

A married couple seeking the will of God make a genuine commitment to always include His will in their marital relations. Natural family planning is God's plan for naturally spacing children that respects a female's natural rhythmic cycle. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio* (section 32),

The choice of the natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the ... woman, and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control. ... In this way sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension and is never "used" as an "object."

Please note there are distinct differences between artificial methods of contraception and the occasions when, for just reasons, a couple may ask God to postpone conception. American Life League does not ever endorse any method of family planning designed to intentionally avoid the meaning of the conjugal act: openness to the possibility of children and the unitive love between spouses.

HEALING HANDS, FAITHFUL HEART: Dr. Tim Field's journey to opening a natural family planning practice

By Amber Dolle

Standing among his fellow classmates of Texas A&M University's medical school in 1981, Dr. Tim Field never imagined where his life would lead some 25 years later. He entered the world of medicine with a desire to help others. After running a successful obstetrics and gynecology practice for over two decades, Dr. Field made a decision that would forever change the way he practiced medicine: He quit prescribing contraceptives.

A spiritual journey

Following his graduation from medical school, Dr. Field spent four years training in ob-gyn at Scott & White Hospital in Temple, Texas. He then worked in various hospitals before opening a solo practice in Jacksonville, Texas, in 1988. Twenty years went by, and he felt a nudge. "While I loved my job and the path I had chosen, I was realizing more and more that I needed to make a change in the way I practiced medicine," he said. "It seemed that abortion was the easy question: It's always wrong. As a physician, the issue of artificial contraception was much more challenging for me."

A devout Catholic, Dr. Field lists both his faith and family as factors in his decision, giving much of the credit to his wife of 33 years, who has successfully managed both their home and his medical office. "Lisa is an incredibly faithful and spiritual woman," he observed. "She never pushed, but always led through her loving example ... her prayer was for my professional life to work in coordination with my personal faith. How powerful the influence of the Holy Spirit can be

through our own spouse! Her gentle influence helped me to better understand and appreciate the beauty behind the Church's teachings on artificial contraception."

"My children [Marilisa, Tanner, Layton and Barrett] and their families were very influential in my decision," Dr. Field reflected, no doubt thinking of his six beautiful grandchildren, all conceived through natural methods of spacing children. "They understand and practice that which I knew, but never allowed myself to be open to. Watching each of them live out their faith really made me stop and think."

An experience that helped to solidify Dr. Field's move away from the contraceptive mentality occurred during a 2007 trip to the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville, Alabama, with his wife and mother-in-law. After visiting the holy site established by Mother Angelica, whom he refers to as a "modern-day saint," he experienced peace and certainty about his decision. "The priest gave a beautiful homily about how God wants us to be open with our lives to what He wants us to do," he recalled. "I felt



as if that message was sent directly to me. I shared my thoughts with Lisa, who was immediately filled with excitement. She said she knew it would happen sooner or later."

Starting fresh

On October 31, 2008, the Fields closed the solo practice and moved from the place they had called home for so long. In God's perfect timing, the Fields soon learned that St. Joseph Health System in Bryan, Texas, was looking for an ob-gyn trained in natural family planning. They also learned that Rev. David Konderla, pastor of the vibrant St. Mary's Catholic Center at nearby Texas A&M University, was interested in opening an NFP training center at the university parish. "It could not have been a

more perfect combination of events," said Dr. Field. "This time in our lives is a great example of how God opens the doors for us, but we have to make the choice to walk through them."

Dr. Field began to study the Creighton Model FertilityCare System, which relies upon "standardized observation and charting of biological markers that are essential to a woman's health and fertility." Under the direction of Dr. Thomas Hilgers at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, he became certified as a Creighton Model medical technician and consultant, and now uses the method to help couples. "NFP methods are natural, healthy and wholesome," he explained. "They are based on the idea that procreation is a joint decision by the couple. Artificial contra-

ception has a way of distancing couples and ultimately objectifying women by stripping away responsibility from the man. NFP unites us by enhancing our natural God-given gifts as men and women."

Going against the establishment

Helping those in the medical community to view contraception as a pro-life concern can be quite a challenge. "That which physicians have been taught as the standard, where contraception is concerned, really goes against our Christian principles," said Dr. Field. "Also, there is a mounting pile of evidence showing that artificial hormones [such as in contraceptives] result in a higher rate of breast cancer, liver problems and heart problems. But it is still a challenge to go up against the contraceptive norm in modern medicine. We in the medical profession need to wake up, and see that we can't keep promoting these products and pretending that there are no downsides."

While Dr. Field describes the process for physicians wanting to practice contraceptive-free as an "uphill battle," he does see hope in younger doctors learning NFP. He has come into contact with many young physicians, through the Creighton University program, who recognize that the artificial techniques are not as healthy as we are led to believe. "Even if it is not a choice of faith, one can use NFP methods because they are a healthy alternative to introducing artificial and risky medications into the body," he continued.

Looking to the future

Despite the whirlwind of changes that have occurred in Dr. Field's life over the past few years, a plan to take a break is nowhere in sight. Along with his work in the rural health care clinics in the Bryan/College Station area, he is now focused on the newly established FertilityCare Center at St. Mary's. The center is certified by the FertilityCare Centers of America, an extension of Dr. Hilgers' work in Omaha, and currently serves the community by promoting and teaching the Creighton Model method. Dr. Field serves as the center's medical consultant, and works with couples and individuals who want to practice the method. "The FertilityCare Center at St. Mary's is in its infancy, but we are certain that there will be a boom of activity here very soon," he said. "It is our hope that, with the continued support of the St. Joseph Health Center, St. Mary's and this great community, the facility here will be duplicated across the country, especially near college campuses."

Dr. Field reported that, within the next year, the group aims to establish a dedicated space on the grounds of St. Mary's to house the program. Such a facility would accommodate the training sessions, classes and, eventually, a clinic for fertility care patients. "I am so excited to be a part of such a special project!" he exclaimed. "God has blessed me tremendously with faith, family and a wonderful profession. I am happy to help spread His love through my work and to give back for all the gifts He has given to me."

Amber Dolle is a freelance writer. To learn more about the Creighton Model System, go to www.creightonmodel.com.

Natural family planning offers hope in the Heartland

By Tim Drake

During its November 2009 meeting, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released *Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology*, which examines the procreative and unitive aspects of marital love. In this 16-page statement, the bishops recommend that couples struggling with infertility should look to modern, scientific methods of naturally spacing children for hope, rather than in-vitro fertilization, or other disruptive and unnatural means for achieving pregnancy.

Hope was on hand at the International Billings Method Conference held recently in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The conference, organized by Sue Ek, executive director of the Billings Ovulation Method Association-USA, offered the opportunity for experts, physicians, medical personnel and teachers from around the world to share valuable information, personal experiences and the latest medical developments in the field of naturally spacing children. Attendees included those trained in the BOM, Creighton, Couple to Couple League and Marquette methods.

The conference brought together nearly 100 notables from around the world, including Dr. Lek-Lim Chan, a Buddhist convert to Catholicism and BOM instructor from Malaysia; Marian Corkill, senior BOM teacher from Australia; Fathers Daniel McCaffrey and Matthew Habiger of Natural Family Planning Outreach; Dr. Jan Hemstad, vice-president of the Catholic Medical Association; and Lloyd Duplantis, a registered pharmacist who has done extensive research on the action and side effects of hormonal contraceptives.

Conference attendees lamented the lack of a truly Catholic medical school that supports training in Church-approved methods of natural fertility regulation. One Canadian medical student, who asked not to be identified due to fear of reprisals, attended the conference but had to do so "under the radar" because of the lack of support for non-contraceptive methods.

Vitamin D

One development discussed at length was the discovery of the important role that Vitamin D plays in fertility. Inadequate exposure to sunlight, the use of sunscreen, aging, low-fat diets and malabsorption can all contribute to Vitamin D insufficiency and also infertility. Duplantis said that, in North America, this insufficiency is common in all age groups and even more so among African-Americans. He noted that individuals seeking to achieve pregnancy may want to supplement



Dr. Jan Hemstad



"We're attracting physicians who want to practice without using contraceptives."

beyond the current recommended daily allowance in order to reach and sustain an optimal level.

Personal witness

Teaching couple Tony and Marianne Abadie of Carrollton, Texas, shared their success story, which is one of thousands that witness to natural child spacing's beneficial impact on marriage. Tony said that as they prepared for marriage in the Catholic Church, they were never informed that the Church prohibits contraception, so once they were married, they started using the pill. When they learned the truth, they were shocked.

When a friend told Marianne that contraception was against Church teaching, she reconsidered. And when she shared the news with her husband, she didn't get an enthusiastic response. "I was not

thrilled at first," recalled Tony. "Yet, I knew that if she had her mind made up, I wasn't going to be able to convince her otherwise."

Even after learning the truth, it took some time for them to embrace the Church's teaching completely. "We went to an initial class, got the rules and went home," said Tony. "I got excited by the science of it and we decided to try it."

The Abadies began using natural spacing methods in late 2005. Tony said that he could see positive relationship changes soon after. "Our communication improved and we stopped fighting about sex," said Tony. "I didn't have any respect for her fertility. Now, if she's fertile and we're not trying to conceive, I'm able to discipline myself during days of abstinence." The couple also began talking about having more children. Currently, they have two boys.

In May 2007, Tony and Marianne began teaching the BOM through their parish. The deacon has now made instruction on the natural spacing of children mandatory for couples desiring to marry, and the Abadies have taught approximately 100 couples so far.

The physicians speak

A panel of eight doctors answered questions and spoke about the importance of reaching out to the broader medical community with the positive message of naturally spacing children.

Dr. Clint Leonard of Phoenix, Arizona, noted that it is perhaps easier to reach medical students and residents while they are in training. "They're there looking over your shoulder. They can't help but notice how you practice. The major hurdle," he said, "from my politically correct generation is the fear of not giving someone something they want."

Dr. Mary Davenport, an obstetrician-gynecologist from El Sobrante, California, who formerly prescribed contraception and committed abortions before converting to a 100-percent pro-life practice, spoke about the lack of support in the medical field. "There are only a handful of ob-gyn's in the country who won't provide contraception," she said.

Dr. Mary Martin, an ob-gyn in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, spoke of leading by example: "The emergency room called about another physician's patient who was having a problem with her IUD [intrauterine device]," she said. "They thought that it was coming



Father Daniel McCaffrey dedicates the new Billings Ovulation Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

out. I told them to remove it. Here's a case where we now have a teachable moment."

"When I was on call and patients who were delivering via [Caesarean] section wanted tubal ligations, I wouldn't perform them," said Dr. Martin. "During that time when the mother is overcome with emotion for the baby, I would explain that I was a faithful Catholic. Half a dozen times this came up, and my partners supported me. One of them eventually converted to Catholicism."

The message doesn't need to come only from those in the medical field. "The Church is in need of priests who will preach about the family and NFP," said Dr. Michael Moloney, a family physician who is currently studying for the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

With regard to the health care "reform" debate, Dr. Hemstad commented, "If there's anything we need to fight for, it's the conscience-protection component. That's the only way we can come

back and practice health care from our Catholic beliefs."

First-ever Billings Ovulation Center

Perhaps the most exciting event during the conference was the dedication, blessing and tour of the new Billings Ovulation Center at St. Anthony Hospital in Oklahoma City. The center was dedicated and blessed by Father McCaffrey. Dr. Martin, who spearheaded this project, was obviously thrilled. "We're providing obstetrics, gynecology and fertility consistent with the Church's teaching, all under the umbrella of a faithful Catholic teaching hospital," she said. The center includes six examination rooms, a waiting room and four physician offices.

"After a conference in May 2008, I realized it would be great if physicians had a place where they could go to learn this," Dr. Martin explained. "We can accommodate residents and nursing students. We

have one of the few ovarian fertility monitors in the country. As an accredited teaching facility, I'm hoping that we can create a curriculum that could be introduced into medical and nursing schools."

She has already seen an encouraging response: "This has really taken off with the family practice residents. Virtually all of them are already NFP. They're becoming enculturated in this. We're attracting physicians who want to practice without using contraceptives."

"We've embarked on 'mission impossible,'" said Father Habiger, who spoke about the importance of teaching the truth about human sexuality. "Our success isn't measured by the world but by how God sees it. There will be tremendous opposition to what we are doing, because our work supports marriage, the family and life."

"Dr. Martin's new center will have a tremendous impact on how doctors practice reproductive medicine," said Ek. "She's completely removing the birth control pill from the picture. Because of her new center, medical students will see female fertility as a natural function of the human body."

Tim Drake serves as senior writer for the *National Catholic Register*. He writes from St. Joseph, Minnesota. For more information on the Billings ovulation method of naturally spacing children and the Billings Ovulation Method Association-USA, go to www.boma-usa.org.

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