



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

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Ethics & Medics enjoys a broad circulation to bishops, parish priests, and others engaged in pastoral ministry. It is our intent to provide occasional practical inserts that our readers will find useful in preparing homilies and ministering to individuals in clinical and pastoral settings. The first of these is "Preaching Points on In Vitro Fertilization," prepared by NCBC President, Dr. John M. Haas.

Preaching Points on In Vitro Fertilization

Pastoral Concerns

Catholic couples make use of IVF with great frequency. This is a highly immoral procedure that should be avoided. It often leads to couples having to make terrible choices about the disposition of their embryonic children after the conclusion of the procedure. There will be parishioners or family and friends of parishioners who will have had children through this procedure. There is the need to avoid appearing to condemn them while pointing out the grave moral problems with the procedure.

Pastoral Suggestions

- There is a very high incidence of infertility in our society. Acknowledge the suffering of infertile couples and the natural desire of married couples for children.
- Infertility is not a new problem. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, could not conceive, nor could Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.
- The Bible tells us that not any way of having a child is in accord with God's plan for our well-being. There are means of overcoming infertility that are acceptable to the Church.
- In vitro fertilization, in which babies are brought into being in glass dishes, is probably the most common approach for overcoming infertility in our day.
- There are grave problems with IVF, and Catholics should avoid ever using it. Catholics should also understand why it is wrong:

First, it goes against God's plan for the way children are to come into the world. Children are to be conceived exclusively through the physical expression of love between a husband and wife. In IVF, technicians, rather than the husband and wife, perform the actions that bring

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about life in a glass dish in a laboratory where the reproductive cells of the husband and wife are mixed together.

Second, some embryos, some tiny human beings, are almost always killed through this procedure. Doctors choose only the healthy embryos to place in the womb. The “leftover” ones are either killed or are experimented upon. Some are frozen in liquid nitrogen for future implantation or experimentation. This is no way to treat human beings, even tiny embryonic ones.

Third, it is common that more than one embryo is placed in the uterus with the hope that at least one will implant, come to term and be born. Often only one baby is desired and so the doctors will kill one or more of the other babies in the womb. Or, if they are not all healthy, he will kill the ones who are not developing well.

Fourth, IVF treats children as though they were commodities to be produced for adult needs. IVF also leads to genetic engineering, “designer babies,” and the view that “leftover” embryos can serve as material for research scientists.

- In vitro fertilization does harm to the marital union and to the couple themselves. It also leads to the death of embryonic human beings who, for whatever reason, are not desired after they have been engendered.
- The children conceived through IVF are precious in the sight of God, as are all children. Even though the means by which they were conceived are immoral (as are some other means by which children are engendered, such as sexual activity outside of marriage), they are loved by God and should be loved and cherished by us as well.

General Points

Never speak of a “fertilized egg.” Alternatively, you should use the term which actually describes the reality. It is a human embryo or an embryonic human being.

Be delicate in approaching the topic from the pulpit. Affirm the desire to have children and even the fact that infertile couples would seek out a procedure like IVF.

There may be couples who have had a child by IVF. There certainly will be individuals who know someone who has had a child this way. Affirm the goodness of the individuals while decrying the procedure. The couple can be presented as simply not knowing any better, which is probably indeed the case.

Sexual topics should be dealt with delicately because of the very nature of the topic. There is no need to go into too much detail about how the sex cells are obtained. That is certainly better done in an audience exclusively of adults who are interested in the topic or in a counseling situation.

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We appreciate your feedback on the usefulness of these inserts, and invite you to submit your suggestions for other topics that would be helpful to you in your ministry.