

NEWSLETTER FROM THE GUILD OF SAINTS LUKE
VOL. 2, NO. 2
THE GUILD OF SAINTS LUKE

Guild of Saints Luke

Cosmas & Damian

Newsletter

April 1986

Flowers and Festivals Family Dinner
A Day of Life
Why I began the Guild
and the Guild
What Do People Say
words from the Mass



NEWSLETTER VOL. 2, No. 2
OF THE GUILD OF ST. LUKE, SS. COSMAS & DAMIAN

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FEATURE:

"[Natural Family Planning methods]...methods for planning or avoiding pregnancies by observation of the natural signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phase of the menstrual cycle. It is implicit in the definition of natural family planning, when used to avoid conception, that drugs, devices and surgical procedures are not used, there is abstinence from sexual intercourse during the fertile phase of the menstrual cycle and the act of intercourse, when it occurs, is complete."

- World Health Organization

"...they [doctors and nurses] should regard it as an essential part of their skill to make themselves fully proficient in this difficult field of medical knowledge. For then, when married couples consult them, they will be able to give them proper advice and to show them a way that is lawful. This, indeed, they have every right to expect."

- Encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI, 'HUMANAE VITAE' 1968.

ETHICS AND NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

The words Natural Family Planning never appeared in traditional text-books of moral theology, and it is doubtful if the authors could have even guessed at what they meant. Indeed, the practice of NFP received little attention from moralists until this century. However, it is a practice that is fully consistent with the Church's outlook on marriage and on human life.

From its very inception, the Church was faced with questions about human life. There were problems about infanticide, abortion and the use of various methods to cause sterility. There were questions, too, about sex and marriage. Often, the answers that have come down to us are fragmentary; there is no elaborate theological or philosophical justification for them. But they fitted in with a general outlook on life that has come down to us and is often referred to us as the Judaeo-Christian tradition. So we find that early Christian thinkers, like the Jews before them, held that life is from God and that it is to be respected at all stages of its development. Infanticide and abortion were condemned. So too was the killing of a foetus that, because of a defective biology, was considered to be only a potential human being. It was wrong, not only to kill an actual human being, but to kill an organism that would become a human being. Finally, the use of medicines to cause sterility and thus prevent conception was considered wrong from the earliest times. On the other hand, since human life is good, sexual intercourse for the sake of procreation was considered to be good. Indeed, perhaps in response to a strongly anti-life mentality, the procreative aspect of sex was over-emphasized by St. Augustine and others. The latter recognised that avoidance of sin could be a legitimate motive for intercourse, but it was left to later thinkers, among them St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, to offer more positive reasons, love and marital affection, as other good reasons for intercourse.

Human life, then, is good. It is a gift of God and as such is to be respected. It is to be respected not simply because it is useful to have extra people in the family or in society, but because a human being deserves respect for what he is: each one is a unique person, made in the image and likeness of God. And since a human being is good, it is good to bring human beings into existence.

As organisms we have a natural desire to preserve our own lives and also the human race. As thinking beings we can understand that it is good for us and for the human race to continue to exist. As Christians we believe that human reproduction is 'pro-creation', co-operation with God in the act of creating another image of Himself, another member of His Kingdom and an adopted child of God. Human life is good, a basic good of human nature which is to be respected for its own sake. The passing on of life is a perfection of this good. It is sometimes known as the procreative good.

Human life is a good that perfects our human nature. But it is not the only good that adds to our fullness as human beings. Love and friendship are among the basic concerns of people. We seek love and friendship, not simply because these are useful or enjoyable, but because it is good to love and to be loved, to be a friend and to have friends. Love and friendship can be sought for their own sakes; they can be considered to be forms of a basic human good. Again, knowing the truth is a basic human good. We seek the truth, not merely because it is useful but because it is better to know than to be ignorant. By growing in knowledge we perfect ourselves and become better people.

There are other basic human goods - beauty, sincerity, self-integration, justice to mention some, which we seek because they are good in themselves. When we seek them and begin to share in them, to make them our own, we develop ourselves and become better people. But we have to seek them in appropriate ways. To seek the truth, to accept it, to share it with others is to become a truth-loving, truthful and sincere person. To seek justice and to practice justice in appropriate ways is to become a just person. It is by participating in these goods that we perfect ourselves and grow in the likeness of God. On the other hand, if we attack these goods directly, if we undermine them or harm them of set purpose, we do wrong and become evil. By telling lies we become liars, by acting unjustly we become unjust.

When people practise NFP are they seeking basic human goods in appropriate ways? Are they participating in these goods or turning against them? People have many reasons for practising NFP.... to have children, to space pregnancies, to avoid pregnancy, to

express love, to protect their health. In considering whether what we do is right or wrong we have to ask ourselves what our purpose is in acting. The purpose mentioned just now are all good purposes, and so they would not make the practice of NFP wrong. But people could practise it for selfish reasons or because they were against children; such motives would vitiate their action. In order that our actions be right, it is not sufficient to have good intentions; what we do must also be good. It would be wrong to act against a basic human good, against truth or justice, for a good purpose. We must not do evil in order to achieve good. Does the practice of NFP involve a person in actions against a basic human good? When couples use this method to achieve a pregnancy they are clearly seeking the procreative good, the transmission of life. But when they use it to avoid pregnancy? In the first place, just as a person does not act against truth when he does not tell the truth but keeps it to himself, for example, by keeping a secret, so a couple do not act against the good of procreation by avoiding having a child. As there are times when the truth should not be spoken, so there are times when children should not be conceived. Secondly, those who use the infertile period are not acting against the good of procreation. They are not acting against procreation since the acts are not procreative. They are not choosing to make intercourse infertile, since it is naturally so. They do not turn their minds against the procreative good but are willing to accept a child if, unexpectedly, a pregnancy should follow. By using the infertile period, they do not seek the good of procreation but other goods such as the sharing of love, the strengthening of fidelity and so on. And the quest for and sharing in these goods make their action good.

There have been holy men who taught that we should never act to obtain merely human pleasure, that all our joy should be in doing God's will. In more recent times there have been advertisers for a well-advertised brand of cigarettes who used to tell us, "if you like it, just go and do it". This latter doctrine is more popular than the severe doctrine of the holy men. But a little reflection will show that it is erroneous. Self-satisfaction, pleasure, is not a basic human good. It is not to be sought for its own sake. It does not necessarily perfect us, make us better people. It is not the point of human activity. One might be a little hesitant to approach

a surgeon if one heard that he operated merely for pleasure. What we do is not necessarily good because it brings us pleasure, it is not bad because it causes us pain. Pleasure accompanies human activity. If the activity is good the pleasure is good, if bad, the pleasure is bad. It is necessary to recall these simple truths because one of the commonest, and perhaps the most practical difficulty against NFP is that it is difficult. A way of acting is not bad because it is difficult. NFP is difficult. It requires self-control and mutual effort. But people are willing to face difficulties when they are convinced that it is worthwhile to do so. Couples who are convinced that NFP is good for their marriage and are united in a common effort of will to practise it can surmount these difficulties. "This chaste union", writes Joseph M. Boyle, "obviates the temptation for couples to treat one another as mere instruments for sexual gratification and allows their sexual expression to be an expression of human communication, of their marital covenant, and of the love of Christ for the Church."

- Rev. Fr. P. Brady, S.J.

A WAY OF LIFE

It is everyone's responsibility to provide a proper home environment for their children. Parents have the responsibility to ensure for their children an environment in which their potential can develop. This does not mean children must be given with all luxuries, or necessarily yielding to peer group pressure, or "keeping up with the Joneses", but children must have adequate basic necessities and above all the love and support of their parents. Love is giving for the good of the beloved - not spoiling or giving in to each and every whim of a child but giving what is good for him/her. An important part of this giving is being there when your child needs you, giving him/her your time and your attention. There are, unfortunately, many a poor little rich child. Stunting his growth with over-protectin is not love, not giving for the good of the beloved.

Responsible parenthood meand having only as many children as one feels one is able to bring up as good citizens in this life and the next, and allowing the children the right environment in which they can develop their potential. Each of us has different potentials and parents must not expect all their children to achieve to the same level or in the same areas. Each child is an individual and his/her individuality must be respected. Parents should never expect children to achieve what they failed to do, or to relive their lives in their children nor even decide for them what profession they should enter. Encouragement and advice are in order but insistence and pressure are out of place.

Responsibility for a "child" in this modern world now extends for up to about 25 years. A "child" is physically mature and able to survive, even earn a living, long before that but parents' responsibilities include providing a means for the child to develop his/her potential. For some children, at least, this means tertiary education and/or training in a profession. In many countries, the state provides educational facilities but the primary responsibility is still that of parents.

It is, therefore, only the couple themselves who are able to decide on the size of their family taking into consideration all relevant factors. Family planning means the couple should talk and

decide together how many children they can bring up properly, when they should have them and then seek the means to achieve this goal.

Nature did not intend that every act of human sexual intercourse should result in pregnancy. Indeed, an ovum lives for only 24 hours (occasionally 48 hours) unless it is fertilized. Fertility, however, is never referred to one party alone and we should always say a couple is fertile or otherwise. Sperms remain alive and are able to fertilize an ovum for an average of $3\frac{1}{2}$ days after intercourse. In some rare cases the sperm is known to survive for up to a week. A couple, therefore, could procreate over a period of 10-14 days only in each menstrual cycle. This is the basis of natural family planning. It involves fertility awareness and acting accordingly whether a pregnancy is being planned or should be avoided. The couple act as responsible human beings. Contraception is the use of artificial means, mechanical, physical or chemical, to prevent conception which might result from voluntary sexual intercourse. Natural family planning (NFP) is not, therefore, a contraceptive method as one cannot "contracept" when there is no fertility to intercept.

There are many forms of NFP and the ones now advocated are scientific and, if applied correctly, are very reliable. An effectiveness of up to 99.3% has been achieved with some groups. Unfortunately, many doctors when they speak of NFP still refer to "Rhythm" which means the "Calendar Method". This method is now no longer advocated as it has a high failure rate. Nevertheless, it is still better than no planning at all. Without any planning, a couple having sexual intercourse regularly can expect a pregnancy in one year in 80% of cases. The calendar method reduces this to about 20%.

The "newer" methods (most known for more than 20 years) include Basal Body Temperature, Mucus Method (Billings) and various modifications thereof, Cervical palpation and the Sympto-Thermal Method as well as other methods of detecting fertility. The Sympto-Thermal Method is taught at the NFP clinics in Hong Kong. Those who wish are also taught the Mucus Methods. The changes in cervical mucus and the temperature variations have been found to correspond closely with blood levels of oestrogens and progesterone and the

time of ovulation.

Natural family planning depends on the couple. The doctor can and should teach the method carefully and clearly but its application is completely in the hands of the couple. The couple are in control and not the doctor. We, as doctors, have become used to being in control of a situation and of giving orders. It is, therefore, sometimes difficult for us to leave our patients in control instead. It would be simpler to put them on drugs but we are still uncertain if they will take it. We could of course resort to surgery. Should we?

We must remember the couple are mature adults and family planning is their responsibility. We must learn to trust our patients. The degree of compliance with any medical instruction depends on the patient's motivation and the way the doctor has explained the situation to him. If one merely issues anti-hypertensive pills to a patient without explaining to him why he should take them and the complications that could occur with untreated hypertension, it is unlikely he would comply with the instructions since his hypertension, at the time at least, is asymptomatic whereas the drugs could have side-effects that are unpleasant or the treatment regime (diet, weight-control, exercise etc.) could limit his life style. The degree of compliance depends on the doctor's ability and willingness to educate the patient about the illness and the patient's co-operation.

Natural family planning is probably the only method that involves both husband and wife so that neither party feels he/she is being penalised or being "used". It is, therefore, a good method of encouraging dialogue, understanding, consideration, and co-operation and this should help the marriage grow in love.

Human sexual intercourse is a human communication and one way of expressing love, of saying "I love you". There are many other ways of saying "I love you" but unfortunately, many couples forget this. Indeed, how often do we actually say "I love you"? When was the last time you bought your wife flowers? When did you last surprise him with his favourite dessert? When did you last "go out

on a date"? What happened to all those sweet times you used to spend together, strolling hand-in-hand, sitting quietly in the moonlight punctuated by a cuddle and a kiss? In our busy lives we often forget the loving gestures and the happy times we used to have. Romance is never out of style and NFP could help us restore this.

In NFP one does not switch love on and off. One does not stop loving during the fertile period. One simply changes the way that love is expressed. NFP couples become more sensitive to each other's feelings and they look for innovative ways to say "I love you". Each infertile time then becomes another honeymoon.

No one has ever said NFP does not require effort and self-control. Is there anything worthwhile in life that does not require effort, self-denial and determination?

- Dr. Irene Osmund Ruiz

WHY I BEGAN TO TEACH NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING AND WHY I CONTINUE

SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

Before I became a Maryknoll Sister I was a medical technologist in a general hospital laboratory which was also doing endocrine research. Although I was not personally involved I absorbed a healthy respect for the inter-relatedness of the endocrine glands. After finishing novitiate training at Maryknoll, New York I was sent to St. Louis University Medical School which is a Jesuit University. About this time medical news and journals were bombarding doctors and medical students about the safety of the hormonal birth control pills. No adverse reports made it into print, but I instinctively felt that long term hormone therapy for suppression of the normal function of the ovaries would certainly have serious side effects.

FAITH EXPERIENCE

I have been blessed by being a life-long Catholic, being strongly influenced by my mother's deep faith. As I grew older I considered it my obligation to understand this faith by personal practice, serious study and intellectual assent. Many persons along the way influenced me. not the least of whom was the parish priest who taught classes on faith, morals and church history for parishoners attending secular secondary schools. He taught me to critically analyse the printed word as well as how to study and grow in faith.

MISSION WORK

After completing medical school, internship and two years of residency I was assigned to Hong Kong, arriving in September 1967. Pope Paul VI promulgated HUMANAE VITAE in 1968, and I studied the document and its recommendations for married Catholics. I believed that in life where there is a prohibited action there is a positive action. I also feel that it is incumbent on the official Church as well as Church members to assist and enable other members to follow Church directives.

The Natural Family Planning Clinic of the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council had been established at Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital before my arrival in Hong Kong and was well served by members of the Legion of Mary who did the clerical work and by doctors on the staff of the hospital. It was then the policy to have doctors doing the teaching. Sometimes it was difficult for the doctors to attend regularly and they were often interrupted to care for patients. So about 1969 I trained under Dr. Irene Osmund by sitting in at her clinic at Canossa Hospital and from then on have served regularly at Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital. Because I felt the need to associate with a parish I also began to go to Ngau Tau Kok where transportation was more convenient for the many persons living in the Kwun Tong area.

In the following years I read the available literature and in 1978 I attended one month of seminars at St. John's University, Minnesota. This coincided with the Tenth Anniversary of HUMANAE VITAE and I met many of the leaders who have promoted NFP in many countries of the world.

WHY DO I CONTINUE TEACHING NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING?

Practical experience with married couples who have shared their experience of NFP and what it has meant to their own personal development and happiness is the ongoing stimulus that keeps me teaching. Some one said that religious doctrine is irrelevant to the functioning of the ovaries; that is Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant ovaries all function alike. I find that successful couples of whatever religious background have similar benefits from the practice of NFP. To be successful the couple must learn to communicate firstly the awareness of the fertile and non-fertile periods. This facility in communication spills over into other areas of their life together. By respecting the nature of their physiology they grow in mutual respect and in self-mastery. Fertility is an awesome natural power, to have control over it enhances the dignity of the couple as persons. Successful practice demands shared responsibility for the expression of mutual love in sexual intercourse. There are no long term bad physiological side effects, only good long term psychological side effects. These facts were first shared with me by a Protestant couple, among the first Chinese couples

that I taught, and have been confirmed over and over again by couples both in Hong Kong and in the United States. When you find something good share it with others.

- Rev. Sr. Theresa Howard, M.M.

WHAT DO PEOPLE SAY ABOUT NFP?

The last decade has witnessed an increasing disillusionment with the 'age of plastics' and a growing realization, especially among youth, of the wisdom of learning to live in harmony rather than at odds with nature. The rapid growth of the ecological movement, with emphasis on healthy living, the need for a good diet and exercise and the positive benefits of natural methods of birth control and breastfeeding are all expressions of the growing desire of ordinary men and women to be 'liberated from the tyranny of technology' especially in the intimate area of sexuality and fertility.

In the past, ignorance and mistrust of their efficiency made many people reject natural methods. Today, however, this situation is changing mainly due to modern scientific discoveries about how the reproductive system works and the fact of certain health risks associated with current contraception techniques. Thus, worldwide, there is an increasing interest in natural methods.

- Dr. Anna Flynn
Clinics in Obstet. and Gynae.
Vol.11, No.3, December 1984.

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The practicability of periodic abstinence as a means of contraception varies greatly with individual woman and couples.

The different techniques of periodic abstinences are:

1. calendar rhythm
2. temperature, or thermal, method
3. the cervical mucus method
4. the sympto-thermal method (STM).

While these techniques use different ways to identify the fertile period, none is precise. As a result, all may require prolonged abstinence. The teaching literature on periodic abstinence methods suggests that couples may have to abstain for about one-quarter to one-half of normal menstrual cycles and sometimes longer -

depending mainly on the regularity of the woman's cycle.

The effectiveness of periodic abstinence depends largely on the strength of a couple's motivation to avoid pregnancy and the woman's ability to interpret signs and symptoms of the fertile period. A major problem has been the unwillingness of one partner or the other, usually the male, to agree to long periods of abstinence. Another problem is that women sometimes have difficulty identifying their fertile periods, especially if they are breastfeeding, have vaginal or other infections, or are approaching menopause.

Below is the incidence of unplanned pregnancy during the first year of use of different methods of contraception in United States, 1970-1976:

Pills	2.5%
IUCD	4.8%
Condom	9.6%
Diaphragm	14.4%
Foam, Cream, Jelly, Suppository	17.7%
Periodic abstinence	18.8%
No contraception	50-80%

Because of the relatively high pregnancy rates in recent studies, WHO in 1979 concluded that the cervical mucus and STM methods "had very little application, particularly in developing countries, and recommended that the [WHO] programme devote no further research to measuring their effectiveness". In 1980, after further review the WHO Advisory Group reaffirmed its conclusion of last year that in future the main focus of the Programme's activities in NFP (Natural Family Planning) should be on developing new methods for the prediction and detection of the fertile period, since such methods should allow reduction in the period of abstinence required by present NFP methods, which seemed to be a major reason for their low use-effectiveness.

I personally believe that the NFP methods are only practicable (with an acceptable failure rate of, say, less than 5 per 100 women year) by highly intelligent women, highly motivated and co-operative couples who are ready to accept failure if it occurs (that is, it is more acceptable to use this method as a means to

space out pregnancy rather than to prevent any birth). Although a woman with very regular cycle would require "less intelligence" to make this method more effective. Unless a simple, economic kit is developed that a woman could use to check each day to predict ovulation 3 days in advance, this method is unlikely to be practicable on a large scale with an acceptable failure rate.

- FHL

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My opinion about this method is that it requires some degree of intelligence of both wife and husband. It is helpful for the majority of women who have regular cycles. However, for those with irregular cycles, the post-menstrual period may cause difficulty. Another difficult time is the post-partum period when the detection of mucus is either impossible or very difficult. Vaginitis with discharge also hinder the interpretation of mucus. Hence this method, although good, should be looked upon with some reserve. The risk of misinterpretation and the limitations of the method should be stressed during counselling.

- Leonard

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An advantage of Natural Family Planning is that it is innocuous as far as it can be determined. No hormones, medicines or chemicals are administered or introduced into the woman's body. Its spect of self-awareness or self-knowledge is recognized by most as an important factor in personal development, contributing to the increased recognition of self-worth by women, especially in an illiterate context or in a culture where fertility is still valorized. Self-knowledge is also potentially important in the recognition of normal and abnormal gynaecological problems and contributes an important knowledge of fertility and sexual functioning in general. The educational approach of NFP, by bringing individualized self knowledge, makes the users essentially autonomous and potential educators of other users. Its mechanisms and ideology of adjusting sexual behaviour

to the basic fertility of the woman is generally in agreement with all traditional mores and values. Potentially it can be an important promoter of conjugal dialogue and finally, because of its educational approach, it need not rely on medical or other scarce health personnel resources for its promotion in developing countries.

Perhaps the greatest disadvantage is its interference with sexual spontaneity, requiring periodic abstinence and modification of sexual behaviour. This usually means that it requires high motivation for users to choose it initially and then to stay with it. High motivation is also necessary for accurate charting and record keeping which are distasteful to a certain number of potential users. Finally, it is not considered as effective as other methods of contraception.

- Claude A. Lanctot
Clinics in Obstet. and Gynae.
Vol.6, No.1, April 1979.

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Although Natural Family Planning method is considered less effective than other methods of contraception, I found that to my surprise, this method is not unpopular among medical personnels, even among the non-Catholics. Perhaps, what some people are looking for is not the most effective means of contraception, but some method with the least side-effects. Obesity is one of the greatest enemies of modern women and contraceptive pills are notoriously associated with weight gain. At present, the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council is running a number of Natural Family Planning clinics in different hospitals, but very few people know of their existence. Using modern communication techniques such as advertisement, television and 24-hour telephone recordings, the CMAC can publicize their service better. We must pay tribute to all the volunteers who work in these clinics but I feel that more and more of these dedicated people are urgently required.

- RY

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Time runs fast. My son Jonathan is three years old already. He is one of the many successful cases of sympto-thermal method.

My husband and I learned this method before our marriage. As Catholics are obliged to not using any means of artificial contraception, we found this method especially meaningful for our family planning. It plays an important role in our life.

After practising this method for six years, charting my basic body temperature becomes my daily habit. Before and around ovulation, there are cervical mucous discharge and change of basic body temperature. Thus, I can know when my ovulation will come. It is, by far, the safest method I have ever known.

To learn this method is simple but practising needs patience, mutual understanding and co-operation between husband and wife. This method, therefore, also provides a good bond between the spouses. More important is that one does not have to worry about any side effect caused by commercially available contraceptive devices. As a Catholic nurse, I am depressed to see so many delicate lives being killed in artificial abortions. I really feel the need to popularize this method and sincerely hope that every practising couple can enjoy this method and propagate the marvellous gift of God.

- YLW

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...In Jubilee Centre there is still a hard core group who favours the natural birth control method. ...

- The Family Planning Association of
Hong Kong, Vietnamese Refugees
Programme, Report on December 1985's
Activities

WORDS FROM THE MASTER

Dear members,

Natural Family Planning is nothing new, yet in our recent survey for readers' response, this is a topic suggested to the Publication Subcommittee. The NFP remains a controversial topic and it is good that we should think about it, and each one formulate his own stand in this controversy. Consequently we have decided to devote this issue to the topic. We do not pretend to be comprehensive in our coverage, but we hope we can provide a stimulus. Conspicuous by its absence is any article on the 'know-how' of NFP methods. The techniques cannot be adequately covered in a short article, so instead of giving incomplete information which may cause more harm than good, it may be better to leave this whole area altogether in this Newsletter. I will urge anyone who is interested in the methods of NFP to do a bit of research himself, or more conveniently, to contact the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council which runs several NFP clinics. They can be reached at 5-242071 ext. 259 or 260, or 3-366523. The Editor has also got copies of several books on this topic, so if you are interested, contact him also.

I have written to you some time ago asking you to register/re-register with the Secretary. We hope that through this exercise we can introduce the Guild to new members, and also to update our membership roll so we can know where the Guild stands in terms of its membership which is important for planning purposes, and to have an up-to-date list for correspondence. I am glad that some Catholic doctors who have not joined us previously have now responded to our invitation, but I am slightly disturbed that returns from 'old' members are few. Maybe I have not made the point of re-registration clear in my letter. If you still have the registration/re-registration form, please do return it now; or you may wish to drop a note to or call our Secretary for re-registration.

Easter day has come and gone, but the message and joy of Easter should always be in our heart. So let me still say, Happy Easter and shalom.

Yours in Christ,
George Chan