

A Family Reconnected

Dominic and Kathy Cavaretta

Life looked good for Dominic and Kathy Cavaretta in 1992. They had been married since 1974, had two teenage daughters and lived in a three-bedroom house. Dominic had a good job and was starting to look forward to the day when he could relax a bit.

Their next step was to become what they call “converts from birth control” and have another baby. They took that step, and they were still seeing graces as they celebrated their thirtieth wedding anniversary.

“Dominic Jr. is fifteen years younger than our youngest daughter. It’s kind of crazy how he came about,” Dom Sr. said in an interview in 2003.

In the early nineties Kathy was laid up for a while with a bad back, and she had a lot of time to think and to search her soul. One thing that was eating at her was the couple’s use of birth control.

Then a friend invited Kathy into her home and put an NFP chart in front of her. Kathy showed it to her husband, and they had the same reaction: terror. Neither of them wanted another child—Dom was quite firm in his conviction—and they were sure that’s what NFP would lead to.

“I said to the Blessed Mother, ‘This is rhythm. What are you doing to me?’” Kathy said. “Everybody who uses birth

control becomes dependent on it, and to think of stepping off the edge of the cliff and not using it is terrifying.

"We didn't know what was happening. So we went to see a priest friend of ours, a dear friend, who listened to our story, our fears." That led to a meeting with a practitioner, who put them at ease about the effectiveness of NFP. This woman became a good friend while teaching them NFP. The couple began to use the Creighton Model Method.

"Dom took a leap of faith without looking back," Kathy said. "He willingly used NFP and trusted in it.

"Learning the method started to bring us closer together immediately. It forced Dom and me to confront and communicate on the issues of children and family. It drew us closer together; we felt the grace immediately.

"After using the method for about a year, my fear of getting pregnant started to leave. I can't even put my finger on what the fear was. It didn't have anything to do with money, because neither of us is materialistic. We enjoy our home and our family; that's the joy of our lives. But whatever the fear was, it started to leave. I came to a new mind-set and started to desire another child."

"I didn't know what was coming over Kathy," Dom said. "I thought she was losing her mind when one night in 1992, after eighteen years of marriage, she asked me how I felt about having another child. I was in my early forties and looking along the lines of retirement.

"It was one of those times when you go to bed and she wants to talk and lays a bomb on you. I had to say, 'Let's sleep on this and talk about it some other time.' It surfaced a couple more times. I couldn't convince her to forget about it. It kept resurfacing in her mind. And she seemed

to have solutions for all the reasons why I thought another child was impractical.”

One issue was their home. They had a modest three-bedroom house, and each teenage daughter had her own bedroom. An addition would cost more than they had.

Then Dom remembered an insurance policy that a friend had bugged him into buying. He had signed for the policy in his mother’s house as he dressed for his wedding. “I had this thing for twenty years, and it was worth some money,” Dom said.

They developed a plan for an addition of a couple hundred square feet. It was a master bedroom and bathroom for Kathy and Dom and a third bedroom for the baby.

Yes, by this time Kathy was pregnant. When she passed her first trimester, Dom figured it was time to get serious, so he told her, “You just worry about having this baby, and I’ll have this addition done.”

“I worked night and day with the help of Saint Joseph and a few other friends I made along the way. Eighteen weeks to the day from when we broke ground, Kathy and I moved into our new bedroom. Eight or nine days later she had the baby. Say what you want, but it was the work of the Holy Spirit. It was meant to be, and it happened.”

“Dom took the leap of faith, and God threw the life preserver after that,” Kathy said.

The birth of Dominic Jr. paid an unexpected bonus for the Cavarettas: It brought back their daughters.

“Raising teenage daughters in the early nineties was difficult, and our family was growing apart,” Dom revealed. “Our daughters wanted to do their own thing, to go here and go there and do what their friends were doing.

“When we decided to go ahead and get pregnant, we didn’t know what the girls were going to think. They were thrilled, and they couldn’t wait for the delivery. They were with us in the hospital when Dominic was born. I’ll never forget that as long as I live. Here are my two daughters and me with my wife, who’s having a baby.”

This bedside gathering brought about a family reunion of sorts. “From the moment Dominic was born on August 11, 1995, you could feel something happening, just pulling our family back together,” Dom said. “Our daughters started staying home more often to be with the family, to be with the baby. We started saying the rosary as a family. Try getting two teenage girls to do that. By the time Dominic could walk and talk, *he* was reciting the rosary.”

“The grace extended into other areas of our life, in our faith,” Kathy said. “I believe that trusting in God and being careful of the use of our fertility was the thing that we needed.

“Dom and I have always gone to Mass, and we have never stopped practicing our faith. I know that God was faithful to us because of that. He knew that we were trying. Once we got through that obstacle of the birth control, once we let go of that, the floodgates of grace opened in our marriage and our home.

“I know it has extended to our older children. Our oldest daughter and her husband have given us a beautiful grandchild already, and another one is on the way.”

“The key there is ‘she and her husband,’” added Dom. “One of my biggest concerns as a father was that the girls do things the right way. I couldn’t be prouder of my two daughters. Our older daughter married a wonderful non-Catholic man.”

“He practices NFP to support our daughter in her faith. Even a lot of Catholic guys will not do that for their wives,” Kathy said.

Dom and Kathy decided that their young son needed a playmate. She conceived again but miscarried. So Dom bought roller blades for himself and his young son. They moved on to pickup ice hockey games with other families on Saturday mornings. Kathy told her husband that this son would either make them young or make them old. At age fifty-two Dom joined a hockey league of his own.

When father and son started going to Buffalo Sabres games together, Dominic proved that all those rosaries his sisters and his parents said over him were put to a good purpose. “On the way home he’d sit in the back seat, an eight-year-old, and say, ‘Dad, do you want to say the rosary now?’”

“Had we not made the change to NFP, I don’t think any of this would have happened. Once we did the NFP thing, everything fell into order. I’m convinced that’s what started it.”

“I agree,” his wife said. “A flow of grace started there.

“It was difficult to realize the ramifications of our use of birth control. Our whole family would have been different had we learned of this sooner. We would have had more children.”

“We would have needed more than one addition on the house,” her husband added.

STAYING ON COURSE

How NFP Keeps Spouses From Growing Apart

What do you call a couple who practices NFP?

Parents.

This joke ignores the basic fact that all married couples are potential parents each time they make love. All couples must face the question of children.

Lionel Tiger, the cultural anthropologist I quoted earlier, says that couples today are facing the question of children under much different circumstances than in the days before effective contraception. For one thing, our world has changed economically. Since 1979 women's pay has increased and is now approaching men's pay, which has decreased.¹

Amelia Warren Tyagi, who coauthored with Elizabeth Warren *The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle-Class Mothers and Fathers Are Going Broke* (Basic, 2003), wrote in a viewpoint

piece in *Time* magazine that competition for homes in the best school districts has driven up prices and left many young parents house-poor and headed toward bankruptcy.

Over the past generation, home prices have risen twice as fast for couples with young children as for those without kids. Why? Confidence in the public schools has dwindled, leaving millions of families to conclude that the only way to ensure Junior a slot in a safe, quality school is to snatch up a home in a good school district.... Since the mid-'70s, the amount of the average family budget earmarked for the mortgage has increased a whopping 69% (adjusted for inflation). At the same time, the average father's income has increased less than 1%.²

There has also been a change in what our increasingly wealthy society needs for an "acceptable life."³ Consider the cost of cell phones, high speed Internet connections, iPods and cable TV when compared to free TV, AM radios and books. Add to this the desire for luxury cars, large houses and dream vacations. In December 2003, *Newsweek* reported a trend among couples of buying new cars for dates and other formal circumstances, so that in some households there are more cars than drivers.⁴

The demands of this elevated lifestyle make it harder for a man to support a family, thus putting pressure on women to work. And with divorce common, women leap into the workforce because they know they might have to support themselves and their children in the future. In 1992 two-thirds of women with children under five were in the workforce.⁵

Women have rightly embraced the rewards of work and made important contributions in fields closed to them prior to 1960. They have taken to our universities, where in

2000 they outnumbered men in undergraduate and graduate programs. Women represented 57.4 percent of all students seeking bachelor's degrees in 2004, up from 42 percent in 1970.⁶

While there is much that is positive in these developments, couples should heed a word of caution. With the pill and the IUD changing what Tiger calls "the pattern of sexual interdependence" and with good jobs breaking the pattern of economic interdependence, it becomes easy for spouses to pursue individual agendas and drift apart. "It is impossible to overestimate the impact of the contraceptive pill on human arrangements," Tiger wrote.⁷

Pope John Paul II recognized the plusses and minuses for modern families in his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*, "The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World":

On the one hand, in fact, there is a more lively awareness of personal freedom and greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, to promoting the dignity of women, to responsible procreation, to the education of children. There is also an awareness of the need for the development of interfamily relationships, for reciprocal spiritual and material assistance, the rediscovery of the ecclesial mission proper to the family and its responsibility for the building of a more just society. On the other hand, however, signs are not lacking of a disturbing degradation of some fundamental values: a mistaken theoretical and practical concept of the independence of the spouses in relation to each other; serious misconceptions regarding the relationship of authority between parents and children; the concrete difficulties that the family itself experiences in the transmission of values; the growing number of divorces; the scourge of abortion; the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization; the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality.⁸

Fukuyama points out that “the tendency of contemporary liberal democracies to fall prey to excessive individualism is perhaps their greatest long-term vulnerability, and is particularly visible in the most individualistic of all democracies, the United States.”⁹

Female-only birth control begets individualism, according to Tiger.

The relations between males and females have changed and ramified in complicated ways, in large measure because through effective contraception—for the first time in natural history—one sex can control the reproductive process. The result is a profound and probably enduring alteration of family patterns.¹⁰

With the condom, once the most employed contraceptive, there was always a conscious or tacit collaboration between men and women. But with the pill that is no longer true.¹¹

And of abortion Tiger wrote, “The drama of abortion arises from ancient reproductive strategies gone awry amid new technology and the novel conditions posed by an economic society founded on individuals, not families.”¹²

Two Become One

If the pill and abortion are supportive of individualism and not the family, Natural Family Planning is just the opposite. Each month couples practicing NFP find they are forced to confront what their goals are as a couple and to reevaluate why they do or don’t want another child at that time. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that we should create life responsibly but that it is the couple’s “duty to make certain that their desire [to regulate births] is not motivated by selfishness” (CCC, #2368).

There are many good reasons why two people may not wish to expand their family. Circumstances of our lives can change, altering our plans and even our attitudes. There is job loss and illness to contend with. Some may find parenthood an unexpected joy and become more generous toward life. Others who initially want large families may find that the needs of their children would not be served well by the arrival of another one.

Reviewing these reasons, making sure they promote the good of the family and not just the individual, keeps the lines of communication open between a husband and a wife.

Natural Family Planning can be used to prevent pregnancy, but it does so in a way that does not threaten the unity of the couple. This is one of the primary ways in which Natural Family Planning differs greatly from contraception, even though both may have the same goal. We must use moral methods to achieve our goals even if our motives are pure. The *Catechism* says, “When it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, the morality of the behavior does not depend on sincere intention and evaluation of motives alone” (CCC, #2368).¹³

A woman will not necessarily have a lot of children if her husband acts in accordance with her fertility. As the following witnesses attest, Natural Family Planning frees a couple to decide how many children they can responsibly support while keeping them on the same page. This can keep them together as husband and wife, which ultimately is better for both of them.