

Assisted Human Reproduction - Considerations

General Conference Administrative Committee

Developments in medical technology have led to a number of interventions designed to assist human procreation. Procedures such as artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, embryo transfer, and cloning increasingly provide new options in human reproduction. Such interventions raise serious ethical questions for Christians seeking God's will on these issues.

The hope of having children is generally powerful. When this hope is frustrated by problems of infertility, the disappointment of childlessness weighs heavily on many couples. Their sorrow deserves understanding and compassion. It is not surprising that many who suffer sadness because of infertility turn to new reproductive technologies to restore hope. However, with the power of such technologies comes the responsibility to decide whether and when they should be used.

Because of their conviction that God is concerned with all dimensions of human life, Seventh-day Adventists are committed to discovering and following God's principles for human reproduction. The power of procreation is God's gift, and should be used to glorify God and bless humanity. Through a careful study of the Bible and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the community of faith can identify fundamental principles that guide in decision making regarding assisted reproduction. Among the most important of these are:

1. Human reproduction is part of God's plan (Gen 1:28), and children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps 127:3; 113:9). Medical technologies that aid infertile couples, when practiced in harmony with biblical principles, may be accepted in good conscience.

2. Childlessness should bear no social or moral stigma, and no one should be pressured

to have children with or without medical assistance (1 Cor 7:4, 7; Rom 14:4; Matt 19:10-12; 24:19; 1 Tim 5:8). Decisions to use or not use reproductive technologies are a deeply personal matter to be settled mutually by a wife and husband, without coercion. There are many acceptable reasons, including health and the special demands of some forms of Christian service (1 Cor 7:32, 33), that may lead people to refrain from or limit procreation.

3. God's ideal is for children to have the benefits of a stable family with active participation of both mother and father (Prov 22:6; Ps 128:1-3; Eph 6:4; Deut 6:4-7; 1 Tim 5:8). For this reason, Christians may seek medically assisted reproduction only within the bounds of the fidelity and permanence of marriage. The use of third parties, such as sperm donors, ovum donors, and surrogates, introduces a number of medical and moral problems that are best avoided. Moreover, family and genetic identity are significant to individual well-being. Decisions regarding assisted reproduction must take into consideration the impact on family heritage.

4. Human life should be treated with respect at all stages of development (Jer 1:5; Ps 139:13-16). Assisted reproduction calls for sensitivity to the value of human life. Procedures such as in vitro fertilization require prior decisions about the number of ova to be fertilized and the moral issues regarding the disposition of any remaining preembryos.

5. Decisions regarding procreation should be based on complete and accurate information (Prov 12:22; Eph 4:15, 25). Couples considering assisted reproduction should seek such information. Health care professionals should disclose fully the nature of the procedures, emotional and physical risks, costs, and documented successes and limited probabilities.

6. The principles of Christian stewardship are relevant to decisions concerning assisted reproduction (Luke 14:28; Prov 3:9). Some forms of technology are very costly. Couples seeking reproductive assistance should give responsible consideration to the expenses involved.

As Christians seek to apply these principles, they can be confident that the Holy Spirit will assist them in their decisions (John 16:13). The community of faith should seek to understand their aspirations and the issues that childless couples face (Eph 4:11-16). Among the alternatives that infertile couples may consider is adoption. As couples make careful decisions they should be able to rely on the compassionate understanding of the church family.