



***Fr. Joseph Hattie explores God’s plan for marriage and family during NFP talk about church teachings, held in conjunction with Billings training weekend Sept. 2 in Saskatoon***

**By Kiply Lukan Yaworski**

SASKATOON -- The church’s teachings about conjugal love and responsible parenthood were highlighted during the opening session of a training weekend about the Billings ovulation method of natural family planning held recently in Saskatoon.

Rev. Joseph Hattie, OMI, of the archdiocese of Halifax spoke to a gathering at Holy Spirit parish Sept. 2 about God’s plan for marriage and family, launching a weekend training session in the Billings ovulation method for teacher couples led by LeeAnn Kinderwater of Stettler, Alberta (see related story).

“If we want the best results, then we must follow the maker’s instructions,” Hattie said, stressing that God is the maker of marriage, and his instruction book can be found in the first books of Genesis, “which Pope John Paul II reflected on with such beauty and depth” in his exploration of the theology of the body.

The spiritual director of WOOMB Canada, an organization promoting use of the Billings method worldwide, Hattie has a doctorate in the theology of marriage and family from the Lateran University in Rome, and has written and published a marriage and family preparation course “Informed Conscience, Walking with God” and “Totally Yours.”

Throughout history the church has kept God's plan in focus, particularly in times of confusion about the meaning of marriage, of human sexuality and the family, Hattie said. "Back in the early 1960s there was a great deal of confusion about the meaning of human sexuality, caused by what was known as the sexual revolution," he said. "The church, through the Spirit working through Pope Paul VI, gave us the document that gives clarity, what I call the divine clarity, about these issues: *Humanae Vitae*, *Of Human Life*."

In his presentation Hattie explored the principles behind the church's teaching on conjugal love, responsible parenthood and family planning, including the rejection of artificial contraception as "intrinsically evil".

"The basic law of life is that for every privilege there is a corresponding and balancing responsibility," he said. Conjugal love is the "great privilege" that God gives to mankind so that he might achieve his design of love through marriage, Hattie said.

The responsibility which accompanies the privilege of conjugal love is the openness of mind, heart, soul and body between husband and wife, and between the couple and God, he explained. "The two have to go together: openness to each other and openness to God," he said. "To the degree that you are open to your spouse, to the truth and goodness, to the masculinity and femininity (of your spouse), that is the degree that you are open to God."

The total gift of self to each other in conjugal love between husband and wife, is meant to reflect the total mutual gift of the Father and the Son in the trinity, and of the total gift of Jesus in giving his life for the mystical bride, the church, he added.

Thus the church teaches that the responsibilities which balance the privilege of conjugal love in marriage are to make it a fully human act, as persons of body, soul, free will and intellect, involving one's whole self, including one's fertility; and to be faithful and exclusive until death, Hattie explained, adding that there is also a responsibility to be "fecund" or creative, as God is creative.

In terms of responsible parenthood, the privilege of being co-creators with God calls married couples to make the decision to have children in harmony with God's plan for marriage. "When you enter into marriage and family, you're entering into a divine project, and God's the project manager. If you want to carry out the project well, you need good communication with the project manager."

True responsibility is found in being open to understanding God's will and his creative intention, and to make the effort to know and respect the biological laws of human procreation. In this context, natural family planning methods such as the Billings ovulation method, can have a place in responsible parenthood, Hattie said.

Couples are also called to know, to understand and to harness the tendencies of instinct or passion "so that energy can be put at the service of your marriage, at the service of your

family, at the service of society, and thus at the service of Christ,” Hattie said. “When that energy is harnessed, it’s much easier to hear God.”

It is also part of responsible parenthood to evaluate both external and internal resources for having children, in consultation with God. How much patience, generosity, humour, and imagination do you have for this task, asked Hattie. “Do you have enough for a baby to get some fingers into and start to stretch?” he asked. “Children are for the salvation of their parents.”

Finally, the couple has a responsibility to respect the true hierarchy of relationships and values: God is first, then the couple, then children, and finally society. “The two of you consult God, and then in response to what he’s asking of you, you grow in love for each other.”

By its very nature, artificial contraception prevents the mutual gift of each other, the complete openness to one’s spouse, and thereby the openness to God, that is the inherent responsibility of the great privilege of conjugal love, Hattie said. “The sadness of it is that most people are convinced that using contraception in sexual relations is being responsible,” he said, adding that many are not open to the truth of God’s plan.

Legislation passed this summer in Canada giving homosexual couples the right to marry, has its origin in the legalization of contraception in 1967, Hattie said. If heterosexual couples have the right to sexual activity and marriage without relation to having children, then homosexual relationships are seen to have that same right, he said. “A whole lot of things begin to unfold.”