *Cliff*

Answer

Seminal fluid is approximately two-thirds prostate fluid and one-third seminal vesicle fluid (the seminal vesicles are two small glands that insert into the back of the prostate). The sperm contribute less than 1% by volume. There is also a tiny but negligible contribution by some small glands that empty directly into the urethra. The amount of fluid ejaculated will increase with increased intervals between ejaculation (i.e., abstinence for several weeks at a time) and with prostatic inflammation (prostatitis); it may also increase with prolonged foreplay. The amount of fluid may decrease as the prostate enlarges benignly and compresses the glandular tissue that would normally make fluid to contribute to the ejaculate. Prostatic enlargement may also "reroute" the ejaculate so that some or all of it goes backwards into the bladder ("retrograde ejaculation") such is also seen after surgery on the prostate for benign occlusive disease. *Gregory Polito, MD*

See [Ask the Expert CANFP.org](http://CANFP.org) for over a thousand Q and A's

Menopause...cont from front page

finding shared hobbies or activities that you and your spouse enjoy doing together can be a wonderful source of connection and new life

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The key to healthfully maneuvering through transitions is to seek out the support one needs through friends, community, programs, resources, professionals, and God. We are made to need other people and God in navigating life and when people get the support they need, they thrive emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Menopause can provide the opportunity for women to choose to grow and thrive. My advice is to go for growth---thrive and become sanctified in the process.

Launching children successfully into adulthood is one of the primary goals of parenting. Haven't we all tried our best to equip our kids with the tools they will need to become independent, productive adults? However, when that happens the actual letting go may be harder than expected. Sometimes there is a real sense of loss for parents as their children move out of the family home. Women are especially vulnerable here and can experience a loss of purpose in their life, loss of relationship and a loss of that role of nurturing and cultivating life through taking care of children and running a household. This is especially true if a woman has devoted most of her time to family and her home. What may be a good and healthy milestone, something we worked hard to achieve, may bring unexpected feelings of loss and grief. If this happens, acknowledge these feelings. Let them come up

and process them. A good way to process some of this might be in a journal, or with a friend who is or has experienced the same, or in prayer with God in Adoration. Allow yourself the grace and acceptance of being where you are. There is no need to make yourself think you shouldn't be feeling this way. Give yourself some time to adjust to this new way of living. With so many of the demands of raising a young family behind women, this time of menopause is a time that God draws us back to that primary gaze of love being between the couple once again. For many of us, for so many years, the focus has been on family, taking care of children and equipping them with the tools needed to navigate life. Now the task is to come back to knowing who one is again outside of those roles, as the individuals we are, in our vocation. We focus once again, as when we started our married life, as a dyad as husband and wife. This may feel awkward to some. Being so busy raising children we may be disconnected from our spouse. It is not unusual to feel like strangers even though we have lived our whole married life together. We may be out of touch with each other. If this is the case for you, I would recommend finding a program or resource to help you foster communication and relationship. Counseling can be a significant help as well as programs designed for this purpose. One such program that comes to mind is Marriage

Encounter. They exist to help couples learn to communicate and be in an open and honest relationship and learn to live out a sacramental relationship within a marriage. Alternatively, finding shared hobbies or activities that you and your spouse enjoy doing together can be a wonderful source of connection and new life. I know several couples who have discovered the joy of playing pickleball together. It is relatively easy to play and if you choose to play as a couple in games or tournaments it allows you to work as a team again, get exercise, have fun and meet other people.

Middle adulthood often comes with caretaking aging parents. There are a lot of thoughts and feelings around this issue; feelings of obligation and duty, of love and responsibility, of balance of caregiving and self-care, and reality of life and death. Most adult children don't anticipate how difficult it is to see the decline of health in parents and to step into the role of caretaker. There is a role reversal of parents now relying on adult child, for life giving help and support. It is also a time when in dealing with the decline of our parents that we recognize and come to face our own mortality.

Midlife crisis is another situation that comes up during menopause whether it is a woman's own experience of it or that of her spouse. It occurs during middle age. It is often

The solutions to navigate this phase of life well are already within us built up one day at a time over a lifetime of married love

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a time of people examining their life and their feelings of lack of fulfillment in it. They may experience dissatisfaction and anxiousness due to facing their mortality and their accomplishments. This can be a time of impulsivity and making decisions lacking discernment and good judgment. If you are experiencing a midlife crisis, it is important to talk with someone about your thoughts and feelings. There are many examples of people's lives going askew due to poor decision making at this time. With the right support it too can be a means of personal growth and deeper understanding of your life and your surrender to God.

Experiencing the loss of fertility may bring a whole host of feelings along with it that may change depending on what one is experiencing in the day to day. The loss of fertility through menopause and how it affects one's femininity and sexuality unfold over time. There could be a sense of freedom experienced but also loss and grief to deal with. Some women may feel less feminine or experience a loss of their youth in a very concrete way. Women may experience symptoms of menopause that affect their desire for intimacy or their ability to enjoy or participate in the marital embrace. They could experience lack of physical intimacy due to their own or their husband's declining health that affects their sexuality. What statistics show is that despite experiencing these difficulties in their sexuality

women very rarely talk to their doctors about them unless their doctors ask them directly, which is uncommon. Few talk to their friends about these issues and even though they experience it with their spouse, few talk even to their spouse about these challenges. That is to say that most women often walk these places of loss and grief on their own. These are complicated situations fraught with an abundance of deep emotions. It could be helpful to explore the stages of grief as explained by Kubler Ross and how they pertain to the loss of this part of their sexuality. The stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Recognizing that these stages are normal, natural experience of loss could be helpful in walking through it. I wouldn't recommend dealing with this on your own. Reach out to a mental health therapist to get the support you need.

Fortunately for couples who have lived their sexuality in accordance with God's design there has been a formation their whole married life on living marriage sacramentally. They have developed a certain mastery over their passions and have grown in the exact virtues that will be helpful to live a life of grace in this situation. If they have practiced periodic abstinence, they have had a deep formation in the various ways of loving their spouse including the physical, spiritual, intellectual creative and emotional aspects of their



Loree Lippsmeyer and Brian, her husband of 32 years, live with their four children in Roseville, CA, where she taught the Creighton Model of NFP. A Professional Member of CANFP, she is a psychotherapist and enjoys speaking to groups about marriage and the beauty of the Catholic faith.

relationship. If we have lived our sexuality with an openness to life, we have practiced day to day the demands of love whether generally through the demands of family life or specifically through charting our fertility and planning our family with fertility appreciation models that are in line with our faith. The solutions to navigate this phase of life well are already within us built up one day at a time over a lifetime of married love.

Whatever your experience of menopause, one thing I know for sure is that God prepares women for this time and is right there with us through it all. We get to remember that this too serves to sanctify us, and that God loves us, cares for us and we can trust in him. ■



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Edited and published quarterly by the

**CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION
OF NATURAL FAMILY
PLANNING**

1217 TYLER ST.
SALINAS, CA 93906

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