

A hand wearing a blue nitrile glove holds a medical syringe. Attached to the syringe is a clear glass vial containing a blue liquid. The background is a blurred blue gradient.

A CATHOLIC  
ANALYSIS OF  
REPRODUCTIVE  
TECHNOLOGY

# IVF IN THE CULTURE



A photograph of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, both smiling and raising their hands in celebration. Biden is on the left, wearing a dark suit and a striped tie. Harris is on the right, wearing a dark blazer. The background is dark with an American flag visible on the left. The entire image has a blue tint.

# IVF IN THE CULTURE

“Each year, tens of thousands of Americans start or grow their families with the help of in vitro fertilization. IVF is enormously popular, enjoying the support of the vast majority of Americans. Yet Trump's overturning Roe opened the door to laws that rip away access to this vital care – as we saw when Alabama families had treatments halted earlier this year. President Biden has responded to attacks on reproductive care by expanding IVF access for service members, veterans, and federal employees. Meanwhile, Trump has refused to commit to vetoing the Life at Conception Act, a national abortion ban that threatens IVF access nationwide, and his allies are openly attacking IVF.” (Official Democrat Platform 2024)

# IVF IN THE CULTURE



“We will oppose Late Term Abortion, while supporting mothers and policies that advance Prenatal Care, access to Birth Control, and IVF (fertility treatments).” (Republican Platform 2024)

“I am the father of IVF” (President Trump in an interview)

“My Administration recognizes the importance of family formation, and as a Nation, our public policy must make it easier for loving and longing mothers and fathers to have children. In vitro fertilization (IVF) offers hope to men and women experiencing fertility challenges.” (Executive Order)

# PEW RESEARCH CENTER

A Pew Research Center Survey conducted in 2024 found that Americans overwhelmingly thought people having access to IVF is a good thing

- 70% of Americans said access to IVF was a good thing
  - 22% unsure and 8% said it was a bad thing
- There was no substantial difference between any groups surveyed (Men/Women, Republican/Democrat, Religious/Not)
- 65% of Catholics thought access to IVF was a good thing
  - 27% unsure and 8% said no
- 70% of people who say life begins at conception think access to IVF is a good thing

# DEFINITIONS AND PROCESS

Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) – Sperm is directly transferred into the uterine cavity via a catheter.

- Heterologous – sperm is collected from a donor
- Homologous – sperm is collected from the husband

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) – Fertility treatment in which either eggs or embryos are handled

In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) – An ART procedure that involves removing eggs from a woman's ovaries and fertilizing them outside her body. The resulting embryos are then transferred into a woman's uterus.

- The process of IVF involves the hyperstimulation of the ovaries in the woman to produce multiple mature eggs that can be collected by the physician. This typically involves the woman self injecting medication over a period of 10-14 days. Once the eggs are collected sperm is collected from the male donor, typically via masturbation, then “washed” and used to fertilize the eggs in vitro (in a culture dish). In cases of male factor infertility, a single sperm might be directly injected into an egg (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection). The embryos are then allowed to mature and then observed/graded at 3- and 5-day intervals to select which embryos are best suited to be transferred into the uterus. If desired genetic testing can be applied at 5 days to test for various genetic abnormalities. Embryos that are not transferred are either frozen or discarded.

# WHY IVF IS DESIRED

According to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine up to 15% of couples in the United States experience infertility.

According to the World Health Organization this number is increasing worldwide.

Infertility is usually defined as the inability to conceive after one year of unimpeded sexual intercourse.

Combine this with the frequency of miscarriage (10-20% of known pregnancies) and the emotional struggles that accompany it.

In essence the want for children and the inability to obtain that want seems to be one of the fundamental struggles of human life (think of key biblical figures)

In the typical case IUI/IVF is presented as the solution to fertility struggles. The procedures are not considered extraordinary in the medical field.

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF IVF

- The Church has two key magisterial documents addressing the morality of IVF
  - Donum Vitae (1987)
  - Dignitas Personae (2008)
- The USCCB has produced several resources that present the moral evaluation of various reproductive technologies in simple/direct language

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

- Donum Vitae And Dignitas Personae
  - DP opens with a statement that the teaching of DV are completely valid but new technologies require an updated document for answers to new questions and clarifications. For this reason, these documents will be presented interchangeably.
- DV and DP lay down two fundamental values that are essential for evaluating techniques of artificial human procreation/Reproductive Technologies (DV 4)
  - 1) The value of the life of the human being called into existence.
  - 2) The special nature of the transmission of human life in marriage.
- All reproductive technologies that would create life outside of the conjugal act of married persons (heterologous) are violations of both.
  - The documents make a special point to emphasize that “The child has the right to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up within marriage: it is through the secure and recognized relationship to his own parents that the child can discover his own identity and achieve his own proper human development.” (DV II 1)
  - This would rule out using the eggs or sperm from someone outside of the married couple and surrogacy (often referred to as a gestational carrier).

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF IVF

- Fundamental Judgment of The Church Concerning IVF
  - IVF is morally illicit
  - A key point that might need to be stressed to the average layperson is that IVF (and other medical technologies) are not condemned because they are “artificial”
  - “These interventions are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial. As such, they bear witness to the possibilities of the art of medicine. But they must be given to a moral valuation in reference to the dignity of the human person.” (DV 3).
  - “The Magisterium also seeks to offer a word of support and encouragement for the perspective on culture which considers *science an invaluable service to the integral good of the life and dignity of every human being.* The Church therefore views scientific research with hope and desires that many Christians will dedicate themselves to the progress of biomedicine and will bear witness to their faith in this field.” (DP 3).
- Why is it morally illicit
  - A distinction needs to be made between a moral evaluation of IVF in itself (its nature) and “the circumstances and consequences involved with the procedure in relation to the respect due to the human embryo” (DV II)
  - The most manifest (visible) problem with IVF is the creation and treatment of multiple embryos. In all IVF procedures the aim is to create multiple embryos to increase the likelihood of a successful pregnancy that will lead to birth. Embryos that are not immediately used are either frozen or discarded. It also occurs that in cases in which a woman who becomes pregnant with more than one embryo (either because multiple were transferred or an embryo split into twins) that a “selective reduction” is done to have only one embryo in the womb.

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF IVF

- Why is it morally illicit
  - It is important that we understand that this is not the substantial problem with IVF itself.
    - “But even in a situation in which every precaution were taken to avoid the death of human embryos, homologous IVF and ET *dissociates from the conjugal act the actions* which are directed to human fertilization. For this reason, the *very nature of homologous IVF and ET* also must be taken into account, even abstracting from the link with procured abortion.” (DV 5)
  - There are two key reasons to emphasize this at the outset of the evaluation of IVF
    - 1) There can be a temptation (especially among Catholics of good will) to diminish the felt sense of the problem of IVF based on the hope/expectation that eventually technology will provide us with IVF treatments that do not involve direct abortion. We will discuss this in greater depth in just a moment.
    - 2) To help us understand the true gravity of violating the conjugal act. The mistreatment of the embryo flows from the substantial problem of IVF
      - “The Church moreover holds that it is ethically unacceptable to dissociate procreation from the integrally personal context of the conjugal act: human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, which is not capable of substitution. The blithe acceptance of the enormous number of abortions involved in the process of in vitro fertilization vividly illustrates how the replacement of the conjugal act by a technical procedure- in addition to being in contradiction with the respect that is due to procreations as something that cannot be reduced to mere reproduction- leads to a weakening of the respect owed to every human being. Recognition of such respect is, on the other hand, promoted by the intimacy of husband and wife nourished by married love.” (DP 16)
      - In essence the disregard for the embryo is a manifestation of what John Paul II constantly proclaimed throughout his life- that violating the nature of the sexual act causes people to be treated like things to be used as opposed to being treated like people to be loved

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF IVF

- Why is it morally illicit
- “The Church’s teaching on marriage and human procreation affirms the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. Indeed, by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife capacitates them for the generation of new lives, according to the laws inscribed in the very being of man and woman.” (DV II 4).
- “By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man’s exalted vocation to parenthood.” (ibid).
- “It is never permitted to separate these different aspects to such a degree as positively to exclude either the procreative intention or the conjugal relation.” (Ibid).
- “The Church remains opposed from the moral point of view to homologous in vitro fertilization. Such fertilization in in itself illicit and in opposition to the dignity of procreation and of the conjugal union, even when everything is done to avoid the death of the human embryo. Although the manner in which human conception is achieved with IVF and ET cannot be approved, every child which comes into the world must in any case be accepted as a living gift of the divine Goodness and must be brought up with love.” (DV II 5).
- “The Child is not an object to which one has a right, nor can he be considered as an object of ownership: rather a child is a gift, “the supreme gift” and the most gratuitous gift of marriage, and is a living testimony of the mutual giving of his parents. For this reason, the child has the right, as already mentioned to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents; and he also has the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception.” (DV II 8).

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF IVF

- Concerning the treatment of embryos in IVF
- It is important that we understand the “Drive and Spirit” behind ART
  - My evaluation is not based on financial motives or agendas of a few powerful agents behind the medical field
  - It is apparent that the creation of multiple embryos in IVF is not due to the inadequacy of technology but rather to the important emphasis that placed on increasing the probability of pregnancy being achieved, that pregnancy leading to a successful delivery, and the baby being healthy.
  - DP recognizes that in the 20 years between it and DV things got progressively worse
    - “The fact that the process of in vitro fertilization very frequently involves the deliberate destruction of embryos was already noted in the Instruction Donum Vitae. There were some who maintained that this was due to techniques which were still somewhat imperfect. Subsequent experience has shown, however, that all techniques of in vitro fertilization proceed as if the human embryo were simply a mass of cells to be used, selected and discarded” (DP 14).
  - *“The number of embryos sacrificed is extremely high. These losses are accepted by the practitioners of in vitro fertilization as the price to be paid for positive results. In reality, it is deeply disturbing that research in this area aims principally at obtaining better results in terms of the percentage of babies born to women who begin the process, but does not manifest a concrete interest in the right to life of each individual embryo.” (DP 14).*

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF IVF

- Concerning the treatment of embryos in IVF
- It is important that we understand the “Drive and Spirit” behind ART
  - This can be confirmed by various statements by groups like The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and universal practices of IVF
  - “The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) opposes any proposals, laws, or policies that attempt to confer "personhood" to a fertilized egg, embryo, or fetus. These laws and policies are used to limit, restrict, or outright prohibit access to care for women and people seeking reproductive health care, including those who are pregnant, those who are trying to prevent pregnancy, and those who are trying to become pregnant, and they have been used as the basis of surveillance and prosecution of pregnant people.” (ACOG Statement on Personhood Measures).
  - “Access to evidence-based, comprehensive reproductive health care is critical for the lives and health of the women and people for whom obstetrician–gynecologists provide care. This includes all medical interventions that allow people to determine whether and when to become or to be pregnant, including contraception, abortion, and in vitro fertilization. Assigning rights to fertilized eggs compromises access to essential facets of medical care. Elevating the legal status of fertilized eggs to that of women and pregnant people has wide implications for access to medications, medical interventions, and management of high-risk pregnancies. ACOG firmly believes that science must be at the core of public health policies and medical decision making that affect the health and life of women and people seeking reproductive health care.” (Ibid)

# A MORAL EVALUATION OF IVF

- Concerning the treatment of embryos in IVF
- It is important that we understand the “Drive and Spirit” behind ART
  - In all IVF procedures the attempt is to create multiple embryos so that they can be observed at 3 and 5 days of development so that they can be graded which ones give the highest likelihood of achieving a successful pregnancy
  - Chromosomal testing in a normal procedure that is often performed at the 5-day window which can determine whether any abnormalities (e.g., Down syndrome) are present which would harm the chances of successful pregnancy.
    - Of course, in the chromosomal testing biological sex is also known and can provide the parents with the ability to not only foresee the sex of their child but pick which sex they would want to transfer.
    - Both Iceland and Denmark have nearly 100% rates of aborting children that genetic testing reveals have Down syndrome. This is not just in IVF but in all pregnancies.
  - Recent developments in genetic testing have given rise to companies like Orchid.
    - Orchid is a company that boasts the ability to sequence over 99% of an embryos DNA enabling them to screen for over 1,000 monogenic and polygenic diseases. This allows them to show which embryos have the genetic factors for diseases a parent might be afraid to pass on to their children. It also allows them to show which embryos have the factors that would give rise to childhood cancers.
    - The founder of Orchid claimed that this technology “can protect our children from disease,” and that this is “is something every parent should consider,” not just those with infertility.
    - The founder has a slogan which states: “Sex is for fun, Orchid is for babies.”
    - Concerning procreation via the conjugal act she warned of the presumption of “genetic privilege of rolling the dice with our children's health”
    - Elon Musk is rumored to have made use of Orchid for the creation of one of his children.
- In essence we are not moving toward an IVF of fewer embryos but an IVF whose technologies benefit from an increase of embryos.



INTERMISSION

# PASTORAL SOLUTIONS

St. Basil: “Nor, because some sinners do not make good use of the art of medicine, should we repudiate all the advantages to be derived from it... On the contrary, their abuse of these arts ought to be made evident by our demonstrating the proper use of them.”

- The average females experience in visiting the OBGYN
  - The annual question about birth control
  - Situations of infertility – quickly referred to a “Reproductive Endocrinologist”
    - ART VS Restorative Reproductive Medicines
    - Restorative Reproductive Medicine (RRM) is an approach to women's health that seeks to diagnose and treat underlying reproductive and gynecological conditions to restore natural fertility and overall health, often using fertility awareness-based methods (FABMs) to monitor and understand a woman's natural menstrual and fertility cycles. Unlike treatments like in vitro fertilization (IVF) which bypasses underlying issues, RRM aims to fix the root causes of problems, potentially leading to natural conception and healthy pregnancies.
      - NaProTechnology would be an example that is more commonly known
    - ACOG (90% of OBGYN in America) released a statement condemning RRM as unscientific and as dangerous for the obstacles it can place on women to having access to evidence-based methods such as IVF
      - Beyond the obstacles to IVF the chief complaints are that RRM can cause a woman delay in what is a time sensitive matter, unnecessary emotional burdens, and possibly expose them to unnecessary surgeries.



The Georgia Center for  
Reproductive Medicine

Call for more information

**912.352.8588**

HOME

ABOUT  
US

TREATMENTS

FORMS

FOR EGG  
DONORS

CONTACT  
US

### Treatments

Read about the various treatments  
that are available.



### Services

In Office services and  
Hospital Based services



## Treatments

In Vitro  
Fertilization

Ovulation  
Induction

Intrauterine  
Insemination

Donor Egg  
Therapy

Pre-Implantation  
Genetic Diagnosis

Fertility  
Preservation

Gestational  
Carrier

# PASTORAL SOLUTIONS

Resources immediately available to faithful in our diocese

- Diocesan NFP Instructors (Specifically those trained in Marquette and FEMM)
  - It is important for the faithful to understand the NFP is not just a permissible method of postponing pregnancy.
  - NFP is a tool for understanding health (Specifically FEMM and Marquette)
    - The woman's cycle is coined as the "5<sup>th</sup> vital sign"
    - Even younger women can catch red flags in their health by understanding their cycles
    - Methods like FEMM also have courses designed for younger women to learn about their cycles (courses designed for schools but also courses that could function as a mother daughter learning experience)
  - NFP is a tool for achieving pregnancy.
    - A lot of women do not adequately understand the nature of their own fertility cycles
    - NFP methods allow them to know when they are most fertile and have the highest probability of achieving pregnancy.
    - My wife is finalizing her certification in FEMM and we are happy to come to any parish and offer free courses and resources

# PASTORAL SOLUTIONS

Resources immediately available to the faithful in our diocese

- REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH MEDICINE & GYNECOLOGY in Atlanta
  - Dr. Kongoasa is a Catholic Gynecologist in Atlanta who specializes in RRM
  - Women can utilize this office via telehealth
- MyCatholicDoctor.com
  - Telehealth
  - Doctors in a wide variety of medical fields
  - Can serve as a second opinion
  - Possible to have NFP instruction covered by insurance (bilingual)

# PASTORAL SOLUTIONS

## Having conversations and preaching on IVF

- The best way to begin any conversation on IVF is by giving adequate attention to the cross of infertility.
- Placing emphasis on the fact that there are medical professionals who would want to get to the core of the issue and help achieve pregnancy.
- Demonstrate concern about the production and treatment of embryos via IVF and the danger of turning a child from a gift to be received to a thing to be produced.
- Emphasizing the reality that many embryos (people's children) are left to be frozen or discarded
- Promoting the powerful intimacy of marriage, NFP, and the conjugal act and making sure people know that these are not permissible evils but great goods.
- Pointing people to interviews of those who were either IVF doctors or patients and their regrets/concerns
- Emphasize the importance of reaching out to specific experts who can speak coherently and meaningfully about fertility but with respect to personhood.

# PASTORAL SOLUTIONS

- USCCB Resources
  - The USCCB provide a variety of resources and actions to explain/preach about IVF in a quick simple manner. I will include links to those in resources given to you
  - Reproductive Technology Evaluation and Treatment of Infertility: Guidelines for Catholic Couples
    - This is a good resources that get directly to the point of what is and what is not permissible for Catholics
      - It also give thoughts to consider on technologies that are still under discussion
    - Great because it give a “Rule of Thumb” for what is ok and what is not ok
      - “Procedures that remove obstacles to natural fertility and which assist marital intercourse in reaching its procreative potential are morally acceptable.”
      - “Procedures which add a “third party” into the act of conception or gestation, or which substitute a laboratory procedure for intercourse, are not morally acceptable.”

# PASTORAL SOLUTIONS

A few other key resources:

- Rachel's Vineyard has created a one-day miscarriage retreat that can be hosted at any parish in the diocese.
- Red Bird Ministries is a ministry that serves those who have experienced miscarriage and child loss.
- The Fruitful Hollow and Springs in the Desert are two ministries that are directed toward those who experience infertility.
- The National Catholic Bioethics Center and Hotline for bioethics questions.
- Feel free to put people in contact with me.