

Archbishop to host health care symposium

The assault on the conscience rights of physicians and others in the health care field has led Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien to host his first symposium on Catholic health care and ethics.

"Conscience and Ethical Dilemmas in Catholic Health Care" will be held May 9, from 1 to 4:30 p.m., at St. Joseph Medical Center in Towson.

The keynote address will be given by Dr. Janet Smith, the Father Michael J. McGivney Chair of Life Ethics at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.

A panel discussion to follow will include Dr. John Bruchalski, the founder of the Tepeyac Family Center in Fairfax, Va.; Dr. John Brehany, the executive director of the Catholic Medical Association; and Mark Rienzi, an attorney who has litigated a number of cases involving the pro-life position.

The symposium is free and open to all individuals.

It comes at a time when President Barack Obama's administration has proposed rescinding federal statutes that, according to Catholic News Service, currently protect health care professionals who decline to participate in abortions and other medical procedures because of religious or moral objections.

"My desire is to lay out the historic contributions of Christian ethics and Catholic ethics, what these rules are rooted in," Archbishop O'Brien said. "If we treat them lightly and even trample on them, we're going to pay a price in the long run."

He sees a wide gulf between those ethics and science that has brought embryonic stem-cell research and in-vitro fertilization.

"Modern technologies have made all kinds of things possible," Archbishop O'Brien said. "The fact that we can do things does not settle the question: ought we do those things?"

“What best respects the embrace of husband and wife in marriage in creating life?” the archbishop continued. “Is new life manufactured in a dish, or is new life deeply rooted in the love of a man and a woman? All these values, all these traditions, are being held up to question now, because science can do a lot of things in order to reach objectives and conclusions that might not be appropriate.”

The Catholic Medical Association has an active branch in Baltimore. The president of the CMA is Dr. Louis C. Breschi, a parishioner of Immaculate Conception in Towson.

“The fact that we have those respected professionals, I hope that will encourage others to look into our tradition,” Archbishop O’Brien said. “The church has a long noble history of respecting human life. The principle has always been out there, that every human life is sacred, from the very beginning, in the womb.”