



The Family LifeLine

Bulletin of the Family Life Society, Archdiocese of Singapore

www.familylife.sg

Pre-natal Testing and What it could mean for Catholics

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If today a pregnant woman goes to see her obstetrician, chances are that she will be asked if she wanted to do a blood test and/or ultrasound for pre-natal testing. Pre-natal or ante-natal testings refer to tests which are carried out to check for genetic abnormalities of the baby. The screening test commonly used for this purpose is the Nuchal Translucency Test for Down's Syndrome. This test uses ultrasound to measure the thickness of an area in the neck, and an unusually thick reading usually indicates that the child has a higher than normal risk of having Down's Syndrome. If these screening tests, done in the 1st trimester, suggest that the child has a higher than normal risk of developing Down's syndrome, the obstetrician often recommends an amniocentesis or Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS), both of which involves poking a long needle in the mother's abdomen to take a sample of either the amniotic fluid (in amniocentesis) or the placenta (in CVS) to accurately check for Down's Syndrome.

Is there a problem with pre-natal testing?

The question is: if you are that woman who is asked if you wanted pre-natal testing (or the husband whose wife is asked), what should



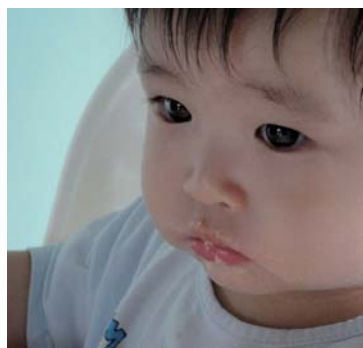
you do? On the one hand, there may be nothing wrong and it is natural to want to know if your baby is normal; on the other hand, one must importantly ask, where does all this testing lead to?

The Congregation on the Doctrine of Faith has given the faithful some very clear and sensible guidelines on this. It says that if the pre-natal test is "directed towards its safeguarding or healing" of the unborn child, then it is morally acceptable. In other words, if pre-natal testing is done so that any abnormality found can be treated by medical or surgical interventions, then it is morally acceptable. However, if "it is done with the thought of possibly inducing an abortion, depending upon the results", then such testing is "gravely opposed to the moral law".

In today's context, the scope of medical or surgical intervention to the unborn child is still very limited, and the vast majority of pre-natal tests are done for the purpose of proposing an abortion. If this is so, then most of the pre-natal testings are done today are for morally unacceptable purposes and should be avoided.

What can one do?

But one may rightly ask, what can one do, especially since such tests are becoming more readily available and are increasingly



regarded as the standard of care among doctors? To illustrate this, one of my friends actually told me that the doctor insisted that he signed a letter saying that he was going against medical advice when he opted against pre-natal testing. Most of us would rather not go against the doctor's advice (and my friend was no exception) since he or she is a trained medical specialist and is supposed to know better.

However, if pregnant Catholic women (and their spouses) make it clear to their specialists right at the beginning that they oppose abortion and will not entertain the prospect of it even if the baby is abnormal, then the specialist, knowing the patient's wishes, can refrain from proposing pre-natal testing unless there is some significant therapeutic benefit to the foetus that can be made. This will save the Catholic mother from both unnecessary and potentially harmful tests (both amniocentesis and CVS have risks of trauma to the baby and even miscarriage) that she might regret for the rest of her life.

Summary

- Most pre-natal testing nowadays are not done for therapeutic purposes but for the purpose of proposing an abortion in case the foetus is abnormal
- Such a practice is not morally acceptable
- By stating at the outset to their specialist that one is opposed to abortion even if the foetus is abnormal, the couple can often save themselves the hassle and the risks of pre-natal testing such as miscarriage or foetal injury

Is there a calling for you to Volunteer for Pregnancy Crisis Service?

"Oh gosh... I missed my period! My boyfriend and I had sex recently."

"We can't afford to have a baby. It's just not possible!"

"I'm pregnant. But I'm not ready to start a family."

What am I going to do?"

In times of crisis, these are common situations women find themselves in. The temptation to abort the child may seem like the simplest and surest way to put things back to order.

A team of supportive and dedicated women at Family Life Society volunteer their time and friendship with the Pregnancy Crisis Service (PCS). Our PCS volunteers are trained and equipped to help teenagers and women confronted with unexpected pregnancies to better understand the issues at hand, thus enabling them to make informed choices.



Success in life has nothing to do with what you gain in life or accomplish for yourself. It's what you do for others. – Danny Thomas

PCS is a one-stop crisis support centre which operates from 9am to 5pm daily from Mondays to Saturdays (except public holidays), a 24-hour hotline (6399-9770), and a shelter for young women who are in need of a place to stay while they bring their babies to full term.



Female volunteers above 21 who can commit to one day a week to PCS. If you feel called to volunteer, contact Kat Baptist at 6488-0278 or email pregnancycrisis@familylife.sg

OUR SERVICES

- Individual, Family & Marital Counselling
- Pregnancy Crisis Service (PCS)
- School Family Education (SFE)
- The Celebration of Life Programme (COL)
- Joyful Parenting (JP)

OUR AFFILIATES

- Beginning Experience (BE)
- Catholic Engaged Encounter (CEE)
- CHOICE
- Couples for Christ (CFC)
- Couple Empowerment Programme (CEP)
- Marriage Encounter (ME)
- Marriage Preparation Course (MPC)
- Natural Family Planning (NFP)
- Retrouvaille



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If you have a personal story to share on family matters or values, email to susie@familylife.sg