

# **New York doctor works to deliver care consistent with Catholic values**

NEW YORK - "Catholic women in many communities feel they have no access to health care that is consistent with their values," said the founding director of a new women's medical center in midtown Manhattan that will provide "authentically Catholic" primary care, obstetrics, natural family planning and infertility treatment.

Dr. Anne Mielnik said Gianna - The Catholic Healthcare Center for Women is the first dedicated practice in New York and one of only a handful in the country to offer a combination of effective infertility treatment alternatives to morally objectionable assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization.

The facility, sponsored by St. Vincent Catholic Medical Centers, opened Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

"There's no suffering comparable to what you see in an infertile couple," Mielnik said. "They're desperate to have a child and when they look for guidance, they end up in an IVF clinic. They're balancing their desperation for a child with doing what they know is wrong."

The Gianna center uses the Creighton Model FertilityCare System, a natural method of family planning and gynecological health monitoring, in conjunction with a comprehensive system of reproductive health management called natural procreative technology, or NaPro technology. Both methods were developed by Dr. Thomas W. Hilgers, founder of the Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction in Omaha, Neb.

Mielnik graduated from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia and completed her family medical training at Lancaster (Pa.) General Hospital in 2009. She met her medical partner, Dr. Kyle Beiter, an obstetrician and gynecologist, while studying NaPro technology in Omaha.

As a medical student, Mielnik said she dreamed of starting a program that would provide health care and educational services to women to "counter the Planned

Parenthood sex education curriculum.”

She said she started the John Paul II Center for Women in Marietta, N.Y., in September 2008 “in response to the pleas of Catholic women for access to reproductive health care and family planning options which affirm their dignity as women and conform to the Catholic Church’s teachings regarding human sexuality and medical ethics.”

The John Paul II center is directed by Joan Nolan, a Creighton Model FertilityCare practitioner. Mielnik said the John Paul II center’s mission is to open Gianna centers for women throughout the United States.

Mielnik said she and the John Paul II center initially planned to open a small medical practice in New York with the support of a pro-life benefactor. Serendipitously, she was recruited by the chairman of the St. Vincent’s Medical Center obstetrics department to establish her Gianna center under St. Vincent’s banner.

She called St. Vincent’s “the last Catholic hospital in Manhattan, the last pro-life hospital” and said it had a waiting list of people interested in NaPro technology and had been trying to recruit a NaPro-trained physician for two years.

Mielnik said NaPro technology addresses infertility by diagnosing and correcting its causes instead of using synthetic hormones to suppress or bypass a woman’s reproductive system. She said problems including anatomical and hormonal abnormalities, infections and ovulation disorders are addressed with surgical procedures and compounded hormones.

Surgeries can open blocked fallopian tubes, remove endometriosis and treat polycystic ovarian disease, she said. By identifying a possibly subtle hormone deficiency and replacing the hormone with an identical compound, delivered at the appropriate time in a woman’s menstrual cycle, Mielnik said NaPro technology can correct conditions that compromise fertility.

Mielnik said NaPro technology is twice as successful as in vitro fertilization, as measured by the number of live births among women using it to help achieve pregnancy. It is also significantly less expensive, rarely results in multiple

pregnancies and does not result in frozen embryos. NaPro technology is also used to treat recurrent miscarriages, premenstrual syndrome, menstrual cramps, ovarian cysts, postpartum depression and premature births.

Mielnik said couples who visit the Gianna center for infertility have an initial 90-minute consultation, followed by a two- to four-month monitored evaluation of the wife's charted menstrual and fertility cycle. Corrective surgery or hormonal therapy then may be implemented.

The Gianna center also will work closely with the New York Archdiocese to offer an educational curriculum that promotes a view of women consistent with their dignity as daughters of God, said Mielnik.

She said the John Paul II center supports Catholic physicians with a confidential Listserv for discussion of ethics and resources. "There is tremendous power in the knowledge of church teaching," she said.

A pro-life doctor is a "lone voice in most health care systems," she said, and the Listserv "is a place where Catholic physicians can support one another and share resources."

The center is named for St. Gianna Beretta Molla, an Italian physician and married mother of four who refused to abort her youngest child when a uterine tumor threatened her own life during the pregnancy. She died in 1962 shortly after the 10-pound baby was born.

Mielnik said St. Gianna is a model for true femininity. She said the saint lived a life of great sanctity, balancing her personal and professional roles.

"She gave her life for her child, but it wasn't a question of her life or her child's, but which action - orphaning her children or giving life - was the greater good," she said. "She chose to give life."