

# ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON CHURCH



Father Mark Seiker  
3301 Echo Drive  
North Platte, Nebraska 69101

Rectory / Office [308-534-5461](tel:308-534-5461)  
Parish Hall: 534-0511

Parish email: [rectory-office@seas-np.org](mailto:rectory-office@seas-np.org)  
Webpage: <http://www.seas-np.org>

## ***16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*** ***July 19, 2020***

***Welcome to St. Elizabeth's:*** It is our hope that you feel at home and among friends here at St. Elizabeth. If you are a visitor for a day, we pray God's speed on your journey. If you are looking for a parish community, we would be delighted to welcome you into our parish family. Please introduce yourselves. Registration forms are available in the entry racks or contact us anytime at 308-534-5461.

### **Religious Services**

#### **Mass Schedule** For Sunday Obligation:

Saturday 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday 10:00 a.m.

#### **Weekdays & Holy Days**

As published in the Bulletin.

#### **Rosary**

Prayed **8:30 a.m.** Monday mornings, and  
30 minutes before weekend Mass.

#### **Sacrament of Confession**

Offered 30 minutes before most all daily Masses  
Saturday 4:00 p.m. – 4:55 p.m.  
Sunday, 9:00 a.m. – 9:55 a.m., or by appointment.

#### **Sacrament of Baptism**

Parents are asked to attend a baptism preparation class. This is recommended, and easiest to do before the birth of the child, but must be done before the baptism.

#### **Sacrament of Matrimony**

To assist those who plan to marry, all couples will be required to fulfill the diocesan marriage preparation policy, which includes the FOCCUS & Engaged Encounter Programs. This requires a minimum of 4-6 months. The assessment process must be completed before a wedding date is set. Contact pastor early to begin the preparation.

### **Parish Information**

#### **Bulletin Deadline**

All material is to be submitted to the parish office before noon Wednesday prior to the Sunday it is to appear. Email to: [rectory-office@seas-np.org](mailto:rectory-office@seas-np.org)

#### **New or Moving Parishioners**

Please call the office to arrange an appointment with the Pastor to register in the Parish. Please call the office to notify us of any address change.

#### **Your Will**

Ask your attorney to include remembrance of your Church in your will.

#### **Religious Vocations**

Any young woman interested in religious life, or young man interested in a vocation to the priesthood should contact your pastor. Please pray for vocations!

### **Education**

#### **Family Formation Program**

Sunday mornings (Sept-May) 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

#### **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.)**

For those interested in possibly joining the Catholic Church. Usually on Wednesdays (Sept-May), 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. in Parish Hall. Please contact the parish office for more information.

## SCHEDULE OF MASSES

|  |         |                   |
|--|---------|-------------------|
| Monday   | July 20 | 8:00 a.m.         |
| Tuesday  | July 21 | <b>7:00 a.m.</b>  |
| Wednesday  | July 22 | <b>5:30 p.m.</b>  |
| <b>6:00pm-10:00pm Eucharistic Holy Hours =&gt; Spend time with Jesus</b> |         |                   |
| Thursday   | July 23 | 8:00 a.m.         |
| Friday   | July 24 | <b>12:10 p.m.</b> |
| Saturday   | July 25 | <b>5:00 p.m.</b>  |
| Sunday   | July 26 | <b>10:00 a.m.</b> |

## INTENTIONS

|                                    |
|------------------------------------|
| Book of Memories / Blessings       |
| Liv/Dec mem. Bode/Ruskamp families |
| Mike & Erika Sindorf               |
| Frank & Florena Schneweis +        |
| MaKenna Ketter                     |
| Frank & Florena Schneweis +        |
| People of our Parish               |

*Those who  
are just  
must be kind.*

— Wisdom 12:19

## **Stewardship: July 12, 2020**

|                               |            |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Adult Envelopes:</b> ..... | \$1,700.00 |
| <b>Loose Plate:</b> .....     | \$130.00   |
| <b>Children:</b> .....        | \$0.00     |
| <b>Holy Day:</b> 0 .....      | \$0.00     |
| <b>Total:</b> .....           | \$1,830.00 |

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b><u>Joy of the Gospel Campaign</u></b> |                     |
| Total Pledged: .....                     | \$958,770.00        |
| Gifts last week: .....                   | \$150.00            |
| <b>Total Gifts Received: .....</b>       | <b>\$891,973.05</b> |
| Original DIAL Loan: .....                | 1,485,000.00        |
| Total Received (CTTF Camp):              | \$1,025,440.07      |
| Misc Donations Received: .....           | \$739,940.31        |
| Total Payments on Loan: .....            | \$1,702,428.04      |
| <b>Balance on DIAL LOAN: .....</b>       | <b>\$61,613.45</b>  |

|                             |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Peter's Pence: .....        | \$50.00  |
| Mission Coop: .....         | \$120.00 |
| Southern NE Register: ..... | \$0.00   |

## **Parish Calendar**

|                 |            |  |
|-----------------|------------|--|
| Wednesday       | July 22    | 6:00pm – 10:00pm: Eucharistic Adoration  |
| Thursday        | July 23    | 1:00pm: Adult Bible Study via Zoom (contact Teri Volesky)  |
| Friday-Saturday | July 24-25 | 5:00pm Friday - 8:00pm Saturday: <b>Cursillo VIRTUAL National Encounter [in the Parish Hall]</b> |

## **Catholic School News:**

Superintendent Dodson wants to share a few updates with you. Remodel progress continues in the high school, along with regular summer repairs and campus improvements. Enrollment for all grade levels is open. To register, contact Gwen Covey at 308-532-1874. Students have started summer weight training and follow all required COVID guidelines. The 2019-20 school year is being closed out and we are preparing for the Fall registration days. Families will receive letters with info about tuition and registration dates in late July. There is no need to do anything prior to those dates unless contacted by the school office. Mr. Dodson has weekly meetings with the state regulators regarding COVID-19 restrictions and what our Fall schedule may look like. At this time, nothing has been determined ... we repeat ... nothing has been determined. As we have experienced since March, everything changes on a daily basis. However, we are optimistic and plan to keep our start date of Tuesday, August 18th. So, for now just enjoy family. Progress continues in the High School along with the regular summer time, sunshine and these lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer! God Bless.

**North Platte Catholic School: Faith & Knowledge for a Brighter Future**

**Knights of Columbus Family Picnic ...** Due to the COVID virus, regrettably, the picnic is canceled for this year. There is no way that we can ensure everyone's safety, so we felt it was best to cancel.

**Peter's Pence Collection ...** has usually been taken up the last Sunday of June. However, this year, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Peter's Pence Collection will be October 3-4, 2020.

**"How to Pray" Series ...** (by Father Gary Coulter, director, Our Lady of Good Counsel Retreat House). If you missed any of the How to Pray Series. They are available on our webpage in one pdf file under the Resources Tab under COVID-19 Resources and also under the Faith Resources. The Application: Prayer Exercises Series is also available there.

**Scheduled Masses:** All Masses are being livestreamed over ZOOM. See Meeting ID at <http://seas-np.org/covid-19-mass-videos-at-seas/> Videos of Masses available on parish webpage 1 hr after Mass ends - <http://seas-np.org/covid-19-mass-videos-at-seas/>

**Scheduled Times for Confession (in Parish Hall):**

- **30 minutes before Daily Mass; 60 minutes before Sat/Sun Mass.**

## **The Benedict XVI Diocesan School of Catechesis**

This is for Catholics wanting to strengthen their intellectual and spiritual formation to empower their evangelical mission in the world. It covers the Creed, the Sacraments, the Commandments, and Prayer (Year I) as well as Salvation History, Church History, Faith and Reason, and Spirituality (Year II). Participants can join in Year I or Year II and classes will be offered in-person and on Zoom simultaneously. The time commitment is one Saturday a month from September to April for two years. The cost is \$100 per semester, however, those who teach CCD, God-teen/CYO, or in Catholic schools would receive a 25% discount. For more information go to [www.lincolndiocese.org/bxvi](http://www.lincolndiocese.org/bxvi) or call 402-473-0631.

**Catholic Social Services Assistance ...** Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska has funds available for rent, utilities, and emergency cash assistance help. They have funds set aside for every region of southern Nebraska, not just the towns where they have offices. If you know of anyone that needs help, please have them call in for assistance. There is an application process for those wanting to receive assistance. Imperial and SW Nebraska area, please call (402) 327-6299 during daytime hours. [see inserts in last week's online Bulletin]

## **Immaculate Heart of Mary Counseling Center ...**

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Counseling Center (IH MCC) with Catholic Social Services of Southern Nebraska continues to support mental health for the Diocese of Lincoln through the use of telehealth. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health difficulties that adversely impact daily functioning or shadow the joy of living, please reach out. Visit their website at [www.immaculateheartcounseling.org](http://www.immaculateheartcounseling.org) for more information or call 402-489-1834. [see inserts: last week's online Bulletin]

## **Emmaus Institute for Biblical Studies ...**

Register for following in-person or online fall classes with The Emmaus Institute for Biblical Studies, running Sep. 8–Nov. 16: The Letter of James, Leviticus through Deuteronomy, Interpreting the Bible, the Book of Job, The Saints & the Scriptures. Learn more & register [www.emmausinstitute.net](http://www.emmausinstitute.net).

**Man of the Shroud Display ...** from Spirit Catholic Radio ... **at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church & Parish Hall Aug. 30 – Sept. 3 ...** including Jim Bertrand's presentation, Sunday, August 30, 3:00pm. More information in coming weeks.

## **"How Natural Family Planning Changed My Life" ...**

*by Dawn Farias. Dawn and her husband, Ariel Farias have four children and live in the Archdiocese of San Antonio.*

As a child I was baptized Catholic, but essentially grew up with no religious practice. As a married adult, I reentered the Church, and soon after felt a tugging at my heart to stop practicing contraception. At that time, I did not know about Natural Family Planning (NFP). More basic, I did not know about Church teachings on the moral practice of family planning. What I would learn about God's design for my married life and through the practice of NFP would change my life.

### **True Freedom and Openness to Life**

When my husband, Ariel and I took an NFP class, I have to admit that I was scared. Giving up control, was frightening! It was one thing to be committed to an ideal, but something quite different to follow through on it. It definitely involved a leap of faith! Over time and with some experience, I began to appreciate the gift and beauty of NFP.

In practicing NFP, my husband and I must decide if we, as a couple, are ready to embrace the possibility of a new life in each menstrual cycle. When we had used contraception, we ignored this reality. With NFP we could not ignore how God made us – as a man and a woman. NFP helped us understand the relationship that God designed between the marital act and procreation. It has made us "open to life." It even brought our last two children into the family!

### **The Gift of Self**

In using NFP over the years both my husband and I, now see that we give ourselves to each other fully in the marital act. For us, the idea of contraception has become almost vulgar. It cheapens the marital act. Contraception seems to say: "I love you, honey, but I don't love you THAT much."

NFP also guards against the objectification of the woman in the relationship. Contraception often keeps the woman in a defensive position because it allows "intimacy on demand." NFP does not allow this because of the practice of periodic abstinence when not seeking a pregnancy. A deeper equality between husband and wife can be nurtured with NFP. NFP begins the process of this awareness.

### **Growing Together in Holiness**

The sacrifices that NFP entails have only served to make me a better person and more devoted to the Lord. Without knowing it, using contraception promotes the idea that children are a burden. Children do require lots of work, and pregnancy demands its own set of sacrifices, but NFP has helped me meet these challenges by leading me to the realization that children are God's blessings. I am constantly forced to pray, change, make concessions and find solutions to the selfishness and laziness that come up often when meeting the needs of others.

Today, I am confident that had I not been open to life in the practice of NFP, I would not have needed to depend on God, and not have grown as a person. This growth benefits my family and the people I meet in everyday life. Jesus calls us to serve others. Marriage and parenthood are ways we can immediately apply this call in our lives. NFP has led me to be more open to life, more aware of God's design for intimacy in marriage, more dependent on Him to fulfill these plans. It has strengthened my relationship with my husband, given me personal insight and it has given our children life!

## **Creighton Model FertilityCare System ...**

Creighton Model is a women's health science that allows users to learn more about their fertility and, in conjunction with NaProTECHNOLOGY, treat many reproductive disorders. An introductory session for July is scheduled for 7:00pm on the 28<sup>th</sup> at John XXIII Diocesan Center. For more info or to register, <https://lincolndiocese.regfox.com/creighton-introductory-session>.

You may also contact a Certified Fertility Care Practitioner, Kathy Burr, to schedule a follow up or get signed up for the better understanding NFP. Email [ckburr240@gmail.com](mailto:ckburr240@gmail.com) or text 308-991-1880.

## **A Lifeline for Marriage ...**

*Retrouvaille* (pronounced retro-vi) simply means 'rediscovery'. Retrouvaille helps couples through difficult times in their marriages. It is designed to provide the tools to help get your marriage back on track. It will give you the opportunity to rediscover each other and examine your lives together in a new and positive way. This program has helped tens or thousands of couples experiencing marital difficulty at all levels including disillusionment and deep misery. For confidential information about or to register for the program beginning **August 21-23, 2020**, in Schuyler, Nebraska call 1-888-317-5654 or 308-986-2351 or [www.HelpOurMarriage.org](http://www.HelpOurMarriage.org) on the web.

## **An Abortion Testimony ...**

"The causes that lead to such painful decisions as abortion are of course many and complex. If, on the one hand, faithful to her Lord's commandment, the Church never tires of reaffirming that the sacred value of every human being's life originates in the Creator's plan, on the other hand, she encourages the promotion of every initiative in support of women and families in order to create the favorable conditions in which to welcome life, and the protection of the family institution founded on the marriage between a man and a woman. Not only has permitting recourse to the termination of pregnancy not solved the problems that afflict many women and a fair number of families, but it has also made another wound in our society, unfortunately, already burdened by deep suffering" (*Address of Pope Benedict XVI to Italy's Pro-life Movement, May 12, 2008*).

## **Good Counsel Retreat House, July Retreats**

Register for Online Retreats sponsored by Good Counsel Retreat House [www.goodcounselretreat.com](http://www.goodcounselretreat.com), 402-786-2705, or [goodcounsel@cdolinc.net](mailto:goodcounsel@cdolinc.net). **Throughout July - "Surrender!"** on-demand retreat with Fr. Larry Richards. **July 24-25** – "We are Not Alone" retreat on John 14 with Bart Schuchts of the John Paul II Healing Center.

### **Plan ahead for Upcoming in-person retreats including:**

- **Aug. 14-16**, a women's retreat with Fr. Sean Kilcawley
- **Aug. 28-30**, Unbound Retreat with Matt Simmons/Fr. Gary Coulter

## **FROM FR. MARK SEIKER:**

**New Software for the Church HVAC Controls ...** the installation has been completed except for a few backordered parts that will help during heating season; the system is working! Thanks to all who made donations toward this needed and necessary expense!

**Cursillo VIRTUAL National Encounter ...** for many years, I have been participating in the Cursillo National Encounters. Because of restrictions due to COVID-19, the National Encounter will be VIRTUAL this year. Some Cursillistas from this Western area of Nebraska will be gathering (at a social distance, observing safety guidelines) in the Parish Hall on Friday evening (5:00pm – 9:30pm) and on Saturday from (9:00am – 8:00pm).

Because the Parish Hall will be used by others on Saturday afternoon, Confessions on Saturday afternoon, 4:00pm – 4:55pm, will be held outside near the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes under a temporary tent. **Fr. Mark Seiker will be available for Confessions and Mass on Saturday afternoon.**

## Liturgical Ministers

|                |  |  |
|----------------|--|--|
|                |  |  |
| <b>Lector</b>  |  |  |
| <b>Acolyte</b> |  |  |
| <b>Server</b>  |  |  |
|                |  |  |
| <b>Music</b>   |  |  |
| <b>Gifts</b>   |  |  |
| <b>Ushers</b>  |  |  |
|                |  |  |
| <b>Rosary</b>  |  |  |

## **Readings for the Week**

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Monday:    | Mi 6:1-4, 6-8; Ps 50:5-6, 8-9, 16bc-17,21,23; Mt 12:38-42                |
| Tuesday:   | Mi 7:14-15, 18-20; Ps 85:2-8; Mt 12:46-50                                |
| Wednesday: | Sg 3:1-4b Ps 63:2-6, 8-9; Jn 20:1-2, 11-18                               |
| Thursday:  | Jer 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13; Ps 36:6-7ab, 8-11; Mt 13:10-17                    |
| Friday:    | Jer 3:14-17; Jer 31:10-12abcd, 13; Mt 13:18-23                           |
| Saturday:  | 2 Cor 4:7-15; Ps 126:1bc-6; Mt 20:20-28                                  |
| Sunday:    | 1 Kgs 3:5, 7-12; Ps 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-130; Rom 8:28-30; Mt 13:44-52 |

**Prayers for the sick:** Jennifer Schmid, Steve Haman, Sharon Beckius, Those affected with/by COVID-19, Theresa McCarthy-Garth, Young woman (with many difficult situations), Troy Tickle, Iris Wyman Lloyd, Peggy Lawler, J.D. Troyer, Matt Reisen (Matt & Ashley Perlinger's friend), Special Intention, Carolyn Cohen, Tim Garth (Theresa McCarthy-Garth's son), Those struggling with Alcoholism, Mary Lou Robles (Toni Barron's sister), Renate Nordquist, Mike & Kim Paul, Jim Beckius.

**Prayers for the deceased:** **Eloise Kramer** (Monica Kramer's mother), **Nellie Rodriguez** (Toni Barron's sister), **Reyes Robles** (Toni Barron's brother-in-law), **Margaret Ruskamp** (Donna Bode's mother), Dolores Kosmicki, Patricia Zamora (Toni Barron's sister), Teresa Clouatre, Gordon Swanson (Cindy Swanson's father), Florena Schneweis (Emily Krondak's mother), Carlos Fleury (Steve/Janet Fear's son-in-law), Ruby Ramirez (Toni Barron's sister), JoAnn Bode Waters (John Bode's sister), Eileen Boltz, Leona Clouatre, Bernadine Torres, Martha Burbach, Luke Ranck.

**Birthdays/Anniversaries:** 7/18 - Ken Bjornstad, 7/20 - Jerry Cooper, 7/25 - Audrey Frary.

**Congratulations:** to Ryan & Kate Wartman who celebrate their 10<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary July 24.

**TREASURES FROM OUR TRADITION ...** By the dawn of the fourteenth century, the sacrament of confirmation was ripe for a rescue, since vast numbers of the faithful never received it, and when it was celebrated, it was done so in isolation from baptism and Eucharist. A bishop named William Durandus set out to reclaim this liturgy, but he had a creative touch and added some things into the mix that had never been thought of before. One was a slap. Oddly, he replaced the kiss of peace at the end of confirmation with a slap on the cheek that endured to modern times. This “wake-up call” was related in his imagination to a custom in the military, wherein ceremonies of knighthood and investiture involved a symbolic wound as a sign of willingness to suffer. Within every congregation today there are people who have memories of fretting through their confirmation liturgies, anxious to know how enthusiastic a slap the bishop would bestow. Durandus loved symbolism and had a reason for every ritual and practice, but his creative spin on the celebration shows how sadly adrift confirmation was from its anchorage in baptism, how far off-course from its home port of the eucharistic community. —Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

**GOOD SEEDS ...** Today Jesus continues to speak to his followers using parables. What a rich treasure we are given today in three parables about the kingdom of heaven! The kingdom is likened to a man sowing good seed in his field, a mustard seed, and yeast mixed with flour. As they did last week, today the disciples press Jesus for an interpretation of one of the parables – the parable of the man sowing good seed. Lest we think that these parables are simply amusing little anecdotes, Jesus’ interpretation should be seen for what it is – a warning. Wailing and grinding of teeth in a fiery furnace await those who are children of the evil one. This parable points to the struggle for today’s believer. Sometimes, through sin, we sow weeds and prevent the love of Christ from blossoming. Let today’s Gospel help put us back on track. Let us recommit ourselves to preparing for the last days, the harvest, by blossoming as the good seeds we were created in love to be. —Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

**WORDS AND WEEDS ...** A man of words and not of deeds is like a garden full of weeds. —Anonymous

**DO ...** Do what you can, with what you have, where you are. —Theodore Roosevelt

**Pray for our Seminarians:** **Ranil John Weerrackoon**, from St. Thomas Parish in Lincoln. He entered the Seminary in 2018. He is in Pre-Theology 2 at St. Gregory the Great Seminary.

**Pray for our Religious Sisters:** School Sisters of Christ the King, Marian Sisters of the Diocese of Lincoln, Sisters at the Carmel of Jesus, Mary & Joseph, Pink Sisters, Sisters of Mary, Queen of Mercy.

**HOLY FATHER’S INTENTIONS ... (July) Universal prayer intention - Our Families:** We pray that today’s families may be accompanied with love, respect and guidance.

# Live the truth and beauty of God's plan for married love!

*Creation overflows with God's life and love! Make no mistake about it—God made you and our world out of His great love! Let's consider how this truth includes marriage. And let's take a look at how the methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) honor the truth and beauty of God's plan for married love.*

## ***It's about love.***

From the beginning, God created Adam and then a suitable partner for him, Eve. The first human relationship ever created was that of marriage! "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2: 23). The two give themselves to each other to become one. Giving of one's self to the other is a hallmark of marriage—there is no "I" in marriage, but "We." It is part of God's plan for the good of humanity. That is because marriage reflects the love of God—permanent, faithful, and fruitful. And, with the coming of our salvation in Jesus, marriage reflects the love of Christ for His Church.

The methods of NFP honor and even have the potential to protect and strengthen a married couple's ability to reflect God's love. That is because NFP requires communication and cooperation between husband and wife. NFP methods, which are rooted in science, make use of education and behavioral change for achieving and avoiding pregnancy. When learned and used correctly, they are an effective means of responsible parenthood.

As a couple learns about their combined gift of fertility and understands the best time to either conceive or postpone conceiving a baby, they are better able to discern God's plan for their marriage. If delaying a pregnancy, they will abstain from the marital act. They then will do nothing to harm God's gift of fertility. The use of NFP often requires self-sacrifice as the spouses explore other ways to show affection for each other when periodically abstaining to postpone pregnancy. As they work together, a husband and wife will find that this may deepen their emotional and spiritual intimacy as spouses.

## ***It's about life.***

God created men and women in His image—male and female. Human sexuality is part of God's plan. It is woven into the fabric of each man and woman. Human sexuality carries within it the two-fold powers of love and life. The essential nature of this two-fold truth should be appreciated and respected.

In marriage, husband and wife deepen their love for one another through celebrating the truth of their sexual union. The marital embrace is a spousal gift with a two-fold purpose; to draw the spouses closer together, to be unitive and to be procreative, to be life-giving.

Procreation is the Lord God's awesome invitation and a sacred duty for husband and wife to share in His creative power! Sometimes a couple is unable to have children through no fault of their own. Their challenge is



to offer their marital love as a blessing in the community in service to others.

Marriage is the foundation to build families—children are “the supreme gift of marriage” (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 50), and marriage creates a secure home for children. God’s procreative invitation to husband and wife extends past pregnancy and calls parents to steward their children: to nurture them, to teach them to love God and neighbor.

The Church has always understood that God wants parents to be open to life and to care for their children. To be a parent is a life-long vocation! It is why the Church can say that married couples receive “a kind of consecration” in their marital duties (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 48).

NFP methods support God’s gift of procreation because they value new life. Unlike contraception, which exists to deny human fertility, NFP respects natural fertility. NFP education enables husband and wife to understand their window of fertility—when they are most likely to become pregnant—and therefore, can also be used to help them achieve a pregnancy besides postpone one. NFP respects God’s power of life. Contraception cannot do that!

### *It’s about freedom.*

Free will is one of God’s gifts to men and women. When God created humanity, He made the human person as a “rational” being—who can initiate, control, and decide how to act (see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1730). Freedom of conscience is a gift from God that allows each person to grow in maturity and to be able to love Him and neighbor freely. At the same time, the Catholic faith tells us that true freedom can only be found when we choose to love God. Freedom, therefore, is not the arbitrary ability to do whatever we’d like at any time.

True freedom is the ability to *recognize the good and do what is right*. If a person chooses to live a life in which he or she makes choices only thinking of his/her own happiness and fails to do the good to which God calls him or her, the person creates a type of prison for themselves (see *Catechism*, no. 1740). Doing what is right in life often requires personal sacrifice for a greater good than one’s own desire or pleasure. And, this good is liberating!

As applied to marriage, the decisions of spouses can either build up or tear down the heart of a marriage. How the spouses exercise their individual freedom within the marriage cannot be made in isolation but must be made in recognition of each other’s needs, that of their children, extended family, and other obligations and responsibilities outside the home.

Healthy marital communication is especially important regarding conjugal relations. Sin affects us all. It is deceptive. Sin can twist the good of the marital embrace.

Spouses can be selfish in how they treat each other. Wholesome inter-mutuality that is rooted in the love of God and each other strengthens a couple’s marriage. Spouses need to support each other in striving to honor God’s design by rejecting anything that can injure their marital love. It is the reason why the Church opposes contraception. It strikes at the heart of marital love.

The methods of NFP provide useful information on the woman’s fertility cycle. NFP helps a husband and wife determine whether their lovemaking may result in bringing a new life into the world. The practice of daily charting the wife’s signs of fertility can spark deep conversation about God’s plan for their marriage. The practice of NFP can promote mutual growth in self-mastery, foster emotional, and spiritual maturity, and lead to a more authentic life lived in the freedom of God’s design.

### *It’s about gift.*

God is love. In His great love, God created men and women in His image to share His divine life. When our first parents turned away from Him, God sought them. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Every human life is a gift from God, and, in turn, like our Heavenly Father, together we are gift to each other. We cannot fully discover who we are as persons “except through a sincere gift” of ourselves to each other (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 24). Human beings are able to be fully human only when we reach out to our neighbor to form a network of loving relationships of life and love. We are all sons and daughters of the one family of God!

Marriage is a particularly unique gift from God. Marriage is not “the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love (*Humanae vitae*, no. 8). God designed marriage to bring a man and a woman together in the one-flesh union that Scripture so eloquently teaches (Gen. 2:24). It is because of marriage that families come to be.

Today, we are fortunate to live in a time where human reproduction is well understood. The reliable methods of NFP stand upon solid research about male and female physiology. NFP science has confirmed the fertile signs of the woman’s menstrual cycle and marked the parameters of a man and a woman’s combined fertility, which creates the fertile window. NFP can be a moral means to either achieve or postpone a pregnancy. And, for women, NFP charting can provide insight into the health of her reproductive system. With so good a gift in our world, why not learn more about these healthy and ethical methods that support God’s plan for married love? Visit [uscbb.org/nfp](http://uscbb.org/nfp). And remember “live the truth and beauty of God’s plan for married love!”

