

What Can I Get Away With?

by Robert Babecka

Married Catholic Christians are asked to accept God's call to be open to life. It's true that using periodic abstinence to delay pregnancy is not intrinsically sinful (as opposed to using a contraceptive to make a given sexual act unnaturally infertile--see "[Catholic Birth Control](#)" for more details on this distinction). However, our goal should not be to find a "morally acceptable" way to keep from having children, but to find ways to become more open to God's great gift of new life.

I am writing this article because I have noticed that all too frequently when Catholics faithful to this teaching are discussing it with others their focus is that natural family planning is as effective as other forms of birth control and that it has other benefits besides preventing unwanted births. Sad to say, I have been a culprit in some of these discussions. Part of my problem may have been that I was not fully open to life. I may have been too concerned with staying on the path and not focused on where I was going.

When my wife and I began using natural family planning as non-Christians, my focus was very much on control. Without realizing it, I retained some of this attitude after becoming a Christian. It was hidden by the fact that Cyndi and I very much wanted children at that point in our lives.

I am attracted to goodness. When I see it in others, I frequently desire to become more like them. My wife's openness has moved me and so has the example of some Catholic friends. So why should Christians be open to new life?

First - It is God's will that we be fruitful. He did not give us a target number of children or say be fruitful for ten years of marriage. Just as when the boss at work asks his workers to be productive, a faithful employee doesn't strive for the minimum production to stay out of trouble. He will seek to find ways to produce more. Our love for God and our recognition that He knows best should move us to desire fruitfulness.

Second - God has given us a great power, the power to cooperate with him in the bringing of new souls into existence. Dr. Janet Smith said it well. When a child is conceived the universe is changed dramatically. Something that did not exist before has been created, and it will last forever. Nothing else we participate in creating will last forever.

Third - When we receive the gift of new life we are given the opportunity to help shape that new soul in the image of Christ. Parents, by what they do and don't do, can have more influence on their children's eternal destiny than any other human being. What a great gift to be able to do that for another human being.

Fourth - Kids are a blast. The secret is that you have to know this to be true for it to be true.

Fifth - Children help us grow. We have to sacrifice our immediate interests on occasion if we put our children first. In our society of instant gratification it is easy to have a self-centered life. Instant gratification is not good for character. Many people spend their resources on toys and recreation, much as they would have liked to do as children. By sacrificing for our "little ones" we get to progress further along the continuum of character, from that of a child to that of an adult.

Faithful Catholics need to realize that it is more important to communicate the value of openness when talking to others, than it is to discuss the effectiveness and legitimacy of birth control techniques.