

Summer 2011



ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE OF NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

# The Chart

a newsletter for the St. Louis NFP Community

This is a special issue of THE CHART. Unlike past issues, this one focuses entirely on the testimony of one family's conversion to Natural Family Planning. It is compelling on many levels, not the least of which is the fact that the father and husband in this family is a local Obstetrician Gynecologist. We would like to thank *Dr. Richard Brennan, Mrs. Katie Brennan and Miss Amanda Brennan* for their willingness to share their stories. We are so grateful for their support and pray that the Lord continues to bless them abundantly.

## From a doctor's perspective...

My conversion to a new way of practicing medicine was not an easy decision, but it was truly a life-changing one. My first exposure to change came on a trip to Rolla, MO to hear Christopher West speak on JohnPaul II's Theology of the Body in November of 2008. From that day forward I was given subtle hints from my wife and daughter about changing my practice. My daughter Amanda was in the midst of writing a research paper on the Catholic Church's teaching on contraception. My wife left literature and books on my bedside table to read. Then, in November 2009, my wife actually confronted me about prescribing the birth control pill to patients. At first I felt threat-

ened and not open to change. How could I practice medicine without prescribing the pill or other forms of birth control? In my practice, I did not just use the pill for contraception, but to treat other symptoms/diseases affecting women's health. For twenty years I had practiced OB-GYN with it. I did not think it was possible to practice without prescribing. In addition, if I did stop prescribing, what alternatives could I offer my patients? I knew no other way to practice my specialty without using the pill.

The financial aspect of not prescribing also concerned me. How many patients would I lose? As a father of four children, one starting college, two in Catholic high school and one in grade school, how would I afford it with the loss of income? However, despite those concerns, I began to

put trust in God and the Mother Mary. I began to research the teachings of the Church on contraception. I began to question my current way of practicing medicine. As a physician, I first began to explore the science behind the way the pill worked. I knew its primary mechanism of action was to inhibit ovulation. However, it also works in other ways. The most troubling to me was that it prevents implantation. Some would say only a small percentage of the time, but what percentage is too much? Whether 1% or 10% of the time, it was still aborting a newly, conceived life. As a prolife Catholic this was hard to accept. I always prided myself on not performing tubal ligations or inserting intrauterine devices because they prevented or interrupted life. But by prescribing the pill, I too was guilty of contributing to the culture of death. (cont. pg 2)

## From a wife's perspective...

June 3, 1989 Rick and I were married at St. Gabriel the Archangel Church in St. Louis Hills near Francis Park. It was love at first sight for me when we met in Labor and Delivery at St. Mary's Hospital in 1986. I was working as a nurse and Rick had just started his residency in Ob-Gyn. We were both raised Catholic, attended Catholic schools and went to church every week. We did an engaged couples weekend retreat to prepare for the sacrament of marriage. I don't ever remember hearing anything about the Church's teaching on contraception, so like most people my age; we thought "we" were "in control" of when we were going to start a family. So, that we did. Fast forward 17 years, two beautiful girls and two

beautiful boys later we had our family.

We began experiencing great loss in our lives. Rick's dad died in November '06 and my mother died seven months later. In addition, we lost two dear Aunts and one dear Uncle. By February of '08 I was searching, yearning for answers to life in general. My sister-in-law invited me to a Day of Recollection at SLUH to cheer me up. The guest speaker happened to be an old friend from high school, Patty Schneier. Her talk was entitled, "God, I don't have time for this". I had no idea what I was about to hear.

The focus of the day was centered on making time for prayer, but Patty began the day with her story of conversion which involved the Church's teaching on contraception. Her story touched me immediately. I needed to know if what she was saying was

true. How could it be? I, a lifelong Catholic, had never heard such a thing.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2008, I buried myself in resources and surrounded myself with anyone and everyone who I thought could shed some light on my many questions. I met with Patty for coffee in September of '08, and she gave me contacts, websites, books, etc. to help me explore even deeper. I began listening to Catholic radio, continued weekly adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and attended daily mass. I wrote to various religious, priests, physicians, chastity speakers inquiring about the Church's teaching on moral issues. It was becoming crystal clear that what Patty had said was true. I had even discovered through conversations with Dr. Michael Dixon that there was (cont. pg 2)

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### From a doctor's perspective (cont.)

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Further research and prayer over the summer of 2009 led me on a spiritual conversion. Attending daily mass, prayer and trust in God strengthened my resolve. My family, friends and religious priests and sisters were major guides and supporters throughout my conversion.

In May 2009 my daughter Amanda presented a paper at CorJesu Academy entitled "Loving as a Catholic." It spoke about the true teaching on contraception and it identified the lies of the pill in today's world. Her presentation undoubtedly struck a nerve. I questioned whether I was truly practicing as a good Catholic physician. I began to seek the Holy Spirit and the Mother Mary for spiritual guidance. Over the summer of 2009, I began to really question my life and what was most

important. I read a book called "Physicians Healed," which highlighted physicians who had converted to a contraception-free practice. On a trip back from Destin, Florida, my wife convinced us to stop at Mother Angelica's Shrine in Alabama. While visiting the Shrine, I prayed to the Infant Jesus of Prague and asked for a sign to convince me to stop prescribing. I had prayed that a lawsuit be dropped. The week we returned to St. Louis my prayer was answered. I was now convinced that my conversion was not accidental or coincidental, but a gift from the Holy Spirit. I made the decision to attend the Pope Paul VI Institute in Omaha to learn the Creighton Model System of Fertility Care. At first I went to audit the class, but after leaving Omaha I knew my life was about to change. On November 1, 2009 (All Saints Day), I stopped prescribing the pill. In April 2010, I became a Creighton Model Medical Consultant.

It has been a little over a year now and I never have regretted my decision to change my practice. God has truly blessed my practice, my family, and me. Wonderful new friends and opportunities have come our way. If you place your trust in God, He will take care of you. The way I practice medicine now has made life more meaningful and much more rewarding. In addition, I can offer my patient's a new and better way to treat endometriosis, infertility, premenstrual syndrome, and other women's health issues. My practice is busier now than before the switch. God truly works in mysterious ways if you place your trust in Him. My thanks to Patty Schneier, Diane Daly, Ann Prebil, Dr. Michael Dixon, Dr. Brian Gosser, Fr. Joe Classen, Fr. Jay (a priest from Poland I met at Pope Paul VI Institute), Dr. Hilgers and the many other friends and family who have supported me on my journey, especially my wife, Katie. In closing, I am most grateful to God for His love and unending mercy for a sinner like myself. I look forward to continuing the practice of medicine the way God has intended for me all along.

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### From a wife's perspective (cont.)

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even a way Rick could practice in accord with Church teaching with a new women's science called NaPro-Technology. I began wondering in anger, "Where has the Church been?" "Why have I never heard this before now?" The most difficult point in the journey came when I spoke to our parish priest, Fr. Joe Classen. I had asked him if Rick was o.k. to prescribe the birth control pill as a Catholic. He said, "Katie, your vocation as Rick's wife is to get him to heaven and right now that's not looking so good." He explained that Rick was cooperating in something intrinsically evil. I was devastated! Despite this, however, Fr. Joe was one of the very first people to be charitable enough to share the truth with me and not tell me what I wanted to hear. Rather he told me what I needed to hear!

This willingness to speak truth led Rick and I to attend a Theology of the Body Conference with Christopher West in Rolla, MO in November '08. Through God's grace and mercy, Rick and I were beginning a journey which we had no idea would bring as many blessings as it has. In December of '08 I was diagnosed with

a borderline malignant ovarian tumor which required surgery. This was a particular blessing in my eyes because it allowed Rick to see Dr. Dixon's office busy and thriving to prove to him that it would be possible to practice successfully without prescribing contraception. January of '09, our oldest daughter Amanda interviewed Rick about if and how his faith affected his work for an assignment given to her for theology class. To my surprise and delight, he answered her honestly. In February of that year, Jason Evert (a well-known Catholic author and chastity speaker) came to St. Louis to speak to the Parent Network Organization. Rick and I both attended. Rick was beginning to see a pattern and was further challenged by what Jason Evert had shared that evening about Natural Family Planning and chastity in general. He began attending daily mass when able, reading pamphlets and books, listening to various CD's. On April 30, 2009, we both met with Diane Daly. She was so kind, so respectful, and so encouraging all the while answering Rick's questions, concerns, and challenges. In May, Amanda presented a theology paper on the Church's teaching on contraception and its effect on the medical world entitled, "Loving as a Catholic" to parents, teachers, classmates. Rick attended this as well, but the internal struggle remained and was heightened after hearing his own daughter defend the

Church's teaching. In August, we took a detour on our way home from Destin, FL to the Shrine of the Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville, AL (Home of Mother Angelica and EWTN). About this time, Rick was being sued and he was going to court the week after we returned from vacation. The case had been dragging on for the past three years. While at the shrine, Rick prayed for a sign that if God wanted him to quit prescribing contraception, to please give him one. I prayed unbeknownst to him that his lawsuit would be dropped. Five days after we returned home, his lawsuit was dropped. Not only was it dropped, but the day also fell on the Feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe, August 14<sup>th</sup>. St. Maximilian Kolbe is the patron saint of the pro-life movement! Praise God!

In September Rick had to write an essay explaining why he wanted to audit the class at the Pope Paul VI Institute in October. Here is an excerpt from his essay: "Over the years, I think ignorance or lack of willingness to learn about Natural Family Planning prevented me from inquiring about it and the Creighton Model. If life begins at conception, how can we as Catholic physicians condone this?" ...On October 2, 2009 Rick was in Omaha, NE beginning to learn about the Creighton Model and NaProTechnology at the Medical Consultant

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(cont. pg 3)

### From a wife's perspective (cont)...

course. He returned convinced he needed to stop prescribing contraception which he did October 26, 2009. On All Saints Day, November 1, 2009, he sent out 3200 letters informing his patients that he would no longer be prescribing contraception and introduced them to the benefits of Natural Family Planning and NaProTechnology. Rick completed his medical consultation program with Pope Paul VI Institute in April of 2010! It has been a tremendous gift from God to finally realize and understand the way God intended for us to live and for

Rick to practice. The pain I experienced trying to convince Rick of this truth does not compare to the joy that I feel now knowing that Rick's soul is in a much safer place than before. This feeling was summed up best in a meditation on March 15, 2008 (which happens to be Rick's birthday) in the Word Among Us, a Catholic Devotional Magazine. "It is up to us to reach out to our family to help them get right with God so they can experience the passion of His love and not His wrath." Rick and I have truly been blessed by God to be awakened to His unending love and mercy. We look forward to serving God the best we can the remainder of our time here on earth.

Throughout the journey, God placed wonderful, holy people in my path who were not afraid to

share the truth with me. I developed a strong devotion to Our Blessed Mother through recitation of the daily rosary, spending time in adoration, reflecting on the daily readings, attending daily mass, listening to Catholic radio and continuing a devotion to the Infant Jesus of Prague. Underneath the Infant Jesus statue is this: "The more you honor me, the more I will bless you." We have definitely seen this first hand! Another devotion which gave me great comfort was the Divine Mercy Chaplet with the words, "Jesus, I trust in you". I am most grateful to Rick to take the leap of faith and place his trust in Jesus. We have been in deed blessed beyond our comprehension. Truth will set you free!!!!

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### From a daughter's perspective...

In the story of my dad's conversion from practicing medicine with contraceptives to not, God must receive all the credit. My mom and I, along with countless others, served as "merely small instruments" in God's hands as Mother Teresa would say.

Since I was little, I can remember visiting my dad when he had shifts moonlighting at St. Anthony's Hospital in South County. My younger siblings and I always looked forward to grabbing a bite to eat in the cafeteria and peaking in on the newborn babies in the nursery upstairs. Not until I was in high school did I realize that my dad's work entailed more than helping to bring new life into the world.

During the spring of 2009, my senior year of high school, I was introduced to Blessed Pope John Paul II's teaching known as the Theology of the Body. My parents first presented me with it through books by Jason Evert and Christopher West, followed by my theology teacher at Cor Jesu. Instantly, I felt a connection to the messages conveyed in the 129 Wednesday audiences. Stories in the Bible that had never impacted me before in books such as Genesis, Ephesians, and Song of Songs took on new meanings. Before I knew it, I longed to discover more about the Catholic Church, specifically her teaching on contraception. Only weeks later all seniors

began a Budget Project in our theology classes to practice financial planning for a young family of three. Our first assignment was to ask our own parents how they managed their finances throughout their marriage. When asking my dad how his Catholic faith influenced his work, he answered that as a physician he is called to help and care for peoples' health. When probing him further on the topic of contraception, he answered honestly that his Catholic faith and his prescribing of contraception did not align. Little did I know, he had been wrestling with this question since my mom first presented it to him the previous fall.

Meanwhile, I was taking a second theology class at my high school with a small group of students. For the semester, we were asked to research a social justice issue facing the Catholic Church. I had been struggling to pinpoint a topic until I interviewed my parents for my Budget Project. My dad's answer about the way he practiced medicine stirred more and more questions within me. I was curious if the teachings of the Catholic faith were meant to be reserved for Sunday mass or if they were meant to guide every action, thought, word, and decision of all believers. So, my decision was made: I would research the issue of contraception in addition to its affects on society, Catholics, and the medical field.

Over the next few months, I found myself pouring over books, testimonies, and articles, listening to talks and radio shows, and interviewing various individuals on the subject. Never before had I felt such a zealous passion to explore something. After finally completing my research paper in May 2009, there was an opportunity for my fellow classmates and I to present our findings to an audience of teachers, peers, and family if desired. With encouragement from my mom and Mrs. Schneier, I presented what I had discovered. To my surprise, my dad was in the crowd!

Looking back on my dad's journey, I can appreciate the words of St. Catherine of Siena, "Nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring." For me, my dad's conversion was a time that tried my patience and my faith. Once I understood the Church's teaching on contraception, I didn't understand why my dad could not understand it, and thus apply it to his medical practice. At times I resented my father and his work. It wasn't until I encouraged my dad with love and support, that I came to appreciate the struggle he was experiencing. Little by little, I am learning that I must share the truths of the Catholic faith with "sugar and not salt" as my parents say. God has touched my life through my dad's conversion, and I hope others allow Him to touch their lives too in some special way.

**ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE OF  
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K. Diane Daly, RN, CFCE—Director  
Melissa Barnason—Editor

11700 Studt Ave, Ste C  
St. Louis, MO 63141  
Phone: 314-997-7576  
Fax: 314-692-8097  
E-mail: [diane.daly@mercy.net](mailto:diane.daly@mercy.net)  
<http://stouisnfp.org>

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# Trivia Party for Archbishop Carlson Adoption Fund

The Archdiocesan Department of Natural Family Planning is hosting a trivia night to help couples dealing with infertility offset some of the costs of adoption.

- \$20 per person or \$160 per table of 8.
- Feel free to bring your own food and soda.
- Beer, wine, soda and light snacks will be provided.  
(No outside alcohol permitted.)
- Bag raffle and Silent Auction

**Location:** St. James the Greater  
Catholic Church Gym  
1360 Tamm Avenue  
St. Louis, MO 63139

**Date:** October 15, 2011  
**Games start:** 7:00 p.m.  
(doors open at 6:15 p.m.)



Two of the three recipient families from the 2010 Adoption Fund



Please make your check payable and mail to:  
The Archdiocesan Office of Natural Family Planning  
11700 Studt Rd., Ste. C  
St. Louis, MO 63141

For questions:  
phone 314-997-7576 or e-mail [melissa.barnason@mercy.net](mailto:melissa.barnason@mercy.net)