

Catholic Support for Ethically Acceptable Stem Cell Research

Sometimes it is wrongly said that the Catholic Church opposes stem cell research. In fact, the Church supports ethically responsible stem cell research, while opposing any research that exploits or destroys human embryos.

Because the Church opposes deliberately destroying innocent human life at any stage, for research or any other purpose, it opposes embryonic stem cell research as currently conducted. However, when scientists proposed avenues for possibly obtaining embryonic stem cells or their pluripotent equivalent without creating or harming embryos, Catholic leaders were among the first to welcome discussion of this idea (Catholic News Service, June 22, 2005).

The Catholic Church has long supported research using stem cells from adult tissue and umbilical cord blood, which poses no moral problem. Catholic institutions at times have taken the lead in promoting such constructive research, which is already providing cures and treatments for suffering patients:

- In May 2006, New Jersey's 15 Catholic hospitals announced that they will become centers for collecting umbilical cord and placental blood for the state's two public cord blood banks (Associated Press, May 23, 2006).
- In October 2005, the Catholic bishops of South Korea said they will raise and donate about \$10 million to advancing adult stem cell research (Taipei Times, October 6, 2005).
- South Korea's Catholic Medical Centre announced in June 2005 that it had successfully treated stroke and vascular disease in 64 patients using adult stem cells (AsiaNews.it, 20 June 2005)
- A March 2005 breakthrough demonstrating the capabilities of adult stem cells in Australia was made possible by a grant of \$50,000 (Australian dollars) from the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney (CNN International, March 22, 2005).
- In February 2005 a major Catholic teaching hospital in Boston, Caritas St. Elizabeth's Medical Center, announced that it had "identified adult stem cells that may have the capacity to repair and regenerate all tissue types in the body" (News Release, Caritas St. Elizabeth's Medical Center, February 2, 2005).
- Throughout 2005 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has worked to pass federal legislation creating a nationwide public bank for umbilical cord blood stem cells, for research and the treatment of a wide variety of diseases (News Release, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, July 12, 2005, at www.usccb.org).
- In 2004 Monsignor Thomas Hartman, director of radio and television for the Catholic Diocese of Rockville Centre, founded The Thomas Hartman Foundation for Parkinson's Research. The foundation has raised millions of dollars for adult stem cell research and other avenues for curing Parkinson's disease (see www.hartmanfoundation.org).

Clearly, the Church favors ethically acceptable stem cell research. It opposes destroying some human lives now, on the pretext that this may possibly help other lives in the future. We must respect life at all times, especially when our goal is to save lives.