

Responsible Parenthood Means God is in the Picture
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GLENVIEW, IL (April 28, 2010) - How many children should a couple have? How should a couple arrive at this decision? The following might shed some light on this. It is an interview between the Natural Family Planning teaching organization Couple to Couple League (CCL) and Fr. Richard Hogan, a former CCL board member and pastor of St. Raphael in Crystal, Minn.

CCL: What's your definition of responsible parenthood?

Father Hogan: Responsible parenthood is the decision by a married couple either to try to conceive a child or to postpone a pregnancy while living according to the culture of life (not resorting to contraception, sterilization, or abortion, IVF, et cetera). This decision must be based on a virtuous assessment of the married couple's current situation in life.

CCL: How has popular culture challenged or cheapened this notion?

Father Hogan: In my view, there are two poles acknowledged by the current culture. (1) Any couple – married or not – has the right to control their bodies to prevent pregnancy. The means used to accomplish this goal is decided by the couple and a physician. It is not necessary even to acknowledge the way God created us because the means used is not to be dictated to the couple by God or anyone else. (2) Every couple – married or not, including gay couples – has a right to a child. If a child is desired, any means is legitimate for “acquiring” a child.

CCL: What does it mean to have a “right order of priorities” about parenthood and family planning, as Pope Paul VI put it?

Father Hogan: The “right order of priorities” means that married couples acknowledge the moral teachings of the Church regarding sexuality and also that they are generous in giving life. It was summarized in a statement Pope John Paul II made to parents: “In your effort to give everything to your children, do not forget that the greatest gift you as parents can give is a brother or a sister.” That's a paraphrase. Of course, there are times when the “right order of priorities” also means that couples should postpone a pregnancy for unselfish prudent reasons, such as economic hardship, a recent death or a serious sickness.

CCL: How can a couple ensure that their decisions about family planning correspond to God's will?

Father Hogan: Prayer, talking and listening to each other carefully. They also should be practicing their faith, be fulfilling their familial responsibilities and their obligations at their

workplace. If they are generally trying to live a virtuous life, consistent with the wisdom of the Church, then they can be reasonably sure that they are following what God would wish them to do.

CCL: What makes responsible parenthood such a tricky concept to master? Does a couple ever master it?

Father Hogan: The chief difficulty with the term “responsible parenthood” is that in some circles it has been confused with natural family planning. It essentially means a prudential decision by a married heterosexual couple to try to conceive or try to postpone a pregnancy. As with all prudential decisions, including vocational decisions – and this is actually a vocational decision which is part and parcel of the vocation of marriage – there is never an absolute certainty in the sense of mathematical certainty. There is only moral certainty: A conviction that one is doing the best in the particular situation one finds himself or herself.

There are two pitfalls regarding responsible parenthood. First, there is the culture’s rejection of it, the idea that couples exercising responsible parenthood by using NFP to postpone a pregnancy are doing the same thing as contracepting couples or couples using other means contrary to the culture of life. NFP couples are not doing the same thing as those using these other means.

Second, there is the idea that the very exercise of responsible parenthood is contrary to God’s will, that pregnancy should be left only to God and not to the married couple. This point of view is sometimes called providentialism.

CCL: When CCL couples practice responsible parenthood, what stands to be gained? How does that benefit society at large?

Father: They are living holy lives and in that sense contribute greatly to all of society and to the Church. For themselves they are leading a path of holiness, a path to heaven.

Father Hogan has written on the Theology of the Body, authored three books on the theology of Pope John Paul II, appeared on EWTN, and was an author and editor of the Image of God religious instruction program.

The above article appeared in the March/April 2010 issue of Family Foundations. To receive the magazine, sign up for a membership at Couple to Couple League International at www.ccli.org.

Natural Family Planning Classes Taught:
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