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Catholic Courier

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 109 NO. 43 ■ THURSDAY, JULY 16, 1998 ■ 75¢ ■ 16 PAGES



Do means 'entitle' couples to children?

Jack and Jill (not their real names) married in the early 1990s. The Southern Tier couple — both in their mid-30s when they wed — knew they wanted to have children as soon as possible because Jill's "biological clock" was ticking.

But after several years of unsuccessful trying, the couple — both active Catholics — decided to turn to medical assistance.

Jill had a background in nursing, and as Jack explained, was "aware of the options."

Moreover, Jill's health-insurance plan covered reproductive assistance, so they didn't have to face the thousands of dollars such options can cost.

They tried drugs to stimulate Jill's release of eggs coupled with natural intercourse. They tried assisted insemination in which Jack's sperm were inserted into her. Finally they opted for in-vitro fertilization. Eggs were collected from Jill, fertilized in a laboratory with Jack's sperm, then reimplanted in Jill's body.

On the second attempt at in vitro, Jill became pregnant. She gave birth to a baby boy while in her early 40s.

Jack acknowledged an awareness that the church had issued teachings about reproductive technology.

"I heard (from some people that) one type of procedure was approved by the church; I heard another type was not, so it led to confusion," Jack said.

But he said he deliberately chose not to investigate what the church actually taught, explaining, "Ignorance is bliss."

"My conscience is clear," Jack remarked. "I think God is involved in everything — natural intercourse, artificial insemination. That's the kind of God I believe in."

Trends and technology

Although statistics are sketchy, studies do indicate that an increasing number of people struggling to conceive children are turning to assisted reproductive technologies, commonly referred to as ART.

Also growing are the number of related legal, moral and ethical concerns as more children are produced by ART and as reproductive technologies — including the potential for human cloning — advance.

Father John Bonnici, director of the Archdiocese of New York's Office of Family Life and Respect Life and chairman of New York State Diocesan Pro-life Directors, told the *Catholic Courier*, "We have taken what is incredibly beautiful, the conjugal act, and reduced it to the techniques of science in a very cold manner."

Those "techniques of science" are, by all accounts, producing thousands of children each year.

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STORY BY LEE STRONG

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY

GREG FRANCIS & LINDA JEANNE RIVERS