

# FertilityCare for young women

A newsletter of the Pope Paul VI Institute  
dedicated to helping women appreciate their fertility

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## MY LONGING FOR TRUTH

by Emily O'Donnel, research assistant



Emily O'Donnel

I TOOK AN HONORS ENGLISH CLASS my first semester of my freshman year of college entitled “Rhetoric as Argument”. Fabulously naïve and painfully zealous, I prepared myself for what I imagined would be a delightful daily gathering of intelligent individuals willing to discuss differing opinions in a sophisticated and enlightened manner. My professor was a young, single, female PhD candi-

date with a vibrant personality and a thinly veiled bitterness towards the patriarchy, whose goals included shocking the conservative Midwestern students in the front row while simultaneously encouraging us to question everything we had ever been told was truth and drastically change our life plans “for the greater good”. Needless to say, the semester proved an interesting one.

We read provocative environmental pieces, radical feminist literature and profound works on the history of obstetrics and gynecology in America. While I admired that professor for several noteworthy reasons, her ability to keep her opinion to herself and grade papers impartially were not among them. I respectfully locked horns with her several times over the semester as I struggled to meet her ideological expectations in my writings. To her dismay, I chose to write my final research paper on the subject of hormonal birth control and its detrimental effect on women’s health. I interviewed Teresa Kenney, the Nurse Practitioner at the Pope Paul VI Institute, read several books cover to cover, and turned in a very concise argument on the environmental, emotional, spiritual and physical ramifications of hormonal birth control.

According to Merriam Webster’s online dictionary,

feminism is “organized activity in support of women’s rights and interests”. In my paper I stated that I am, in fact, a feminist. I do firmly believe in women’s rights and, as a woman, am incredibly supportive of female interests. As a result, I firmly believe that a woman’s reproductive system should be celebrated and not suppressed by hormonal contraception. In my paper, I stated something of this nature. To this day, my most profound college experience was flipping through my graded paper full of comments from my professor, and seeing my sentence “I am a feminist” underlined several times with a penned comment: “No. You are not.”

In retrospect, that class actually did radically change the trajectory of my life goals and plans, though ironically in the opposite way that my professor had hoped, and I wouldn’t realize its full effect until almost two years later. From that moment on, I did become restless with the system — with everything society had told me was truth. I read everything I could get my hands on about Natural Family Planning methods, NaProTechnology and the **CREIGHTON MODEL FertilityCare System**. I began charting my own cycle a few months after that semester ended in order to monitor my own fertility. I devoured everything I could find about fertility, cycles, pregnancy, nutrition, hormonal birth control, feminine spirituality, holistic women’s health care and current issues in the field of obstetrics and gynecology. I began compiling a library collection specifically devoted to these subjects for the purpose of lending books to fellow women

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on this journey of truth. (My collection now needs another book shelf).

Along the way, a few important saints have nudged me in the right direction and continue to guide me and encourage me daily. St. Edith Stein, a brilliant feminist and philosopher, has been a continuous light and sisterly presence for me on this journey and I am so grateful every day that this beautiful and holy woman of God pursued my friendship. St. Gianna, mother and physician, has become a major role model for my life, encouraging sacrifice and selfless love. St. Joan of Arc, a warrior woman of fearless passion and devotion to our Lord, has continued to surprise me with words of ardent wisdom, quiet strength and dedicated grace. And of course, the Blessed Virgin herself has been my motherly companion, especially those days when I felt most alone, a relationship for which I will spend every moment until my last breath thanking God. These holy women are a few among thousands who questioned everything society told them was true, lived their lives with a passionate zeal for Christ, and gave brilliant examples of what it truly means to be a woman.

Interestingly enough, my journey to learn more about these issues surrounding the modern approach to women's health pointed out other fallacies in our society's key teachings. Reading St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body and Love and Responsibility, as well as revolutionary writings like Pope Paul VI's Humane Vitae and St. Edith Stein's Essays on Woman, began an incredible new chapter in my journey of discovery. I started making new connections and began filling in dots I hadn't previously known existed. New light was shed on issues like homosexuality, environmental disregard, consumerism, abortion, the "hook-up culture" so prevalent in modern society, divorce, mental illness, pornography, atheism, loveless marriages, abuse and rape. As time went on, it became more and more clear that none of these issues stand independently from one another. I came to realize more deeply that they all have two major things in common: 1) they are all intensely on the rise 2) and they all largely stem from society's rampant hormonal contraceptive use. As this understanding grew more solid, my passion grew deeper and much more fervent. In the eloquent words of the wonderful St. Edith Stein, "My longing for truth was a single prayer."

It took a period of deep discernment, but eventually, everything started to quickly change. My life turned

upside-down. I switched my major, I withdrew from several programs I had planned on participating in my entire life, and dove head first into totally new things I never dreamed I would include on my resume. I am now majoring in Biology at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and looking into medical school, nursing and bioethics graduate programs as exciting options for my continued education. I am currently on staff at the Pope Paul VI Institute as a research intern for Dr. Thomas Hilgers, a hero of modern reproductive medicine.

I just applied to become a practitioner of the **CREIGHTON MODEL** and I am so excited for this journey. The **CREIGHTON MODEL FertilityCare System** has radically changed my quality of life, restored hope in my reproductive future, and empowered me as a woman more than I could have ever possibly imagined. I desire to become a FertilityCare provider because charting is a brand new language that has allowed me to understand myself, my body and my fellow sisters in Christ in a much deeper way. As a NaProTechnology surgical patient myself, I know first-hand the miracles that the **CrMS** working hand-in-hand with NaProTechnology can facilitate. I want, with every fiber of my being, to help other women's lives go through similar miraculous transformations. If feminism involves female empowerment, the **CREIGHTON MODEL Fertility-Care System** proves to be the epitome of reproductive empowerment. The **CrMS** allows a woman to take control of her reproductive health, schedule preventative and diagnostic procedures, pursue holistic and necessary fertility treatments, and work cooperatively with her spouse and/or doctor regarding her fertility.

In the last two years, Christ and His beautiful servants the saints, have very clearly guided me towards the path I am supposed to follow. I do not know the details of the future, but I do understand that I am supposed to join in this glorious mission of spreading the word about diagnostic women's health methods, rather than today's widely used suppressive "medicines". I firmly believe with all that I am that hormonal birth control is the root of many of society's greatest ills today and I have a fierce desire to help reverse the current trends. My greatest wish is that every woman, of every age and every state of fertility, can receive the truly beautiful gift of deeply understanding the miraculous thing that is her reproductive system, and that this understanding will help her realize how much God faithfully loves her.

**PRAYER FOR THE UNBORN** — *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I love you very much. I beg you to spare the life of the unborn child that I have spiritually adopted, who is in danger of abortion. Amen.*

Venerable Fulton J. Sheen

# PRO-LIFE PROFILE: EDITH STEIN



**THE LIFE AND WORK OF EDITH STEIN** are of immense importance to the women's family planning movement, and to feminism generally. Scholar, mystic, and feminist, at various times in her life she was a devout Jew, atheist, philosopher, Catholic, and Carmelite nun. Finally, more

than 50 years after her death in Auschwitz, she became a canonized saint.

As a brilliant feminist scholar she was able to challenge certain assumptions of the day, arguing for greater involvement of women in the liturgical life of the Church, in the professions, and in the workplace. She was an intellectual leader of the fledgling women's movement in Germany after World War I. It is a remarkable tribute to her persona that she was able to harmonize these feminist aspirations with her abiding belief that at the deepest core of woman's personality one will find receptivity and motherhood. Not a "barefoot and pregnant" reductionist view of motherhood, the kind which sees woman as a passive prisoner of her biology, and slave to her tyrant fertility. Rather, she saw receptivity and motherliness as woman's unique power, a power capable of transforming a home, workplace, professional environment, country, or society in ways that men cannot.

One of the prescient original insights was derived from her exegesis of the Genesis biblical narratives as well as from her intuitive analysis of the lived experience of woman. This insight was that procreation would always be a more consuming and psychologically preoccupying concern for the woman. This prophetic analysis anticipated the work of later experts of the psychology of woman, who recognized the

"Because she was Jewish, Edith Stein was taken with her sister Rosa and many other Catholics and Jews from the Netherlands to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, where she died with them in the gas chambers. Today we remember them all with deep respect. A few days before her deportation, the woman religious had dismissed the question about a possible rescue: 'Do not do it! Why should I be spared? Is it not right that I should gain no advantage from my Baptism? If I cannot share the lot of my brothers and sisters, my life, in a certain sense, is destroyed.'"

— Pope John Paul II in his homily at the canonization Mass, Oct. 11, 1998

procreation and childbearing can be anxiety-provoking challenges to integration in a woman's life.

We think that if Edith Stein were alive today she would be a zealous promoter of fertility consciousness and appreciation, and would see this issue as an existential core feminist issue. She would see this alternative as the only authentic and empowering way of satisfying modern woman's fertility-control needs in a way that fulfills also the deepest needs of her person. She would also see contraception and sterilization as a deeply traumatizing form of rejection of woman's core self. She would see them as debilitating compromises with fear and therefore contrary to reproductive freedom. She would not view contraception and sterilization as liberating technologies, but rather cruel instruments of woman's personal degradation and enslavement to the will and desires of others.

We therefore look to Edith Stein as patroness of our Foundation and movement. We believe it most fitting that this great feminist and saint inspire all efforts to empower the world's women in an authentic way in this new millennium. We think her ideas, articulated within the woman's movement, will have great power to influence the cultural dialogue concerning woman, sexuality, marriage, and family.

The writings of Edith Stein fill 17 volumes, many of which have been translated into English. A woman of integrity, she followed the truth wherever it led her. After becoming a Catholic, Edith continued to honor her mother's Jewish faith. Sister Josephine Koepfel, O.C.D., translator of several of Edith's books, sums up this saint with the phrase, "Learn to live at God's hands."

[www.theedithsteinfoundation.com/about-2/who-is-edith-stein/](http://www.theedithsteinfoundation.com/about-2/who-is-edith-stein/)

## Can an **ATHEIST** be **PRO-LIFE**?

"I've had a lot of quarrels with some of my fellow materialists and secularists on this point, [but] I think that if the concept 'child' means anything, the concept 'unborn child' can be said to mean something. All the discoveries of embryology [and viability] — which have been very considerable in the last generation or so — appear to confirm that opinion, which I think should be innate in everybody. It's innate in the Hippocratic Oath, it's instinct in anyone who's ever watched a sonogram. So 'yes' is my answer to that."

— The late Christopher Hitchens, atheist, on whether he is pro-life, (2008)  
Photo by ensceptico - IMG3956 via Wikimedia Commons





## RESOURCES

[www.DrHilgers.com](http://www.DrHilgers.com)  
[www.fertilitycare.org](http://www.fertilitycare.org)  
[www.chastity.com](http://www.chastity.com)  
[vocation-network.org](http://vocation-network.org)  
[www.onemoresoul.com](http://www.onemoresoul.com)  
[www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com)



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For more information, visit [www.popepaulvi.com](http://www.popepaulvi.com).

## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

**Back in college, my doctor put me on the birth control pill because I had painful periods and irregular cycles. Now, I am married and want to use a Natural system of family planning but am fearful that those problems will return if I come off the pill. What can I do?**

It is common medical practice these days for doctors to put women on the “pill” for women’s health problems including painful periods, irregular cycles, ovarian cysts, PMS, and even acne. The reason the pill works to treat so many menstrual problems is because it suppresses the entire menstrual cycle and therefore suppresses the troublesome symptoms that women experience. However, there is an alternative to using the BCP to treat women’s health disorders.

In 2004, Dr. Thomas Hilgers introduced a new reproductive health science called NaProTECHNOLOGY (Natural Reproductive Technology). It is a women’s health science designed to treat the underlying causes and diseases of these common disorders. NaProTECHNOLOGY was derived from years of research developing and working with a natural system of family planning; the Creighton Model system. The Creighton Model system is based entirely on the observation of cervical mucus a vital indicator of our fertility. It has been scientifically developed and standardized and is extremely effective at both achieving and avoiding pregnancies. One of the incredible benefits of this system is that it can be used to monitor, maintain and evaluate, women’s gynecological health.

Instead of covering up the problem by shutting down the reproductive system like the birth control pill does, this approach to women’s health tries to actually solve the underlying problem thus providing better outcomes for patients while preserving their fertility. And it allows women to avoid the physical side effects of hormonal contraceptives as well as the serious ethical implications they pose for Christians.

If a woman is interested in seeking a doctor who practices NaProTECHNOLOGY, she can go to the websites [PopePaulVI.com](http://PopePaulVI.com) or [FertilityCare.org](http://FertilityCare.org). There one can find lists of doctors and Fertility Care Practitioners who teach the Creighton Model System. Or they can contact Pope Paul VI Institute directly at **402.390.6600**.

**My husband and I have undergone a conversion that has made us take our Catholic Faith more seriously. We are now considering using NFP as a way to plan our family but are scared because we have heard stories from our parents who tell us the rhythm method just doesn’t work. Can you tell us anything to reassure us?**

There are still stereotypes about NFP. Fortunately the past 30 years has allowed science to bring NFP up to par with modern technology. For example the effectiveness of the Creighton Model System was published in the Journal of Reproductive Medicine in 1998. Its effectiveness rate for avoiding pregnancy was found to be 99.5% for perfect use and 96.8% for typical use. This is just as effective at preventing pregnancy as other contraceptives on the market.

Secondly, there are many benefits to using a natural system of family planning. Not only is it effective, it is easy to learn, medically safe, inexpensive, and a shared system between the couple. NFP has been found to strengthen marriage and families by helping them value, respect and appreciate their fertility.

Thirdly, using NFP allows us to say “yes” to God in every aspect of our lives. Our fertility is the greatest gift God has bestowed to humans, because it allows a man and woman the ability to come together and create with God an eternal human soul out of nothing. If we use birth control we are saying no to this incredible gift and NO to God.