

Artificial Reproductive Technologies and the Gift of Life

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Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART) and the desire for children...

“I want to have children with you” is the opening statement of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops document on techniques that help couples in conceiving a child. Most people will acknowledge the Catholic Churches’ teaching on openness to human life as essential to married love. It is part of God’s plan for married couples to want to have children! He places this natural desire within the heart of husbands and wives. But what many people do not realize is that the Church also has a teaching on medical techniques that can and cannot be used to help in the conception of a child when a couple faces infertility issues.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: *“Techniques that entail the dissociation of husband and wife, by the intrusion of a person other than the couple (donation of sperm or ovum, surrogate uterus), are gravely immoral. These techniques (heterologous artificial insemination and fertilization) infringe the child’s right to be born of a father and mother known to him and bound to each other by marriage. They betray the spouses’ ‘right to become a father and a mother only through each other.’ ... Techniques involving only the married couple (homologous artificial insemination and fertilization) are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable.”* (2376, 2377)

Morally unacceptable techniques are those that replace the marriage act in the hope of achieving a pregnancy. Yet the Catholic Church does encourage couples who are struggling with infertility to pursue techniques that would assist in conceiving a child. These treatments and procedures allow parents to beget a child as a direct act of married love. And they protect the child’s right “to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents”.

On-line infertility support:

The Apostolate of Hannah’s Tears. This organization offers prayer support and comfort to the brokenhearted who suffer the pains of infertility at any stage of life, difficult pregnancy, miscarriage, stillbirth, the loss of a child and the adoption process. Web: <http://hannahstears.net>



Quick reference guide for techniques that replace the marital act:

- Artificial insemination by donor (AID, or heterologous artificial insemination)
- In vitro-fertilization (IVF), *in vitro* is Latin for “in glass”
- Intrauterine insemination (IUI)
- Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)
- Surrogate uterus, ovum or sperm donor
- Zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT)
* also know as pronuclear stage transfer (PROST)

Morally acceptable means to assisting the marital act:

- Natural Family Planning
- Medications that stimulate hormone production and increase production of eggs and sperm. (With indications for use under controlled circumstances so as to avoid multi-fetal pregnancy.)
- Corrective surgery to repair or reconstruct damaged reproductive organs as a means to remove obstacles to fertility.

Medical technologies that provide services directed towards a moral means of assisting couples in achieving pregnancy include:

- NaProTECHNOLOGY (Natural Procreative Technology) Web: <http://www.naprotechnology.com>
- Billings Center for Fertility and Reproductive Medicine
Oklahoma City, OK 73102
Phone: (405) 272-7026
- Local listing of physicians supportive of morally acceptable means of infertility treatment and NFP can be found at: <http://www.fargodiocese.org/infertility>

For further reading on the Catholic Church’s teaching on RT:

- *The Dignity of a Person*,
Congregation for the Doctrine for the Faith, 2008.
- *Life-Giving Love in an Age of Technology*,
United States Catholic Conference of Bishops,
2009.
- *The Infertility Companion for Catholics*,
Angelique Ruhi-Lope and Carmen Santamaria,
Ave Maria Press, 2012.
- *Infertility Journey*,
Elizabeth Ministry International.