



DIOCESE OF MADISON
BISHOP O'CONNOR CATHOLIC PASTORAL CENTER

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September 5, 2013

Dear Principals and Pastors:

Last spring we received several concerns from both parents and pastors regarding field trips to the Town Center housed within the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery (WID). While the Town Center offers many hands-on, scientific field trips, it also offers field trips that explore current research utilizing human, embryonic stem cells. Research involving embryonic stem cells occurs at the Morgridge Institute, which is housed in the same building and is part of the WID.

As you know, the only way to obtain human, embryonic stem cells is to harvest them from a human embryo, resulting in the embryo's destruction – the death of a human being. Due to this, human embryonic stem cell research runs counter to the Church's teaching that all human life is sacred and must be protected. As human, embryonic stem cell research is immoral and against Church teaching, bringing Catholic school students to visit a place that openly engages in the destruction of human life poses several valid concerns.

As there are many serious moral issues and educational considerations involved in this situation, I took several steps to further investigate the questions of whether or not bringing students to the Town Center to participate in a field trip of morally acceptable content, a) causes any collusion with evil, or b) may scandalize students or c) may precipitate scandal on a school or parish.

Toward this end I, a) reviewed the website for the Wisconsin Institutes of Discover, b) surveyed principals regarding planned trips to the Town Center, c) reviewed the variety of educational field trips and programs offered by the Town Center, d) visited the Town Center in person, and e) consulted with the diocesan Tribunal, and Vicar-General regarding both the educational value of the field trips as well as the moral issues raised by visiting a location which supports and actively engages in embryonic stem cell research.

The Town Center offers many engaging educational experiences for elementary and middle school students, however it also offers a workshop on culturing live stem cells for middle school and high school students which allows students to culture live, "pluripotent" stem cells. According to definition, the term "pluripotent" may describe either adult or embryonic stem cells. As the Wisconsin Institutes of Discovery conducts research on both adult and embryonic stem cells, there is a possibility that participants in this workshop may handle embryonic stem cells, which would clearly violate Catholic doctrine and teaching.

Catholic clergy and laity have long been known for their contributions to science. Scientists such as Gregor Mendel, a nineteenth century, Catholic, Augustinian monk who pioneered the field of genetics, made great discoveries by using reason to further inquiry in an attempt to better know and understand our world. This scientific inquiry continues today and has often served to benefit humanity, improving the lives of people worldwide. However, as researchers employ various means to seek answers and

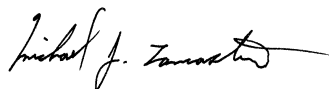
make new, scientific advances, they must also consider the consequences of both their methods as well as the impact of their findings. Responsible science must ask not only the questions of whether or not we are able to do something, or how we might achieve a certain objective, but also the questions of, “Ought we do this?” and “What are the ethical consequences of doing this?” These questions are an important aspect of scientific ethics writ large, and for the formation of our future Catholic scientists it is an aspect that must be deeply engrained if our students are to use their God given talents to live the Gospel message and serve both God and their fellow humans. Thus, in our Catholic schools we are called to teach not only the best that science has to offer, but also the best that humankind has to offer – recognizing the beauty of the world around us, and upholding in all endeavors the inherent dignity of each and every human person.

While it would be possible to visit the Town Center and avoid participation in the stem cell workshop, attending only the other educational offerings that, in and of themselves do not pose a moral issue, the question becomes whether or not patronizing an institution involved in embryonic stem cell research causes scandal and collusion with evil. After consultation with the diocesan Tribunal, and Vicar-General, and as evidenced by the concerned parents who contacted my office, it is clear that patronage of any institution or organization so engaged in conduct contrary to Catholic teaching and doctrine would cause scandal for participants, the school, and the parish.

Given these findings, and after further consultation with Bishop Morlino, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Madison may no longer participate in any activities, workshops or field trips at the Wisconsin Institutes of Discovery. Any plans to do so should be halted immediately, and alternative, morally acceptable means of meeting the educational objectives should be utilized. While the Town Center offered engaging, educational experiences, there are many other effective educational resources that cover the same topics. Thanks to the advances of technology, many of these are no more than a few keystrokes and mouse clicks away, and several are interactive. We would be happy to assist any teacher in locating these resources.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Lancaster". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael J. Lancaster
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Madison