



NEWSLETTER

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Family Solidarity

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EDITORIAL

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BUT FIRST OUR PLANNED WEBINARS

This October, Pope Francis will launch the most ambitious church renewal project since the Second Vatican Council when he opens the synod for a “synodal Church”. This isn't simply about a gathering in Rome, but a discernment process involving every diocese in the world.

The opening of the Synod will take place in the Vatican and in every diocese. The Holy Father in the Vatican will inaugurate this synodal path: 9-10th October. Under the guidance of the local bishop, each diocese will open with the same celebration on Sunday 17th October.

Family Solidarity will host a webinar on the 14th October, at which Jason Osborne (journalist, Irish Catholic) will give his views on what has happened to far and what we should expect from the Synod. Other webinars will follow.

You might register to attend by sending an email to familysolidarityireland@gmail.com and we will send you a link. The webinars will be recorded and made available on our website.

The introduction of the Preparatory Document for the Synod.

The Church of God is convoked in Synod. The path entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and

Mission” will solemnly open on the 9th – 10th of October 2021 in Rome and on the following 17th of October in each particular Church. One fundamental stage will be the celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 2023, which will be followed by the implementation phase that will again involve the particular Churches.

With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”

This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church’s “renewal” proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open Herself to mission. Our “journeying together” is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God.

The full preparatory document can be downloaded from:
<http://www.synod.va/en/documents/english-version-of-the-preparatory-document.html>

IRELAND'S RAISING NUMBER OF DIVORCES WILL HARM CHILDREN



There was a huge increase of applications for divorce last year. It was the highest number since divorce was introduced in 1997. There are many reasons why we should be worried about it, not least because children affected by parental divorce have a higher risk of developing a variety of difficulties.

The 29pc increase in divorce applications in 2020 is probably mainly due to the effect of the 2019 referendum that significantly halved the waiting time for divorce. Nonetheless, the number of broken marriages in the country keeps increasing. By the time of the last census in 2016, almost 150,000 couples had gone their separate ways.

It is true that Ireland still has one of the lowest divorce rates in Europe, but the marriage rate is also declining and for

every four couples who marry in Ireland each year, roughly one couple breaks up. All those trends should raise public concern about the negative long-term effects of breakdowns, particularly on children.

A recent article published in the *Journal of Psychiatric Research* found that children of divorcees have a higher risk of mental health problems. The article is a meta-analysis aggregating the results of other studies and it takes into consideration a total sample of more than half a million people. It is the first for many years to consider a great variety of mental health aspects.

The authors observed “a consistent negative association between parental divorce on all observed dimensions [among children]: depression, anxiety, distress, suicide (attempts and ideation), alcohol and drug consumption, as well as smoking”. Different affective and behavioural dimensions are negatively affected by divorce. “Parental divorce may be consistently connected to detrimental long-term effects, whereby their sizes vary across samples and measures, but with a clear and marked but unspecific disadvantage for those who had experienced it”, the article claims.

These results are consistent with similar studies carried in the past which outlined the long-term negative effects of breakdown on the mental health of children of divorcees.

Paul Amato, possibly the leading sociologist of marriage, found that over half of couples who divorce are in low conflict as distinct from high conflict marriages. He claims that, at least in low-conflict relationships, parents should try and stay together as in those cases, children have experienced a generally positive family life and are not prepared for the break-up of their family.

In Ireland, we don't know how many marriages that end in separation or divorce are low-conflict or high-conflict. If we have the welfare of children in mind, we should find out.

ASSISTED SUICIDE BILL WAS TOO FLAWED TO CONTINUE



The Private Member's Bill to legalise assisted suicide and euthanasia, proposed by Deputy Gino Kenny, has been rejected by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice as it contains serious flaws and it was

criticised by the majority of the public submissions, particularly by doctors.

The Committee has recommended that a Special Oireachtas Committee should be established to undertake an examination of the topics raised by the report on the proposed Bill.

Major legal concerns had been raised by the Office of Parliamentary Legal Advisers, which found errors in all sections of the Bill. One section would be vulnerable to a constitutional challenge as it delegates too much to the Minister for Justice, while the ambiguities and serious drafting errors in other sections, they said, could potentially render the Bill vulnerable to a challenge before courts.

The Bill was badly drafted and the Committee rejected the suggestion that it could be improved if progressed to the next stage. Last year, David Quinn debated the Bill with Gino Kenny and the TD did not appear to understand his own piece of legislation.

The possibility of establishing a Citizens' Assembly on these topics was also excluded as "Members considered that Parliament is the appropriate forum for consideration of this matter" (p. 34)

Last November, as part of the scrutiny, the Committee opened a call for written submissions on the proposed Bill. Over 1,400 submissions were received, the majority of which were critical of the Bill. One of the submissions came from the Family Solidarity. (See newsletter n. 91)

The strongest opposition came from the medical profession. The report tells us that the Committee received 64 individual medical submissions, the majority of which

were opposed to the Bill, and 36 submissions from medical stakeholders (professional bodies, medical schools, etc.). “Nearly all the 36 submissions in this category stated their opposition to the proposed Bill or raised their doubts and concerns over elements contained within the Bill.” (p. 17)

They said that portraying assisted suicide as an alternative to suffering, “would promote the wrong message in relation to terminal illnesses”. (p. 17) The doctors objected to the title of the “Dying with Dignity” Bill as “it undermines the work of palliative organisations by implying that assisted dying is the better or the only way to have dignity when dying.” They also highlighted their concern for the lack of provision for conscientious objection for pharmacists, who have to provide the lethal drugs.

Over half of the 29 submissions from rights-based organisations were against or raised concern with some elements of the Bill, and all of the 435 submissions from faith-based organisations opposed the Bill, highlighting the sanctity and value of all lives.

Ten submissions came from individuals and groups from other jurisdictions, including Irish people who live abroad. They were evenly split between those in favour and those against the proposed legislation. One of them outlined the experience in Canada, where the introduction of euthanasia “had resulted in significant impacts on palliative

care. Additionally, they have seen continuous cases of non-compliance with the law and increasing cases of vulnerable, elderly people being suggested to avail of medical assistance in dying because the costs of their care is too great or their perceived quality of life is too poor.”

The report by the Committee for Justice concluded that the Bill “has serious technical issues in several sections, that it may have unintended policy consequences – particularly regarding the lack of sufficient safeguards to protect against undue pressure being put on vulnerable people to avail of assisted dying – that the drafting of several sections of the Bill contain serious flaws that could potentially render them vulnerable to challenge before the courts, and that the gravity of such a topic as assisted dying warrants a more thorough examination which could potentially benefit from detailed consideration by a Special Oireachtas Committee”. And for all these reasons it should not progress.

This is a small but significant victory that has been achieved thanks to the direct involvement of the medical profession. They deal every with suffering and with end-of-life situations, and their voices should be taken in great consideration at Special Oireachtas Committee that will discuss these topics again soon.

However, there is still an uphill battle ahead as most TDs seem to favour assisted suicide in some form.

IF WE WANT A FUTURE, WE MUST PROMOTE ‘FAMILISM’ NOT ‘WORKISM’



In many countries, including Ireland, not enough babies are being born to prevent the population ageing and declining. Many factors are at work, including the cost of living. But another, linked factor, is that increasingly we prioritise work over family, that is ‘workism’ supplants ‘familism’. Different strategies have been implemented by governments to tackle low fertility among couples, including subsidised day-care but a new report by the Institute for Family Study suggests this kind of approach can backfire because it still promotes the idea that work,

and the workplace, are more important than family and the home.

A common assumption in modern societies is that if men and women share household chores equally, and women can be facilitated to do as many hours paid work as men via affordable day-care, then the number of births will go up. But the IFS's new report, "More work, fewer babies" challenges this assumption and says that the more a society values the workplace and careers ('workism'), the more the fertility rate will drop.

The report finds that in wealthy countries work is not simply a necessity but also an important source of value and meaning. Providing more benefits aimed at workers (universal child-care, parental leave programs, etc.) enforces what the authors of the report call a "workist" attitude. Government policies that promote more time at work can reduce fertility rates further.

The report focuses on the Nordic countries because they introduced affordable day-care and generous parental leave programmes a long time ago. For a while it seemed to some that this encouraged more child-bearing, but in fact all of the Nordic countries have below replacement fertility levels.

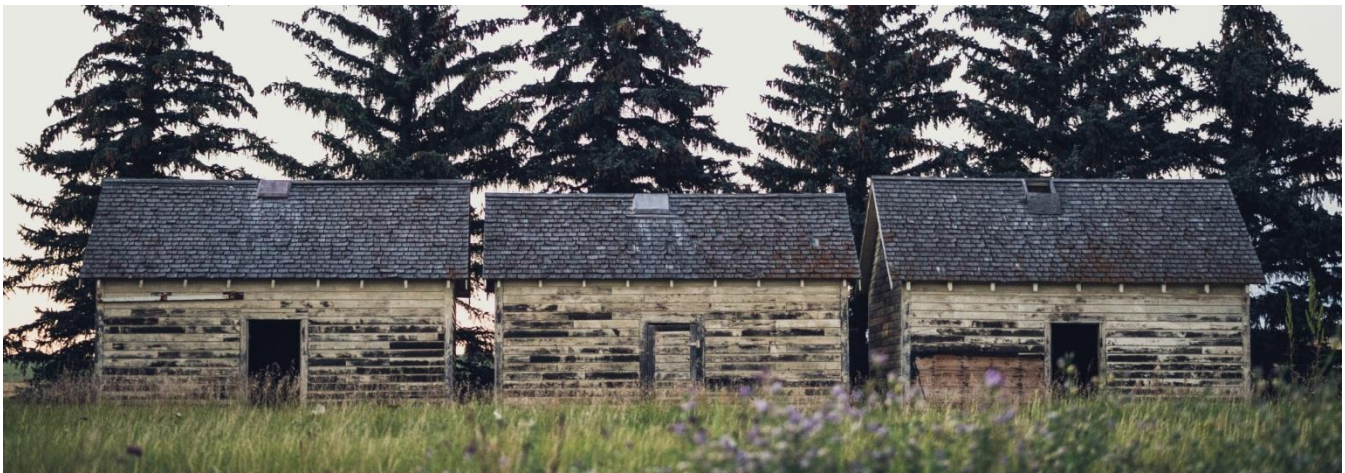
The report claims that Nordic policies are too focused on the division of labour between men and women and focus “not enough attention on the value that individuals and society directly place on work and family”. The policies reinforce the idea that work is the centre of meaning in life, and so, fully egalitarian couples express their mutual commitment by supporting each other’s success at work, rather than spending more time as a family. “Workism is associated with suppressed fertility at high level of socioeconomic development”.

Instead “familism”, the valued placed on family, supports having children. Evidence from international databases shows that those couples who value family more than work have more children. Negative fertility effects are concentrated among those individuals – both men and women – who rate work more highly than family. This pattern can be observed in all countries, but it is more pronounced in wealthiest countries, with robust social welfare, where individuals work more for the accomplishment of personally motivated projects, rather than simply for their material well-being.

This confirms that “familism”, more than gender equality, is associated with more procreation.

This is true also on a country level. When “workism” declines, as it has happened for instance in Poland between 2012 and 2017, fertility increases.

The report concludes that “workism is a clearly identifiable social phenomenon significantly associated with fertility outcomes”. When couples regard their home, rather than the workplace, as the primary value of their live, their fertility will be higher. If we want a future as a society we have to promote ‘familism’ over ‘workism’.



PRESS RELEASE | FAFCE & Fundacion Madrina Publish a Reflection Document On Family: The Missing Ingredient In Rural Revitalisation

Brussels, Madrid; 29 July 2021

Today, the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) and the Fundación Madrina published a joint reflection paper entitled “Family Associations: The Missing Ingredient in Rural Revitalisation”.

During the presentation of the document, Vincenzo Bassi, the President of FAFCE, underlined that “*it is essential to*

look to reality: the community is a family of families. And the market only arises from the community". This document presents itself as a "joint reaction of FAFCE and Fundación Madrina" to *The Long-Term Vision on Rural Areas in the EU*, published by the European Commission on June 30th, a document which attempts to flesh out a strategy to achieve "stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040"^[1]. Since 2019, for the first time in its history, the European Commission has directly addressed the topic of depopulation in Europe, in the person of Dubravka Šuica, the Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, who is also responsible for coordinating work on the effects of demographic change on connectedness and access to services.

Conrado Giménez, the founder and president of Fundación Madrina, anticipates that the economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19 will last at least half a seven-year economic cycle, based on the fact that "*there is a debt crisis with regard to family and business bankruptcies, which has only just begun*". There has also been a "*devastation of the self-employed and of businesses without precedent since the Second World War*", causing 26% of families to be at risk of poverty and social vulnerability. He understands that "*the crisis has come to stay, as there are no expectations of the generation of employment in cities, where the largest percentage of the population affected by the economic and*

social crisis of the pandemic resides, due to the fact that there is zero incentive to start companies.” These facts are verified every day, given the constant increase in requests for emergency aid that are made to the Foundation. In this sense, *“the only way out for evicted families in large cities and towns is the countryside.”* In the rural world, these families and their children will find a *“more humane and sustainable habitat”*. Likewise, it affirms that *“in depopulated rural areas, the presence of children, who fill aging towns with few inhabitants with life, is most valued.”*

Josefina Bengoechea, co-author of the reflection document and a Member of the Board of Fundación Madrina and of the organisation *New Women for Europe*, affirms that *“this cooperation with FAFCE is only the beginning of a broader cooperation on the issue of integral human development, the only answer to the sustainable development of our planet”*. For this reason, the European Commission’s strategy would have to be developed with *“a cross-cutting look at the family and its needs”*. *Families are the generative forces that make rural areas more liveable”*, not merely as a result of the local market, the environment, or nature. Parents, with their children, are therefore *“the starting point of any new community capable of creating local institutions and attracting new people.”*

Among its most recent projects, Fundación Madrina has developed the *Pueblos Madrina* program in response to

some of the problems that affect families, such as the phenomenon of “family homelessness”, “Child Guarantee”, “maternal and child poverty”, and “energy poverty”, which causes loss of home, evictions, failure in school, and various childhood pathologies, among other direct and collateral problems. These realities were observed while carrying out social support programs for vulnerable families in rural areas. The document presents this PM program as a “good practice”, which could be expanded as a model throughout Europe. In addition, the Foundation, with the aforementioned *PM* project, strives to achieve energy and food self-sufficiency in the towns of depopulated Spain, generating energy and agri-food cooperatives, as well as the generation of rural employment in a sustainable way.

This concept of “a tailored suit”, which the Madrina Foundation wishes to promote in each rural area of depopulated Spain, is intended to be carried out through the four axes of development contained in the Pueblos Madrina programme, and which correspond to the 4Rs of “repopulation, reforestation, reconstruction and revaluation”. With this, the aim is to develop rural repopulation that is much more humane, accessible, and sustainable over time, and that roots the most vulnerable families in the villages and over time, as it is already doing along the repopulated valleys of Amblés, Ambroz, and La

Corneja in Ávila, as well as Cuenca, Toledo and other communities. More than 300 families and 1000 children have been rehoused, and another 700 families in vulnerable situations in large cities are waiting. The document highlights the role of families and family associations in “facing demographic challenges, since they are the first place where this interdependence is revealed and is the true antidote to loneliness.” This document also comes at a historical moment of change in the real estate market, with a growing interest in rural areas throughout Europe. Family associations are presented as “a necessity for the prosperity of every community.” Supporting them in their role would be a solution to addressing the two main factors that cause antagonism and inequalities in development between rural and urban areas, including loneliness and market inefficiencies. The latter, the document concludes, can also be corrected “considering family and demographic policies as an investment and not as a cost.”

What is FAFCE

The Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) is made up of 18 associations, plus 5 observer members and 4 associate organizations, from 17 European countries. Founded in 1997 as a local law association in Strasbourg, it has held participatory status in the Council of Europe since 2001. FAFCE is a member of the Forum of

International Catholic NGOs and is also registered in the Transparency Register of the institutions of the European Union. Its General Secretariat is located in Brussels (Belgium). (See reminder of the appeal for additional funding for FAFCE which we made in Newsletter 92)

What is Fundación Madrina

Established in 2000, in Madrid, Spain, it is a member of New Women For Europe and has participated in the drafting of laws in favor of single-parent families in the EU and UN. The mission of the Madrina Foundation is to work for the most vulnerable children and mothers, victims of violence, abandonment, abuse or social inequality. The FM fights against “maternal and child poverty” by welcoming, supporting and empowering the mother, knowing that “behind every child there is a mother”. It supports the Family as the most important company in a country and considers women the CEO of the same. This support is carried out through different areas of action such as food, health, health support, training, employment and entrepreneurship, and reception; and it is realised through programs such as the 24-hour health Call Center, the “maternal-infant” emergency, the Baby Bank, the Mother Program, the SAMI Clinic, the Diamond Entrepreneurship training, the Godmother Towns (Pueblos Madrina), the Godmother Grandparents (Abuelos Madrina), the Godmother Homes (Hogares Madrina), and reception apartments, with the aim of being a centre of reference and excellence in comprehensive support for the most vulnerable children and mothers, especially for families with children of school age and with difficulty in achieving their own social,

school, and labour integration. A recipient of various national and international awards, recently the FM has obtained the Certificate of Quality, ISO 9001 and Corporate Social Responsibility

THE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY ON DEMOGRAPHY

By FAFCE

Pornography often pretends to be confined to the hidden secret of sexual fantasies. However, even if hidden, pornography heavily impacts a person's relations with its family, its peers, its community and the entire society overall. The current demographic winter in Europe demonstrates a shift from the true wealth of society – family and children – to the promotion of individualistic short-term happiness. The consumption of pornography is a striking symptom of this change.

The impact of pornography on the individual level is starting to be widely documented. The effects of porn consumption are numerous. It is to begin with a perverse and counterproductive form of sexual education for children and adolescents, who will develop unrealistic, emotionally detached and often violent expectations of sexuality.^[1] Pornography is equally problematic for adults, both men and women, with addiction to pornography

having disastrous consequences on the psychological balance of its consumers.[2] It also impacts couples, as it rejects the notions of consent, monogamy, stability and occults the profound connection of sexuality with the dignity of human procreation.[3] Moreover, pornography is not only a problem for those who view it, but also a violation of the human dignity of those who participate in it, as the working conditions of porn actors include degrading treatments.[4] More seriously, the porn industry profits from the diffusion of the worst crimes – rape, torture, child abuse – while promoting in a diffuse way a culture of rape, male dominance and sexual selfishness.[5]

However, besides acknowledging the harm that pornography inflicts on the interpersonal relationships, few people consider pornography's effect on the community, as for example the impact of pornography on demography and the decrease in birth rate. This question was raised early this year in an article of Auguste Meyrat on "The Pornification of Society".

The unprecedented scale of consumption of pornography by both men and women needs more attention: as for today, porn is one of the top researches online.[6] Therefore, even if the level of impact of pornography at the individual level can be discussed, the fact that porn consumption is so widespread implies that

its negative impacts are multiplied with the number of consumers.

Subtle effects of porn consumption such as a reluctance to commit to a relationship will thus multiply into entire generations unwilling to enter or stay into stable relationships based on fidelity and monogamy. Since a stable relationship is one of the first basis to start a family, porn consumption thus impacts the wish to have children. Although the impact of porn consumption in the decrease of fertility in Europe is still yet to be assessed, it most certainly constitutes an explanatory element within a general explanation of an individualist society based on immediate wellbeing, comfort and satisfaction that dissuades to enter in a relation of responsibility with a child.

“Pornography destroys human drive. Compared to pulling out one’s phone and watching titillating videos, taking a person out and having a conversation is difficult and uninteresting. Compared to the easy pleasure of pornography, the lasting pleasure of a happy marriage or even a job well-done is relatively pointless. Compared to the stress-free satisfaction of virtual sex, the hard-won satisfaction of raising children and building a business is unrealistic”.

With pornography, sexuality is no longer something you do together, and is definitely disconnected from the openness

to life. It promotes a society of instant enjoyment and comfort rather than a society that generates life and accepts the joyful responsibility of caring for children, who are the treasure for a dynamic and sustainable society. As stated by Auguste Meyrat, pornography “*has effectively sterilized whole generations of men who now lack the initiative to marry and have children*”. More profound perhaps is also the loneliness experienced by porn viewers. Only relationships of friendship, love and support can help to overcome an addiction to pornography. The support of a community becomes then a deeper cure for a disease of which pornography is only a symptom: loneliness.

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[5] R. Jensen and G. Dines, “The Content of Mass-Marketed Pornography,” *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality*, (1998): 65–100. Jochen Peter and Patti M. Valkenburg, “Adolescents’ exposure to a sexualized media environment and their notions of women as sex objects,” *Sex Roles* 56 (2007): 381-395. Ana J. Bridges, Robert Wosnitzer, Erica Scharrer, Chyng Sun, and Rachael Liberman, “Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update,” *Violence against Women* 16, no. 10 (2010): 1065–1085. Mary Anne Layden, “Pornography and Violence: A

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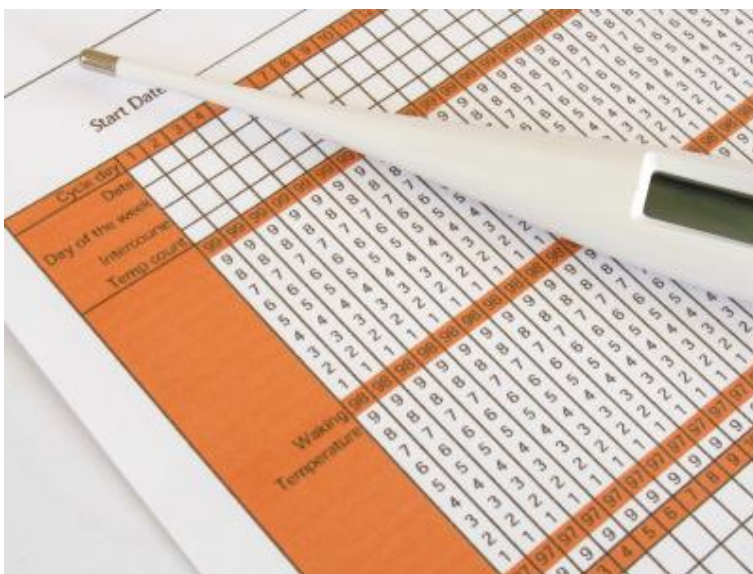
[6] Marc Barnes, *Porn the Evangelist*, Newpolity (2020). Available at <https://newpolity.com/blog/porn-the-evangelist>

From Mercatornet:

IS NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING GOOD FOR MARRIAGES, AND DO FAMILY APPS HAVE THE SAME POTENTIAL?

Fertility apps are now outstripping longstanding contraceptives like the pill.

by Gerard Migeon



We are in the midst of a technology shift that could revolutionise reproductive healthcare and family planning. Millions of couples are using apps that promise “natural contraception”. It’s time to engage these

couples, inviting them to explore a better way, and giving them the support they need to grow closer through the self-restraint demanded by Natural Family Planning.

Proponents of natural family planning (NFP) methods have long claimed that they are good for marriages and that they

lower divorce rates. Pope St Paul VI clearly stated in his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* that these methods are consistent with God's plan for marriage and sexuality. He presciently warned about the use of contraceptives and its effects on society.

Scholars like Robert Michael, Mary Eberstadt, and Mark Regnerus have provided different but complementary expositions of the deep social shift that has taken place since the inception of widely available contraceptives. Robert Michael, an economist from the University of Chicago, has argued that widespread use of contraception was a major cause of the increase in divorce rates between 1960 and 1972. Mary Eberstadt presented the pill as the technology that facilitated the sexual revolution in her book *Adam and Eve after the Pill*. Scholar Mark Regnerus, in his 2017 book *Cheap Sex* concludes that, along with pornography and online dating, contraception has drastically lowered the access cost of noncommittal sexual activities, thus lessening the motivation for commitment. As numbers of partners and ease of sexual access have increased with contraceptive availability, marriage rates and even dating have been on a downward trend. By contrast, more than fifty years after Pope Paul VI's warning about contraception, several compelling studies present new evidence that the practice of Natural Family Planning strengthens marriages.

What Natural Family Planning Is . . .

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is an umbrella term for various methods that teach women to recognise and chart the biological signs of their cycles. Modern methods of NFP provide standardised techniques and tools that allow women to determine what days they are fertile. With this information, couples can choose to have intercourse or not, based on whether they would like to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

It is important to note that *women are not always fertile*. In fact, they are relatively rarely fertile, as ovulation happens once per cycle and an egg lives only twelve to twenty-four hours. Given that sperm can live up to seven days in a fertile environment, the “fertile window” for couples is around eight days per month, with the two days around ovulation being the most fertile. As a result, a couple that seeks to naturally avoid pregnancy will avoid intercourse for about eight to twelve days each cycle, depending on a number of factors (method used, expertise at charting, women’s regularity, and the clarity of the biological signs the couple monitors).

Modern methods of natural family planning include ovulation methods (Creighton, Billings), sympto-thermal methods (Couple to Couple League, Sympto-Pro), and sympto-hormonal methods (Marquette, FEMM). Each has demonstrated high effectiveness rates both for avoiding and for achieving pregnancy. All these methods have

Catholic roots and are faithful in their teaching to the periodic abstinence approach. In other words, in these methods, couples avoid intercourse during the fertile period.

. . . and What It Is Not

In the past twenty years, other methods and apps have been designed that introduce the use of barrier methods of contraception during the fertile period. This practice makes it possible for couples to have sex during this time even if they want to avoid pregnancy.

In 2018, Natural Cycles became the first FDA-cleared app to function as a natural form of birth control. Developed in Sweden by physicist Elina Berglund and her husband, Natural Cycles boasts a typical effectiveness rate of 93 percent. The app works by monitoring a woman's basal body temperature to determine her fertile window, during which time it instructs users to "abstain or use protection". In March 2021, the FDA cleared another app, Clue Birth Control, which boasts a 92 percent typical effectiveness rate. While Clue, like Natural Cycles, uses algorithmic data to determine a woman's fertile window, Clue only requires users to input when their period starts — monitoring no fertile signs whatsoever — making it closer to the rhythm method than to modern FABMs. This quality also makes Clue, by its own admission, ineffective for women with irregular cycles. But since Clue also recommends barrier methods such as condoms during its estimated fertile

periods, one wonders if much of its effectiveness is based on the effectiveness of condoms (which have a typical effectiveness rate of 87 percent).

Because apps like Natural Cycles and Clue Birth Control suggest the use of barrier methods during fertile periods, adherents of Natural Family Planning do not consider these methods to be true forms of NFP.

The Distinctive Values of NFP

As Birute Obeleniene and her co-authors explained in a February 2021 article in the *Linacre Quarterly*, in 2001 the WHO replaced the designation of NFP with Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABMs), embracing the use of condoms as part of the practice of natural methods. The intention was to incorporate NFP methods in “the broad terminology of contraception in terms of logic and values.” In truth, argue Obeleniene and her co-authors, the distinctive values of NFP mean that its users have a significantly different mindset and use very different methods than couples who contracept. Thus, NFP is properly understood not as a subcategory of FABMs but as an altogether different approach. The authors argue that “despite the fact that abstinence can be difficult at times, it is the method’s strength.” This practice of self-denial validates that the partners in the marriage are not just “biological social constructs with uncontrollable sexual impulses,” but persons with free will and the ability to grow in virtue and self-control.

Among couples practicing the self-discipline of periodic abstinence surveyed in 2004, women reported feeling more respected and less “used”. A study conducted among



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German NFP users stated that NFP “improves communication and mutual respect between the spouses”. In the practice of NFP, the sexual relationship of a man and a woman is not a purely

biological relationship, but in the terms of Pope Paul VI, “the primary form of interpersonal communion,” underscoring the spiritual dimension of the mutual and total gift of self that is sexuality.

Conversely, the authors explain that “if sexual intercourse does not express a comprehensive human experience but merely a quenching of a sexual desire, then we are talking about the dehumanisation of sexual intercourse”. This is what happens when a part of their human reality — the couples’ fertility — is artificially suppressed with contraceptive methods. In such a case, the sexual act is separated from its procreative potential. This separation can harm the relationship, subtly shifting the dynamic to one characterised by what St. John Paul II called “reciprocal consumption”.

The Effects of Periodic Abstinence on Marital Relationships

The effects of NFP use on couples' relationships were further studied in a new article in the same volume of the *Linacre Quarterly*, co-authored by Marquette University's Richard Fehring, PhD, RN, and the Couple to Couple League's Mike Manhart, PhD. The article offers an extensive literature review of the marital benefits of NFP.

The authors cite several studies conducted among couples who practiced NFP, which show fairly consistent results over the past fifty years. The first such study in 1970 showed that "75 percent of the husbands and 74 percent of the wives felt NFP was helpful to marriage, despite 40 percent of husbands and 22 percent of wives reporting that they had often difficulties with periodic abstinence." Similarly, a 2016 study among users of the Creighton model of NFP revealed that while "60 percent of respondents stated they sometimes had difficulty with abstinence, 80 percent of men and 85 percent of women felt the use of NFP helped their marriage".

The most recent such study was conducted in the United States and Western Europe, collecting the 2,560 online surveys from users of two major NFP organisations. The article reports that "64 percent of women and 74 percent of men found that NFP improved their relationship, while less than 10 percent felt the use of NFP had harmed it".

Interestingly, this study mentioned that 47 percent of respondents had previously used contraceptives.

Two studies (Wilson, 2005 and Rhomberg and Weissenbach, 2013) examined the divorce rates among NFP users in the United States and Germany, and both showed a similarly low divorce rate: 3 percent of the 505 US NFP users and 3.1 percent of the 486 German users of the Sympto-Thermal Method. While these divorce rates are very low, the challenge with these studies is that, as the authors note, they are “cross sectional and not population based”. In addition, “other factors could contribute to or prevent divorce,” such as religiosity. Further, the low response rate prevents these studies from being generalisable across a diverse population.

Fehring and Manhart conducted a new study that used the most recent data set of ever-married US women of reproductive age from the 2015–2017 National Survey of Family Growth. One of their goals was to verify whether there would be “greater odds of divorce among those ever-married women who ever used sterilisation, the hormonal pill, and condoms as a method of family planning compared to women who never used those methods”. They also wanted to determine if there were “lower odds of divorce among women who ever used NFP, attend church frequently, and feel that religion is important in their lives” compared to those who don’t. Their sample included 2,582 women with a mean age of 36.8 years, 70.8 percent of

whom were married and 19.7 percent divorced, 7.8 percent separated, and 1.7 percent widowed. Not surprisingly, most women reported having used other methods than NFP, while 1 percent reported current use of NFP, and 20 percent had ever used NFP.

Their conclusion shows that marriages fared better among couples who used NFP. For instance, they report that “with ever-use of NFP, 14 percent were divorced or separated, and the rate was 10 percent when excluding the rhythm method users from the sample. In contrast, 39 percent of women who were sterilised and 27 percent of women using the Pill were divorced or separated.”

While this study has obvious limitations, it continues to indicate a significant difference between the relationship outcomes of NFP users and couples who use contraception. As Fehring and Manhart point out, there is a need for more research to understand and establish further the benefits of NFP for marriages, but the initial evidence is compelling.

Cultural Shifts

Could we finally be entering a new, post-Pill era? The voices of women who experienced the long-ignored side effects of hormonal contraception are starting to resonate through the echo chamber of the internet and spilling over into traditional media. In reading these accounts, one seemingly subjective effect is that women on the pill don’t “feel themselves”. This may be the result of high doses of artificial hormones affecting their moods, perceptions, and

reactions to stress, as documented by Dr. Sarah Hill in her recent book *This Is Your Brain on Birth Control*. One can even speculate, reasonably so, how the Pill affects the way women view their relationships with their partners, to the extent that it could negatively affect their marriage.

We are in the midst of a technology shift that could revolutionise reproductive healthcare and family planning. More than 13 million women use one of the two FDA-cleared apps, Natural Cycles and Clue. That's more than use the Pill.

Could these methods that allow the use of physical barriers during the fertile window, while not bringing the full benefits of NFP and periodic abstinence, make a difference for couples? Could the experience eventually lead them to practice NFP? In other words, could these clearly insufficient approaches still bring couples closer to the fullness of understanding of their physical relationship? There is hope in the fact that they remove the chemical change women experience on hormonal contraception. Perhaps, either because they dislike the use of condoms or because they realise that avoiding all sexual contact during the fertile period is the most effective way to avoid pregnancy, some couples may come to experience the gift of periodic abstinence.

That's where promoters of the traditional methods rooted in the *Humanae Vitae* principles may have a role to play. It's time to engage these couples, inviting them to explore

a better way and giving them the support they need to grow closer through their use of NFP. An active effort to educate and encourage these couples could make an important difference for marriages and families.

Gerard and Anna Migeon founded Natural Womanhood, a non-profit that promotes fertility charting so that women know their bodies, and enjoy good health, sexual intimacy, and effective family planning.

DAY FOR LIFE 2021



Day for Life is celebrated annually by the Catholic Church in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. It is a day dedicated to raising awareness of the meaning and value of human life at every stage and in every condition. This year's *Day for*

Life will be celebrated in Ireland on Sunday 3 October on the theme 'The Good Samaritan: A Model of Compassion'.

In the context of the recent proposal to introduce assisted suicide, both in Ireland and the UK, this year's message invites Catholics to consider a more positive and compassionate response to the care of people who are in the final stages of life. The Catholic Church's approach to end of life care is well articulated in the recent Vatican document *Samaritanus bonus* on the care of persons in the

critical and terminal phases of life. In that document we are reminded that Jesus gave us the image of the good Samaritan as the model for our compassion and our solidarity with those who find themselves vulnerable and who fear being abandoned in their final illness. The Good Samaritan is one who “crosses over”, who “binds up wounds” and who, most important of all “stays with” the person for as long as is required.

For more information and resources please visit:
<http://councilforlife.ie/Day4Life/>

In the last Newsletter we carried an appeal from FAFCE. The following is an extract:

In order to maintain our current level of activities, we need to keep a professional team in Brussels. This means that, to balance our budget this year, we still need €25.000.

Due to the many financial difficulties that our own Member Family Associations are having, next year we will have an outstanding balance of €75.000.

If every person who reads this could give as little as 1, 5, or 10 euros, we can easily fill this gap.

Despite this difficulty, we feel honoured that you have entrusted to us this huge responsibility, both towards the family and the Church. Now, we are sure that you would be

happy to share our responsibility of ensuring families' support and growth.

You can make a donation:

- Online (filling the form on website <https://www.fafce.org/support-us/>)
- By bank transfer (IBAN : FR76 1027 8060 3900 0211 3760 155 ; BIC : CMCIFR2A) (*Note this Bank is in France if you are making the payment on line*)
- By a check issued to FAFCE (to be sent to Square de Meeûs, 19, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium)

For any information regarding a donation please do not hesitate to contact: info@fafce.org

We, Family Solidarity, can also make the transfer on your behalf. If requested.

Thank you all who have paid their subscriptions and made donations to further our aims. We have put a return envelope with a subscription slip with all copies of the Newsletter as it is simpler than selecting those from whom we have not heard. If you have contributed in the last year, ignore this.