



Talking Points for Priests About

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING



STL NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

NFP. GOOD FOR LIFE.



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS
Office of Natural Family Planning

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Why This Guide?

Women's health and family planning are popular yet sensitive topics. Couples have identified clergy members among those sought out for advice and guidance when faced with these issues. We created this packet for you—to support you in your pastoral ministry—to be best informed about the full beauty and application of Natural Family Planning as well as the full range of resources available to you and your parishioners.

This guide is for your use as you are talking to couples with different fertility-related issues. It is designed to be an easy reference for individual topics as well as a comprehensive guide to the resources available to you and your parishioners.

THERE IS A PAGE OF TALKING POINTS FOR EACH OF THE MOST COMMON SITUATIONS:

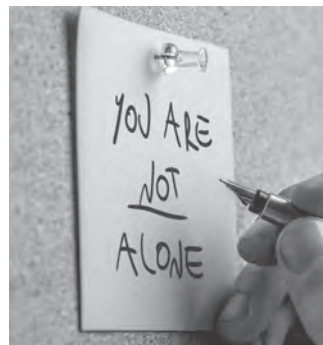
- Engaged Couples
- Miscarriage and Stillbirth
- Touched by Infertility
- Contracepting Couples

Most of these topics are sensitive in nature, and by the time couples are reaching out to you for spiritual and emotional support, they may be struggling or hurting. It is helpful to accompany them where they are, listen, be compassionate, and, when appropriate, share the information and resources in this guide.



We invite you to **refer parishioners to the Office of NFP** so we can offer excellent, focused care to compliment and nurture the theological and pastoral care you offer.

We also invite you to **have a Parish Ambassador** to be a resource and liaison to the Office of NFP.



We have included several helpful resources in this package. Please share freely.

Quick Overview

WHAT CATHOLICS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NFP

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the loving choice that respects women, respects marriage, and respects God. Here is what you need to know about why NFP is good for life:

1. MIND—NFP is the *smart* choice.

- It allows you and your spouse to plan when and how many children to have, and it is highly effective whether you are trying to avoid or achieve pregnancy.
- NFP fosters strong communication between spouses. Couples develop a profound reverence and understanding of their combined fertility.

2. BODY—NFP is the *healthy* choice.

- It cooperates with the natural cycle that God has given a woman without exposing her to harmful chemicals or toxins as with some methods of birth control.
- Because it doesn't mask symptoms, it can help reveal common issues including PMS (premenstrual syndrome); PCOS (polycystic ovarian syndrome); endometriosis; irregular bleeding; recurrent miscarriage; post-contraception side-effects.
- It can help overcome infertility, naturally, morally, and less expensively than treatments like IVF, IUI or other reproductive technologies.
- It is useful in every phase of a woman's life: teen, single (religious or unmarried), married, pre-/post- conception, while breastfeeding, and pre-menopausal.

3. SOUL—NFP is the *moral* choice.

- Just as it has no dangerous side effects, it has no dangerous soul effects, when used correctly. Couples can be responsible in family planning without being ensnared in the moral complications of contraception.

“ NFP allows us to give ourselves to each other

completely, freely, faithfully.

WHAT'S BETTER THAN THAT? ”



St. Agnes of Rome, patron saint of engaged couples

St. Joseph, patron saint of married people

St. Priscilla, patron saint of good marriages

- **Continuing your work.** Did you know that some couples who cohabitate before engagement have decided to live chastely and even apart before the wedding once the Catholic Church's teaching on fertility and intimacy are explained completely and lovingly? You may be the first person to share the beauty of the teaching with them. Once you share the strong theology, refer them to the Office of NFP and we will help them actualize the theology.
- **Each woman is unique.** Every woman's cycle is different, so understanding the signals that her body is naturally sending empowers her to learn about her own complete fertility cycle as well as to uncover potential health issues (PMS, PCOS, infertility, irregular periods, etc.). There are five different methods of NFP in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Each method has different features that may make one preferable over another to a couple. Contact the Office of NFP if there is a question about which method to use.
- **There are many myths about NFP:**
 - Using NFP does not mean you must have a large family (though some joyfully want to!).
 - It is not the same as the rhythm method or the calendar method. There is science and research behind modern methods of NFP.
 - It is not impossibly difficult to learn or follow. NFP, however, is best learned with a trained practitioner to ensure proper learning and use of the method.
 - It does not put the woman in control of the couple's sex life. Rather, learning about the wife's body enables the couple to make decisions together that are *best* for each other and the marriage.
 - Using NFP does not destroy a couple's sex life. Rather, it encourages sex as a more authentic expression of their relationship and total commitment to each other.

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- **Why BEFORE the wedding?** Couples benefit when they attend an introductory session about six months before the wedding – AND continue to learn and practice that method – regardless of when they plan to have children. Why? Because it encourages communication and self-discipline, fosters appreciation of their mutual fertility, AND it can help to reveal potential health issues that may not be recognized otherwise. Not only does this lay a strong foundation for the relationship, but NFP is easier to learn before marriage and helps build confidence in the method.
- **Strong marriage.** NFP increases communication between husband and wife. They become more in tune with each other’s needs, their family goals, and they can find strong bonding apart from sex. Communicating about fertility and intimacy is also good practice for discussing other important topics like money, career, family, etc.
- **Grace to do well.** Charting and practicing NFP is neither “easy” nor “too challenging” for couples to successfully navigate. With the support of a qualified teacher, the couple can learn the method to navigate their unique situation. As with the discernment of co-creating new life with God, He gives the grace to rise to these challenges. There are practical supports available with modern, scientific methods of NFP that work.
- **Responsible parenthood.** The Catholic Church’s teaching on having children is largely misunderstood as the command to have as many children as possible. When in fact, responsible parenthood is the attitude of discerning, with God’s guidance, and “guided by prudent consideration and generosity, elect to accept many children... also to be considered responsible, who, for serious reasons and with due respect for moral precepts, decide not to have another child for either a definite or an indefinite period of time.” (*Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI, 1969). When a couple discerns that there are serious reasons to avoid pregnancy for a time, NFP can help them to achieve that goal.



Refer To:

- **What Can NFP Do For You?** brochure
- **A Dozen Differences** handout
- **NFP Providers list** - archstl.org/nfp-providers
- **Introductory Session Schedule** - stlouisnfp.org/introductory-sessions
- ***Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love***
- **Talking Points for Contracepting Couples** (Page 11 in this guide)



St. Anthony of Padua, patron against infertility

St. Gerard Majella, patron of pregnant women

- **Pain of infertility:** Coping with infertility is grieving the loss of having biological children. It is not usually discovered until a couple wants a child and may come as a surprise. Infertility is on many women's minds daily. At the point of reaching out to you, the couple is suffering. An approach of accompaniment and listening is the most beneficial pastoral approach. Consider recommending the resources available from the Office of NFP (listed below) when the time is right.
- **Worthy in God's eyes.** When questioning why they haven't conceived, the couple may feel that they aren't worthy of God's blessing or love. Men and women may blame themselves, their pasts, something they did or didn't do, for why they are unable to conceive. It is an extremely isolated and lonely cross to carry. While there is never an easy answer to "why me?", there is no doubt that they are loved by God and the Church and that He is with them every step. They are no less of a man or woman. God still has a plan for them and their family.
- **Medical, emotional, spiritual support.** Couples touched by infertility need much support in all these areas. The Office of NFP can help with the medical support and NFP methods, but we also have the Enkindle Infertility Ministry to help with the emotional and spiritual support. Couples can meet with a licensed counselor, they can be connected with a seminarian to pray specifically for them, and they can follow our *#EnkindleWednesday* posts on social media. At the parish level, consider offering a support group, spiritual guidance, etc.
- **NFP compared to artificial reproductive technologies.** Reproductive technologies such as IVF (Invitro fertilization), IUI (Intrauterine Insemination), surrogacy, etc., may be perceived as a reasonable solution to infertility, but they are considered immoral options by the Church. For one thing, they introduce a third party into the act of creation and, as with IVF, may be abortifacient. The use of NFP is morally permissible, cheaper and safer than these artificial technologies. (See USCCB regarding reproductive technology - link on back.)
- **The Role of NaProTECHNOLOGY.** NaProTECHNOLOGY (NaPro) is the medical practice of interpreting the Creighton Model System (CrMS) of charting to diagnose and treat reproductive issues including infertility. NaPro is over twice as effective for treating infertility as IVF. The St. Louis area is blessed to have several NaPro trained physicians (archstl.org/nfp-physicians).

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- **The issue of adoption.** A couple may or may not be ready to consider adoption. Adoption may seem like the next logical step for some couples, but for other couples, it may feel like giving up on being able to conceive. Encourage adoption (infant or foster-adopt) if they seem open and mention the Archbishop Robert J. Carlson Adoption Grant to help with the financial burden.
- **Secondary infertility.** Even a couple that has children can experience secondary infertility (the inability to become pregnant or carry a baby to term after previously giving birth to a baby) which can be just as frustrating and painful as primary infertility.
- **Thoughtful touches.** Consider offering up Mass, rosary, and/or prayers for the couple to let them know that they are not forgotten. Send a personal card around Mother's/ Father's Day or holidays to let the couple know that they are in your prayers.
- **Being sensitive to mothers and fathers.** Mother's Day and Father's Day can be particularly difficult for women and men who want to be parents but are not. Some have even admitted to avoiding Mass on that day to avoid being embarrassed or emotionally triggered by not being able to stand for a blessing. Consider wording your blessing and/or petitions to be especially sensitive to those who have experienced infertility or loss of a child and giving the blessing when the entire congregation is standing. There are some suggestions on our website (stlouisnfp.org/clergy).
- **Avoid common reactions.** Avoid asking young couples why they aren't expecting a baby yet, even if you are trying to encourage young families. Avoid statements that may feel dismissive of their deep struggle and suffering. (i.e. "Pray, hope and don't worry!" "All in God's time" etc.).



Refer To:

- **The Natural Choice Video Series** - bit.ly/NFPNaturalChoice
- **Enkindle Infertility Ministry** - archstl.org/infertility-and-adoption
- **#EnkindleWednesdays** on our social media channels
- **Archbishop Robert J. Carlson Adoption Grant** - archstl.org/infertility-and-adoption
- **NaPro Physicians list** - archstl.org/nfp-physicians
- **NFP Providers list** - archstl.org/nfp-providers
- **Introductory Session Schedule** - stlouisnfp.org/introductory-sessions
- **Mother's Day and Father's Day suggestions** - stlouisnfp.org/clergy
- **Good Shepherd Children & Family Services** - goodshepherdstl.org
- **USCCB webpage** with resources about reproductive technology:
www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/reproductive-technology



St. Catherine of Siena, patron saint against miscarriages

St. Gianna Beretta Molla, patron saint of mothers & unborn children

- **Accompany the grief.** A pregnancy loss, no matter when it happens, can be as painful and devastating as losing a child at any other time, even if the parents never held the child in their arms. Help the family through the process of grief. Connect them with others who have experienced a similar loss so they know they are not alone.
- **Precious life lost.** Acknowledge the value of the tiny human life lost. Encourage them to name the child and offer to say a Mass or pray with them at the cemetery.
- **Gone but never forgotten.** The couple who lost a child during pregnancy likely thinks about the baby every day. Remembering the baby in conversation may bring comfort to the couple that their baby still matters.
- **Rites and rituals bring healing.** Offer to hold a graveside service, Mass or other liturgical rite for their child. There are a variety of options available in the Order of Christian Funerals – Funeral Rites for Children. There is a comprehensive guide and list of available Liturgical Rites and uses available at www.bostoncatholic.org/Offices-And-Services/Office-Detail.aspx?id=12540. In addition, some funeral homes will provide their services free of charge for miscarried babies and the Archdiocese Catholic Cemeteries offer free or reduced cost burials for babies.
- **Medical care.** NFP can help diagnose and treat underlying causes of miscarriage. If the couple is seeking to understand what may have caused the miscarriage, refer them to the Office of NFP.
- **Avoid common reactions.** Some common responses to miscarriage may feel trite and dismissive to the couple. (i.e. “The baby is in a better place.” “It wasn’t meant to be.” “You have an angel in Heaven.” “You can always try for more.”)
- **Included in Mother’s Day and Father’s Day.** Include parents who have lost children in parish blessings and petitions on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day.



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Refer To:

- **The Natural Choice Video Series** - bit.ly/NFPNaturalChoice
- **Mother's Day and Father's Day suggestions** - stlouisnfp.org/clergy
- **Blessing of Parents after a Miscarriage or Stillbirth** (from the Book of Blessings) www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/blessing-of-parents-after-a-miscarriage-or-stillbirth.cfm
- **Funeral Readings for Children who Died before Baptism - Masses for the Dead** www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/bereavement-and-funerals/funeral-readings-for-children-who-died-before-baptism.cfm
- **Catholic Miscarriage Support - Burials and Names** www.catholicmiscarriagesupport.com/practical/practical-qa/burials-and-names/
- **Pastoral Notes on the Celebration of Liturgical Rights for Deceased Infants and Stillborn or Miscarried Infants** - from Archdiocese of Boston www.bostoncatholic.org/Offices-And-Services/Office-Detail.aspx?id=12540
- **NaPro Physicians list** - archstl.org/nfp-physicians
- **NFP Providers list** - archstl.org/nfp-providers
- **Introductory Session Schedule** - stlouisnfp.org/introductory-sessions



Contracepting Couples



St. Gabriel the Archangel, messenger of life
Guardian Angels

- **Meet them where they are.** Couples may not know nor understand that contraception is morally incompatible with Catholic theology. In a society where such methods are commonplace, it is best to approach the couple with truth and with compassion.
- **Clearly, consistently, compassionately.** Even when a couple has seemingly convincing reasons for sterilization or contraception, recognize and compassionately reiterate the Church's teaching about marital intimacy and the obstruction that contraception and sterilization create within a relationship.
- **Natural and healthy.** NFP is simply the observation of a woman's natural cycle reflecting times of fertility and times of infertility. Understanding the signals the body is created to send is the most natural, healthy and moral way to plan and space children.
- **Fertility is not a disease.** Fertility is a precious gift given to us as a way to participate with God in creation. Modern methods of contraception treat fertility like a problem to fix, or something that can be turned on and off at will.
- **Just as effective.** Avoiding pregnancy is the goal of a contracepting couple. What they may not realize is that NFP, when practiced properly, can be equally as effective (99% effective) in avoiding pregnancy - without the side effects or moral complications of contraception. See *What Can NFP Do For You?* Brochure for specific effectiveness rates.
- **Unwanted side-effects.** Hormonal contraception may have increased risk of various side-effects. The Pill, even when prescribed for "health reasons," can cause depression, weight gain, headaches, irregular bleeding, etc. Often, if a couple decides to have children after using hormonal contraception, it may take a long time to return to a "normal" cycle. See *What Can NFP Do For You?* Brochure for specific side effects. Find a physician documented chart of effectiveness and side effects of NFP and contraception methods at www.archstl.org/nfp-v-contraception
- **Group 1 carcinogen.** The World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) lists Estrogen-progestogen oral contraceptives (like the Pill, the Patch, or Vaginal Ring) as group 1 carcinogens.
- **Barrier to the relationship.** By using contraceptive methods, the couple is putting a barrier between themselves and thereby withholding the total gift of self. Practicing self-discipline and self-sacrifice while practicing marital chastity strengthens the couple's relationship.

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- **Listen to their difficulties.** A couple may have serious reasons for avoiding pregnancy, or may have an unexpected pregnancy (which can happen with NFP or contraception). If a couple is experiencing fertility-related difficulties, please strongly recommend working with an NFP teacher who likely has experience with clients who have dealt with all these situations and may be able to help them find a natural and moral solution. Couples may feel ashamed, frustrated, or simply not know why NFP is the only moral option in the Church, and they could benefit so much by one-to-one instruction with a trained teacher who can empathize with them and help them find a solution.
- **Marital chastity.** Avoiding intercourse during times of fertility when a couple has discerned to avoid pregnancy adopts an attitude of trust in God's grace month to month and year to year, and maintains an openness to life. Couples with challenging charts may feel frustrated because they choose to abstain for extended periods while the cycle and biomarkers regulate. Spiritual support and encouragement during these stressful times may be crucial.



Refer To:

- **The Natural Choice Video Series** - bit.ly/NFPNaturalChoice
- **What Can NFP Do For You?** brochure
- **A Dozen Differences** handout
- **NFP Providers list** - archstl.org/nfp-providers
- **NaPro Physicians list** - archstl.org/nfp-physicians
- **Introductory Session Schedule** - stlouisnfp.org/introductory-sessions
- ***Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love***
- **Cracking the Contraceptive Myths by Dr. Janet Smith** - www.youtube.com/watch?v=3yBPmQDF5il
- **USCCB page on Contraception** - www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/contraception/index.cfm



NFP and Theology of the Body



St. Pope John Paul II,
author of *Theology of the Body*

Special thanks to Dr. Ed Hogan and Sister Marie Paul Lockerd, RSM, DO, CFCMC for providing the following reflections and insights into the Theology of the Body.

Saint John Paul II uses *Theology of the Body* as a catechesis to understand spousal love between a man and a woman. He develops spousal love between God and his Chosen people and between Christ the Bridegroom and His bride the Church. Jesus Christ is the model of sacrificial love in gift of self for the good of the other. Married couples participate in Christ's sacrificial love when they consciously, with full will and consent, give of themselves body, mind, and strength for the good of the other and for the children who are a gift of their spousal love. Saint John Paul not only describes spousal love as a reciprocal gift of self, but he describes spousal love as a reciprocal receiving of the other. He describes married spousal love as a participation and a prophetic witness of the communion of the Trinity where the perfection of the reciprocal gift of self and the reciprocal receiving of the other shares in the Love and Life of the Holy Spirit. Couples who use Natural Family Planning share in the reciprocal gift of self and the reciprocal receiving of the other in communion with the three persons of the Trinity.

- 1) Many people have never thought about the **relationship between marriage and the Trinity**. But there is a parallel: the Trinity is a communion of persons whose union brings forth life, and marriage involves a communion of persons whose union has the capacity to bring forth life.

Ask a couple how they understand the connection between marriage and the Trinity. You might use the following quote to prompt them:

“Man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning.”
(Saint John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 9.3)

- 2) Many people have never thought about the **relationship between the Eucharist and Marriage**. But there is a parallel: Holy Communion is a one flesh union of persons, and marriage involves a one flesh union of persons. The one flesh union of man and woman in marriage is meant to be a sign – limited, but real – of the one flesh union that is offered to us in the Eucharist. Likewise, the Eucharist is a one flesh union that gives life, and marital intercourse is a one flesh union that has the capacity to give life.

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Ask a couple how they understand the connection between the Eucharist and marriage. You might use the following quotes to prompt them:

“For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, namely Christ himself...who gives life to humanity through his flesh”. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 16)

“The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 27)

- 3)** Many people have never thought about the **relationship between marriage and the Cross**. But there is a parallel: on the Cross, Christ made a complete gift of his body and blood to us so that we might have life; likewise, in marriage, spouses make a complete gift of their body and blood to each other so that there might be life.

Ask a couple how they understand the connection between the Cross and marriage. You might use the following quotes to prompt them:

“This revelation reaches its definitive fullness in the gift of love which the Word of God makes to humanity in assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of Himself on the Cross for His bride, the Church. In this sacrifice there is entirely revealed that plan which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation; the marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ. The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross ... Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross.” (Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, #13)

“The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross”. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 766)

SUMMARY

By pointing out some of the basic connections between marriage and the Trinity, marriage and the Eucharist, and marriage and the Cross, you can help a couple begin to form a “theology of the body.” The theology of the body challenges couples to not only believe the faith with their minds, but to live the faith with their bodies. If they develop this theology of the body they will be able to see more clearly how their faith in Jesus Christ, their celebration of the sacraments, and the decisions they make in everyday life can all be connected.

What the Office of NFP Can Do For You

THE NATURAL CHOICE VIDEO SERIES

These NFP videos are focused on relationships, health and understanding of NFP. They are perfect to use during Marriage Prep or for any woman or couple wanting to know more about NFP from real couples.

- NFP: The Natural Choice for a **Strong Relationship** (8:50)
- NFP: The Natural Choice for **Family Planning** (5:35)
- NFP: The Natural Choice for a **Woman's Health** (5:08)



The above videos can be viewed at bit.ly/NFPNaturalChoice

PRINT MATERIALS

To request any of the following print materials, simply contact the Office of NFP at 314.997.7576 or stlnfp@archstl.org.

- **What Can NFP Do For You? brochure** - Explains the benefits of using Natural Family Planning, showcases the five different methods available in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, and compares Natural Family Planning to contraceptive methods (like the Pill, implants, sterilization, etc.), and lists the area NFP Providers.
- **Three Things Catholics Should Know About NFP bookmarks** - Brief overview about NFP.
- **Connect With Us cards** - Easy-to-hand-out business cards with ways to connect with the Office of NFP on social media and to subscribe to the monthly e-newsletter.
- **Enkindle Infertility Ministry cards** - How to connect with Enkindle Infertility Ministry.
- **Archbishop Robert J. Carlson Adoption Grant flyer** - Financial support for families choosing to adopt.
- **Wonder of Eve flyer** - Program for High School girls.
- **Be A Man About It flyer** - Geared towards men about the benefits of using NFP.
- **Body and Soul letter** - Archbishop Carlson's pastoral letter regarding *Humanae Vitae*.
- **Humanae Vitae: A Challenge to Love** - Encyclical by Pope Paul VI with an introduction by Dr. Janet Smith.
- **A Dozen Differences handout** - Explains the differences between NFP and contraception.
- **Infertility Prayer program card** - Seminarians pray specifically for couples faced with infertility.



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ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Clergy web page** containing: stlouisnfp.org/clergy
 - Homily library
 - Talking points (this guide in digital form)
 - Mother's Day and Father's Day Support
- **Happy, Healthy, Holy e-newsletter** bit.ly/STLNFPnewsletter
- **Social Media Channels:** Facebook, Twitter, Instagram @STLNFP

PROGRAMS OF THE OFFICE OF NFP

- There are five **Methods of NFP** available in the Archdiocese - stlouisnfp.org/methods
 - Billings Ovulation Model (BOMA)
 - Creighton Model System (CrMS)
 - Couple to Couple League (CCL)
 - Marquette Method (MM)
 - SymptoPro Fertility Education
- **Witness Couples** - speak to engaged couples, parishes and other audiences.
- **NFP Parish Ambassadors** - resource and liaison to individual parishes to provide support, events, etc. *Parish Priests are invited to request a Parish Ambassador for their parish.*
- **Enkindle Infertility Ministry** - emotional and spiritual support for couples touched by infertility.
- **Wonder of Eve** - presentation for high school girls.
- **Archbishop Robert J. Carlson Adoption Grant** - financial assistance available to families who have chosen adoption to grow their family. Applications are due every November 1.
- **Clergy Support** - speakers, print material, parish resources, online homily library, Deaconate class, etc.
- **Seminary program** in partnership Mercy Hospital St. Louis.
- **Father/Son and Mother/Daughter** events through Mercy Hospital St. Louis.



For more information on the above, or to **request a Parish Ambassador** or speaker, please contact the Office of NFP at 314.997.7576 or stlnfp@archstl.org.