

Diocese asks parishes, schools to break ties to Komen

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – Following the practice of some other dioceses, the Diocese of Little Rock is discouraging its parishes and schools from supporting fundraising activities for Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

The international organization raises millions annually for the detection, treatment and research of breast cancer. A portion of the money nationally is given to Planned Parenthood for breast cancer screenings. Planned Parenthood is also the largest provider of abortions in the United States.

Several parishes and schools have hosted teams for the Komen Race for the Cure, which attracts more than 43,000 participants to the 5K race in Little Rock alone each October. Another 15,000 participate in the Komen race in Springdale each April.

Marianne Linane, diocesan respect life director, said a statement declaring the Respect Life Office “neither supports or encourages participation” in Komen activities was written after several inquiries from pro-life Catholics about the diocese’s position.

The diocese is encouraging Catholics to write to the Komen headquarters in Dallas and ask them to stop funding Planned Parenthood.

Issued Feb. 4 and endorsed by Monsignor J. Gaston Hebert, diocesan administrator, the two-page statement was a way to inform Catholics in the state about Komen for the Cure, Linane told the Arkansas Catholic, Little Rock’s diocesan newspaper.

She said the diocesan statement is based on one developed by the Archdiocese of St. Louis in 2007. Similar statements have been issued in Charleston, S.C., and Phoenix.

Linane said one of the main reasons to distance Catholic groups from Komen is the funding to Planned Parenthood clinics in 22 states. Seventy-five percent of the money raised in Arkansas stays in the state and is not funneled to Planned

Parenthood clinics. The remaining 25 percent is sent to the national office.

While Planned Parenthood clinics in Arkansas do not do breast cancer screenings and do not receive Komen grants, national grants do support their work, Linane said.

“Donors cannot control how an organization designates its funds,” the diocesan statement said. “Therefore, money donated for a specific service, i.e., breast health care, directly frees up funds to support other areas of an organization’s agenda, i.e., contraception services, ‘safe’ sex education and abortion services.”

The statement said Komen for the Cure also supports embryonic stem-cell research and denies there is any link between abortion and breast cancer; the statement noted research that has found such a link. According to the Komen for the Cure Web site, the organization does deny any link.

Linane said Komen endorses embryonic stem-cell research as having the “most potential for cancer stem-cell research.”

Regarding the link between abortion and the increased risk of breast cancer, Linane said Komen officials “purport to be doing women favors but how can they deny the increase in breast cancer (by those who have had an abortion)?”

According to the statement, Dr. Joel Brind of the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute and Dr. Janet Daling, a cancer epidemiologist, said the link should not be dismissed. Both have done research in this area.

“Our hope is that the Komen Foundation will focus all funds on research to find causes and cure for breast cancer and refuse to give financial or other support to any abortion provider or organization that promotes the destruction of human life,” the diocesan statement said.

The executive director of Komen’s Ozark affiliate, based in Fayetteville, reiterated that no Arkansas Planned Parenthood clinics get local or national grants. Alison Levine provided a statement to the Arkansas Catholic saying, “Komen and its affiliates do not provide any funding for abortions or for any activities outside the scope of our mission to eradicate breast cancer.”

The statement continued, "The National Cancer Institute's review of recent scientific literature reveals that no conclusive evidence exists to suggest that abortion increases a woman's risk for developing breast cancer."

Levine said the organization has worked successfully with the Catholic Church over the years.

Linane said the diocese doesn't want to discourage groups from supporting breast cancer detection and research.

"Both Monsignor Hebert's and my mother died of breast cancer," Linane said.

She said groups should support Catholic hospitals directly that operate breast centers. "Your dollars will go further and will be used locally," Linane said.