

Bishops take definitive stance on stem cells

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien said the bishops made a firm stand in the discussion of embryonic stem-cell research at U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' meetings in Orlando, Fla., June 12-14.

Archbishop O'Brien was among the bishops who overwhelmingly approved a June 13 statement that called the use of such stem cells "gravely immoral."

"Our people have virtually no understanding of what reproductive technologies are, what's right, what's wrong and why they're wrong," Archbishop O'Brien said in an interview with The Catholic Review. "To fiddle around with the beginnings of human life is a very dangerous thing and we're going to pay for that in the long run, and only the church is preaching that message in unison. But we have to preach that to our people."

The stem-cell research document reads: "It now seems undeniable that once we cross the fundamental moral line that prevents us from treating any fellow human being as a mere object of research, there is no stopping point. The only moral stance that affirms the human dignity of all of us is to reject the first step down this path."

The bishops' definitive stance on stem cells sent a clear message, Archbishop O'Brien said.

"The teaching is truth - it's there, it's reliable, it's strong," Archbishop O'Brien said. "But, it's not being translated correctly. And this is what the bishops want and it will be done."

However, will the people of the country and in the Catholic faith further understand the church's position on stem-cell research?

"They better," Archbishop O'Brien said. "If they don't, we will have failed. I think they're open to the truth, but we just have to present it and show them the dangers of the alternatives."

The church will issue a 16-minute DVD about the undeveloped power of adult stem cells in helping the critically ill. Also, an informational bulletin insert about the topic is coming.

All but one of 192 votes cast by bishops were in favor of the new document called "On Embryonic Stem-Cell Research: A Statement of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops."

The nearly unanimous vote stood in stark contrast to a more difficult 700-page liturgical translation vote, which ended in a stalemate.

The debate over a 700-page translation of one section of the Roman missal failed to garner the 166 "yes" votes to approve it and the 83 "no" votes to reject it. The issue remains in limbo as bishops not present at the meeting could still mail in votes.

At the core of the dispute over the translation, which had come from the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, are words no longer in common usage among English-speaking Catholics.

"We're semi-sure that proposal will pass as it is," Archbishop O'Brien said, who before the meeting was hopeful for a resolution.

Bishop Victor B. Galeone of St. Augustine, Fla., who opposes the translation, told his fellow bishops, "These orations need re-working if we're going to proclaim them without leaving people scratching their heads."

Archbishop O'Brien said despite the lack of resolution on the oration issue, the meeting proved to be more of a bonding experience.

"It was not that full of an agenda," Archbishop O'Brien said. "The summer time is something more for reunion and fraternity. We had an excellent prayer and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament."

Catholic News Service contributed to this article.