

2004 Parish Ministries Workshop

“Protecting the Unborn”

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A growing number of married couples seek medical assistance each year in their effort to achieve pregnancy. Numerous ‘medical’ conditions are causative agents affecting one in every seven couples. Unfortunately corrective procedures will only improve the status of a small percentage of these patients.

The past two decades have provided an expanding spectrum of technologies to assist in conception and delivery of a full-term baby. The Orthodox Church in America supports the use of *in-vitro* fertilization by married couples, with two major conditions:

1. The husband must be the sperm source.
2. The wife provides the ova (egg) and she must carry the pregnancy.

These conditions dictate that the baby will be genetically linked to the married couple and the wife will deliver the baby.

A complicating limitation of our current technology is the use of fertility medications. These drugs induce the woman’s ovaries to ripen more than the usual single ova. Subsequent *in-vitro* insemination of all ova can then result in many embryos, each of which have the potential of full term development to a healthy baby.

Therefore, introduction of multiple embryos can then provide an unacceptable risk of multiple pregnancy and possible complications. Frequently, embryos are frozen to reduce these risks.

To act in accordance with the teachings of the Church and since each embryo has the potential for normal full-term development *in-utero*, couples seeking assistance from *in-vitro* fertilization must keep in mind and share the following conditions with their physicians:

1. They will not consider third-party assistance (e.g., donors or surrogates)
2. They do not consider ‘selective termination’ (abortion) within a multiple pregnancy to be acceptable
3. All frozen embryos (if any) are destined to be returned to the wife a later time
4. Frozen embryos or cells from their embryos are NOT to be used in research or deemed to be “surplus”

It is the accepted responsibility of the Orthodox couple using IVF to share these conditions with the medical staff and to gain assurances that their wishes will be honored. Furthermore, the couple must keep the potential development of their frozen embryos (if any) in mind for use at a later time.

If the couple has reservations about the concept of frozen embryos and wishes to avoid these deliberations, timely instructions must be given to only inseminate a limited number of ova.