

VITAL SIGNS

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FERTILITY

# A Study Links Prayer and Pregnancy

Researchers at Columbia University, expressing surprise at their own findings, are reporting that women at an in vitro fertilization clinic in Korea had a higher pregnancy rate when, unknown to the patients, total strangers were asked to pray for their success.

The findings are in the current *Journal of Reproductive Health*.

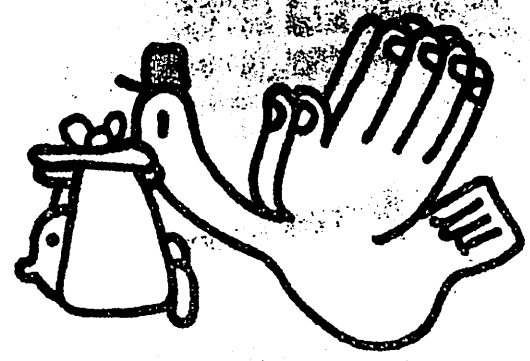
The researchers found that women who were prayed for became pregnant twice as often as those who did not have people praying for them.

The lead author of the report, Dr. Rogerio A. Lobo, Columbia's chairman of obstetrics and gynecology, said he and his colleagues had thought long and hard about whether to publish their findings, since they seemed so improbable. In the end, the differing pregnancy rates between the two groups of women proved too significant to ignore.

"It was not even something that was borderline significant," Dr. Lobo said. "It was highly significant. And still I am not willing to say that this is the definitive answer, that there is definitely an association."

Dr. Lobo said the idea for the study came from a colleague and co-author, Dr. Kwang Y. Cha, a researcher at Cha Hospital in Seoul.

The study involved 199 women who went



Illustrations by Stuart Goldenberg

to Cha Hospital in 1998 and 1999 for help becoming pregnant.

None knew about the study, and the medical staff caring for them also was unaware of it.

The researchers gave members of different Christian denominations in the United States, Canada and Australia photographs of the patients and asked them to pray. One group was asked to pray directly on behalf of the women, a second group directed its prayers to help the first group, and a third prayed for the two other groups.

Earlier studies suggested that prayer by strangers also seemed to help heart patients.