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Press Release

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Albuquerque - Wednesday, November 01, 2006 -- IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Albuquerque Journal reported today, Wednesday, November 1, 2006 that Governor Bill Richardson was proposing an embryonic stem cell research program at the University of New Mexico. The article said that he did not see this as a pro-life issue.

Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan said:

I have sent a letter to Governor Richardson asking him to reconsider his decision to promote embryonic stem cell research and limit the program to adult stem cell research. The other Catholic Bishops of the state, Bishop Donald E. Pelotte of Gallup and Bishop Richardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, concurred with the request.

The Church opposes embryonic stem cell research because it kills innocent human life. We believe that there are strong ethical issues involved here. Even a small embryo is a human being. We all started out as embryonic stem cells. To harvest embryonic stem cells, even to help human life, is wrong because it kills the embryo. It is in effect using the tiny human body parts for scientific purposes. The end does not justify the means.

As Catholics, human life issues are the bedrock of our faith. The respect for life that we have is central to Catholicism and thus we defend every life where it is threatened--from conception to natural death. We are committed to life across the board. We are opposed to abortion, to embryonic stem cell research, to euthanasia and capital punishment.

Embryonic stem cell research takes the lives of tiny human beings, no matter the number of cells, in the early the stages of life's development and thus kills the embryo. Every one of us began as an embryo. We strongly condemn any kind of stem cell research that would reduce the embryo to an object from which to steal body parts.

The moral chasm between adult and embryonic stems cell research is massive. Opposition to embryonic stem cell research should not be confused with opposition to stem cell research generally. Most types of stem cell research, in fact, are morally acceptable and laudable. We can all support many kinds of exciting and forward-looking avenues of stem cell research, like umbilical cord and adult stem cell research, with a clear conscience. The Church is very much in favor of adult stem cell research and research that does not harm the human embryo. Adult stem cell research has proven to be more fruitful for curing illnesses than embryonic stem cell research. There are scholars and experts who would say that there is much more hope to develop cures from adult stem cell research than the embryonic stem cells.

We are opposed to anything else that harms the dignity of the human person, poverty, lack of health care, and the many other moral issues that the Holy Father and the bishops have spoken strongly about. It is all a part of the love that Jesus showed for us... that every person is unique and not replicable.---END

Background Information

The following article was published January 2005 *People of God* (Archdiocese of Santa Fe Newspaper)

Does the Church Oppose Stem Cell Research?

By Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan

There has been a great deal said, especially during the recent political campaign, about stem cell research. The Catholic Church approves of adult stem cell research. However, enemies of the Church have branded us as being opposed to science and indifferent to those who suffer certain illness because we are against embryonic stem cell research. The truth is that there is no contradiction between ethically responsible scientific research and the teachings of the Church.

The Church strongly opposes embryonic stem cell research because it involves the direct destruction of a living human embryo, which is immoral.

We know that the genetic package is really complete when conception takes place and sonar pictures of the growing infant in the womb clearly shows the human life as it grows and develops and eventually is born. Thousands of lives have been saved by adult stem cells - most often in the form of "bone marrow transplants" for leukemia and other conditions. Treatments that do not require destroying any human life, are the most promising - they are already healing some conditions and are far closer to healing other conditions than any approach using embryonic stem cells. The choice is not between science and ethics but rather between science that is ethically responsible and science that is not. Those commentators that say embryonic stem cell research will lead to the cure of many diseases are involved in speculation. The Church encourages science that uses adult stem cells which treatments have been of great help to people with Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury, sickle cell anemia, heart damage, corneal damage, and dozens of other conditions. Embryonic stem cells have never treated a human patient and animal trials suggest that they are too genetically unstable and too likely to form lethal tumors to be used for treatment any time soon. Claims of impending miracle cures based on embryonic stem cell research are simply false.

The Church has a consistent ethic of life that teaches human life must be respected from the moment of conception to natural death. Science may be complex, but the ethics of embryonic stem cell are simple and the Church teaches that we do not kill the innocent for any reason whatever.