



“I want to have children with you.” - So much meaning is packed into these words, when a man or woman says them to a spouse. Especially in the light of faith, they mean: I entrust myself to you and to you alone— including my ability to join you in cooperating with God to create a son or daughter. This openness to new life, this willingness to beget and raise children together, is essential to married love.

It is sad, then, that so many couples hoping to have children find it difficult to do so. It is estimated today that one out of six couples will experience infertility. The suffering of unanticipated childlessness is real. Spouses may feel they have somehow failed, that they are inadequate in a basic aspect of their marital life. Their pain may even be aggravated by regret or guilt over past contraceptive use, sterilization, abortion, or other factors that can contribute to infertility. The sight of other couples’ children may make them yearn for a child all the more and add to their distress. Infertility can affect a couple’s sexual relationship and the stability of their marriage. It may even affect relationships with parents and in-laws who express disappointment at the absence of grandchildren. Catholic couples may feel this pain even more deeply as they hear the Church praise family life and teach that children are “the supreme gift of marriage” (Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [Gaudium et Spes]*, no. 50).

In an age of advances in reproductive medicine, many solutions are offered to couples going through this distress. Some solutions offer real hope for restoring a couple’s natural, healthy ability to have children. Others pose serious moral problems by failing to respect the dignity of the couple’s marital relationship, of their sexuality, or of the child. The Church has compassion for couples suffering from infertility and wants to be of real help to them. At the same time, some “reproductive technologies” are not morally legitimate ways to solve those problems. We bishops of the United States offer this reflection to explain why. We also offer it to provide hope—real hope that couples can “accept children lovingly from God” and build a family while fully respecting God’s design for their marriage and for the gift of children.

- excerpt from USCCB’s *Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology*, Nov. 17 2009

Patron Saints of Infertility

St. Anne
St. Rita of Cascia
St. Gerard Majella

Prayer to St. Gerard

O good St. Gerard,
powerful intercessor before God
and Wonder-worker of our day,
I call on you and seek your help.
You who on earth did always fulfill
God's design, help me to do the Holy
Will of God. Beseech the Master of Life,
from whom all paternity proceeded,
to make me fruitful in offspring,
that I may raise up children to God
in this life and heirs to the Kingdom
of His glory in the world to come.
Amen.

What is wrong with in vitro fertilization (IVF)? - IVF is a reproductive technology in which a new human being is conceived by joining egg and sperm in a glass dish, not in the mother’s body (“in vitro” is Latin for “in glass”). It further depersonalizes the act of generating a child, turning it into a technical process in a laboratory. This procedure is so far from a loving act of the spouses that it can even be used to conceive a child if neither of them is alive, for the body of neither one is involved in the act of generating this life once sperm and egg are obtained and stored. Because these embryos are deliberately created not in the nurturing environment of the mother’s body but in the poor substitute of a culture in a glass dish, the great majority of them die. Many couples have exhausted their savings and ultimately abandoned their efforts without ever having a live-born child from IVF.

Must couples with fertility problems abandon their hope of conceiving a child? Not necessarily. The male and female bodies are made to be able to procreate together. The challenge is to diagnose and address problems so these bodies can function as they should— and there is no moral problem in doing this, any more than there is in other medical treatments to restore health. Hormonal treatment and other medications, conventional or laser surgery to repair damaged or blocked fallopian tubes, means for alleviating male infertility factors, and other restorative treatments are available. The techniques of natural family planning (NFP) can also be used to locate the most fertile time of a woman’s cycle in order to maximize the chances of conceiving. These and other methods do not substitute for the married couple’s act of loving union; rather, they assist this act in reaching its potential to conceive a new human life.

Infertility in Scripture

Luke 1:5-25 - Elizabeth, barren and advanced in years, will bear a son
1 Samuel 1: 1-28 - Hannah's prayers are answered with a son whom she gives to the Lord
Genesis 17:16-21 - Abraham and Sarah are promised a son with whom God will maintain His covenant
Judges 13:2-25 - Manoah's wife though barren conceives and bears a son who will deliver Israel from the Philistines

How does the use of donors and surrogates in trying to have a child raise a moral problem?

Some approaches to infertility clearly violate the integrity of the marital relationship. These introduce third parties to fulfill essential aspects of parenthood, by using eggs or sperm or even embryos from “donors” (who are often paid, and therefore more accurately described as vendors), or even by making use of another woman’s womb to carry the couple’s child. The latter practice is sometimes known as surrogate motherhood, though this woman acts the way any mother would throughout pregnancy and then must relinquish the child to the couple who hired her. The child resulting from these arrangements is not the fruit of the spouses’ commitment to procreate only with and through one another. In an important sense, the spouses have decided not to be fully the mother and father of their child, because they have delegated part of their role to others. The procreative aspect of their marital relationship is violated, just as its unitive aspect would be violated by sexual relations with a person outside the marriage.

These arrangements may harm people other than the married couple. Fertility clinics show disrespect for young men and women when they treat them as commodities, by offering large sums of money for sperm or egg donors with specific intellectual, physical, or personality traits. The cash incentives persuade these men and women to mistreat the gift of their own fertility, and—for women—even to jeopardize their own health in the egg extraction process, in the effort to help others obtain a child outside the context of their own marital relationship.

“As I became more educated on what IVF entails, I realized the wisdom and beauty of the Church’s teaching in upholding my dignity as a woman and in safeguarding my personal health.”

—Mary Louise Kurey, Chicago, Illinois

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Now til March 29th - **Spring 40 Days for Life** (40daysforlife.com)
- March 21st - **Indiana Catholic Women’s Conference** (indianacatholicwomen.com)
- March 22nd - **Faith and Infertility** - monthly gathering of couples who have experienced or are experiencing primary or secondary infertility. This group’s mission is to offer a place to come together in prayer, to share stories and experiences, to support one another on this sometimes difficult journey and to learn about the many issues surrounding infertility. The evenings vary from conversation and support of one another to occasionally welcoming guest speakers on pertinent topics. Meeting runs from 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm on March 22, 2015, at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 East 56th Street, Indianapolis, IN 46226. For more information or questions about these monthly gatherings, please contact Stephanie & Scott Willison at 317-859-6596. There is no charge; however, goodwill donations are gratefully accepted! Light refreshments are served.

List of Resources

- USCCB *Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology* pdf - (usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/love-and-sexuality/life-giving-love-in-an-age-of-technology.cfm)
- Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction - (popepaulvi.com)
- FertilityCare Centers of America - (fertilitycare.org)
- *The Infertility Companion for Catholics: Spiritual and Practical Support for Couples* - (tinyurl.com/infertcomp)
- National Gianna Center for Women’s Health and Fertility - (saintpetershcs.com/GiannaCenter/)
- NaProTECHNOLOGY - (naprotechnology.com)
- *Dignitas Personae On Certain Bioethical Questions* - (tinyurl.com/DignitasPersonae)
- *Donum Vitae- On the Dignity of Procreation* - (tinyurl.com/DonumVitae)
- *Human Embryo Adoption: Biotechnology, Marriage, and the Right to Life* - (tinyurl.com/frozenembryoadooption)
- Frozen Embryo Adoption: Has Rome Spoken? - (cuf.org/2012/01/frozen-embryo-adoption-has-rome-spoken/)
- USCCB’s Reproductive Technology Guidelines for Catholic Couples - (tinyurl.com/USCCBrepotech)
- See brochure in information rack “Children as Commodities” for further information.

Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us.

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