

# Church helped us to deal with infertility

**HAVING children hasn't been easy for Jo and Rob Borley. And they were grateful for the support of their church in the tough times.**

The couple, from St Simon's Church in Southsea, were told it would be difficult for them to have children without fertility treatment. Their twins Joseph and Olivia, now 3, were born thanks to IVF.

And then last year, they had the unexpected joy of another baby, William. He was conceived naturally, just at the point when they were thinking of another round of IVF treatment.

The experiences showed Jo that it was easier to face life's challenges when they were shared with church friends. It also taught her that trusting in God sometimes involves not knowing what will happen next.

"I like to plan things in advance, but this has all reminded me that we can't always know in advance what God has in store for us," she said. "It's also shown me that whatever treatment is available, it's actually God who creates life and breathes life into us."

Jo and Rob met each other at school, but went to different universities. When Jo had finished at Roehampton in London, Rob still had one year left of his course in Portsmouth. They got married in 2002 when they had both graduated and decided to stay living here.

They joined the congregation at St Simon's Church, and – after teaching at secondary schools – Jo became youth worker there in 2005. Meanwhile Rob started an IT company with friends. Although they wanted children, they were referred to the infertility clinic after a year of trying unsuccessfully.

"I had always thought I would have a problem, as I have polycystic ovarian syndrome," said Jo. "It means I have lots of cysts in my ovaries, and so it's difficult for them to release eggs. The fertility clinic suggested some drugs and treatments, but they didn't work."

"The hardest part for me was friends who were having second



**Jo Borley with the twins born through IVF treatment - Olivia and Joseph, who are both now three**

children. We had got married before a lot of our friends, but if they already had one child and were having another, it felt as though we were being left behind.

"My faith was quite up and down. There were times of peace,

once we did, the church were incredibly supportive. The burden was so much lighter with friends surrounding us. There were no more hidden feelings and no more secret tears. It was amazing how many other women

## my faith

**Rob and Jo Borley struggled to conceive, and ended up having twins via IVF treatment. It made a massive difference when they told friends at church who could support them through it**

but other times when I wondered if I had done something wrong. It's difficult when people describe themselves as 'blessed' with children – you wonder why you haven't been blessed.

"At one point I was going to the clinic three times a week, but we hadn't really told anyone about it. I might be told something really difficult and then have to go straight into a work meeting without having time to process what I'd heard. In the end, I told my family only because I had a blood test which gave me a bruise on my arm, and I had to explain why!

"I think we can both be quite private people, which is why we hadn't said anything. But

had experienced trouble with conceiving.

"One wonderful lady told me she had seen a vision of a really

big gift that God had for us. She wasn't saying it was a baby, but that God had something wonderful in store for us.

"I also wondered about telling our youth group, but realised I was asking them to share their lives with me while still holding back on what was happening in my life. Once I did tell them, they prayed for me every week and were so supportive. And because I'd been open, it helped them to open up about things in their lives."

The couple had to wait two years until Jo was 30 before they qualified for NHS-funded IVF treatment. They also had to pray about the ethics of creating embryos which may not be

used. In the end, Jo turned 30 in December and was pregnant by February after two embryos had been implanted.

"In Hampshire, you only get one NHS treatment of IVF," said Jo. "Because they can only plant either one or two embryos, people tend to go for two to give themselves a greater chance. It meant we were prepared well in advance for the possibility of twins!"

The pregnancy went well and Joseph and Olivia were born after 37 weeks at a healthy weight. Jo went back to work at St Simon's after a year of maternity leave. After another year, they went back to the clinic to see if further embryos could be implanted.

"It was going to be a difficult decision, as the embryos were stored in pairs. It was possible they might have to implant one and discard the other, which we wouldn't have been comfortable with.

"We came away to pray about it. Then I fell pregnant naturally, though it was eight weeks before we realised. It seems this was my first and only natural ovulation.

"My doctors just said 'Wow!' and we've never really had an explanation for it. But the timing was ideal, as I was going to step down from St Simon's and we were going to move house last summer. And then William was born that autumn. It all fell into place, and so it couldn't speak any more clearly of God.

"It taught me that whatever our issues and questions, God knows about them and has a plan. He'll work it out one stage at a time, and we just have to trust him."

## Youthwork continues at St Simon's

**IN her eight years working at St Simon's Church in Southsea, Jo Borley helped to develop its work with children, families and young people.**

She led a team of volunteers running children's groups on Sunday mornings – Bubbles for those aged under three and Splash! for those of primary school age.

Jo was also involved with the monthly KISS (Kids In St Simon's) family services,

which include games, lively songs and interactive ways of learning about God.

And she also led a group for teenagers called Submerge. They would study the Bible, play games and explore their faith.

Babette Shaw provided maternity cover for Jo and then became their youth outreach worker. And Jo's close friend Amy Allen has just been appointed as children

and families worker.

"It is strange to still be worshipping at St Simon's, but not to be one of the staff," said Jo. "It didn't hit me to start with, as I was just going on maternity leave to have William. But it has started to feel strange now as I would have been going back to work."

"But it's absolutely right for me to concentrate now on being a mum to our three children."