



The Catholic Women's League of Canada Position Paper

TITLE: The Use of Stem Cells for Research and Medical Intervention Purposes

POSITION STATEMENT

The Catholic Women's League of Canada, in accordance with Catholic church teachings, respects the gift of human life from conception to natural death. Using human stem cells in research can positively and significantly impact medical and pharmacological treatments of severe diseases. However, there must be protection from using human embryonic stem cells in research and therapies where the embryo is destroyed.

- The League will follow the direction of the Vatican and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) during times when vaccination is the only solution to the loss of life, the choosing of vaccines not derived from human embryonic stem cells is impossible, and decisions must be made for the greater good of the population.

BACKGROUND

The church supports and subscribes to the positive benefits of scientific research. Human stem cell research carries great potential for treating the causes of many health disorders and may potentially reverse various chronic diseases for which there are currently no cures. The use of stem cells as a medical intervention gives hope to correct children's severely disabling and commonly fatal metabolic conditions. The disorders now being studied this way include diabetes, heart disease, some liver disease and arthritis (Declaration).

There are three sources of human stem cells: embryonic, adult and umbilical cord blood stem cells obtained at birth. Research on embryonic stem cells is considered easier to reproduce and manipulate in the laboratory, but the human embryo must be destroyed to obtain embryonic stem cells. The two other sources of human stem cells, adult stem cells and umbilical cord blood stem cells, do not require the donor's death. Unfortunately, these stem cells do not currently carry the same potential as embryonic stem cells (Leventhal, A. et al.).

The *Assisted Human Reproduction Act* addresses the ethical use of embryos in reproductive technology but does not protect embryonic stem cells from all types of research. The Catholic Health Alliance of Canada states, "Research on embryos and fetuses, whether viable or not, must respect them as human beings. Manipulations of embryos and fetuses, whether proven or novel, are permitted only if the manipulations are intended to be therapeutic for these embryos and fetuses (86)." The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* instructs, "Since it must be treated from conception as a person, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed, as far as possible, like any other human being" (Vatican 2274).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, fetal cell lines, based on fetal cells collected from abortions decades ago, were used to test the mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) COVID-19 vaccines. The Holy See and the CCCB advised that Catholics, in good conscience, could receive the available vaccine because of the greater good realized in preventing the spread of illness ("Note").

SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS

- Encourage members to be knowledgeable on church teachings regarding the use of human stem cells in research.
- Monitor ongoing research related to human stem cells.
- Monitor government legislation and regulations regarding the use of human embryos to obtain stem cells for research.
- Advocate for the use of adult and umbilical cord stem cells in research.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

“Assisted Human Reproduction Act.” *Justice Laws Website*, 9 June 2020, www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-13.4/.

“CCCB Note on Ethical Concerns Related to Currently Approved Covid-19 Vaccines.” *Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops*, 11 Mar. 2021, www.cccb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CLARIFICATION-CCCB-Statement-on-COVID-19-Vaccine-Choice-9-March-2021-EN.pdf.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. “Instruction Dignitas Personae on Certain Bioethical Questions.” *The Holy See*, 8 Sept. 2008, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html.

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“Health Ethics Guide Third Edition.” *Catholic Health Alliance of Canada*, Sept. 2012, p. 86 www.chac.ca/documents/422/Health_Ethics_Guide_2013.pdf.

Leventhal, A, et al. “The Benefits and Risks of Stem Cell Technology.” *National Center for Biotechnology Information*, Apr. 2012, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3752464/.

Pontifical Academy for Life. “Declaration on the Production and the Scientific and Therapeutic Use of Human Embryonic Stem Cells.” *The Holy See*, 25 Aug. 2000, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdlife/documents/rc_pa_acdlife_doc_20000824_cellule-staminali_en.html.

Vatican. “Catechism of the Catholic Church: Respect for Human Life.” *The Holy See*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 4 Nov. 2003, para 2271, https://www.vatican.va/content/catechism/en/part_three/section_two/chapter_two/article_5/i_respect_for_human_life.html.

STATUS

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