

# Diocese rescinds statement on Komen fundraising events

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Monsignor J. Gaston Hebert, administrator of the Diocese of Little Rock, has rescinded a February statement that discouraged parishes and schools in the diocese from supporting fundraising activities for Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

The international organization, which is based in Dallas, raises millions annually for the detection, treatment and research of breast cancer. One of its signature events is the annual Race for the Cure held in communities around the country.

After meeting with Komen officials, Monsignor Hebert said March 6 that the earlier position statement, prepared by the diocesan Respect Life Office and endorsed by him, “was based upon what were believed to be ‘facts,’ which upon further study have turned out not to be true.”

He said one of the erroneous “facts” he was given was that the national Komen foundation provides grants to Planned Parenthood, a major provider of abortions, raising concern that money donated to Komen in Arkansas could indirectly fund abortions.

“However, the reality is that the national Komen foundation does not give grants to Planned Parenthood - and, therefore, money given to Komen in Arkansas does not, even indirectly, fund abortion,” he said in his March 6 statement. “Thus, my major reason for releasing the position statement was not valid.”

“It is important that the stance of the Catholic Church always be based upon truth,” Monsignor Hebert said, adding that the earlier position statement “was based upon

unintentional error.”

“To let that statement stand would be an act of injustice,” he said. “With apologies to Komen, to those fighting breast cancer and to the survivors, to the Catholic clergy and faithful who were embarrassed by this mistaken policy, I rescind the position statement in its entirety.”

The position statement from the Respect Life Office said it neither supported nor encouraged participation in activities benefiting Komen.

When it was issued, Marianne Linane, diocesan respect life director, said it was written after several pro-life Catholics inquired about the diocese’s position. Similar statements have been issued in St. Louis, Phoenix and Charleston, S.C.

Monsignor Hebert apologized “for the unintended turmoil and misunderstanding created by the statement.”

The priest also said that there was “a considerable amount of confusion over the authority” in the position statement. He said it was not issued as “a mandate but as a position paper” and that any individual Catholic, parish, school or Catholic organization was “free to make their own decision” about supporting the Komen race.

He also noted that “there is a relatively small number of affiliates of Komen that do give grants to Planned Parenthood for breast examinations, treatment and education, mostly in low-income areas where no other facility is available for the exams.”

He encouraged national Komen foundation officials to find “alternative avenues” for such exams and “to completely sever their connection with Planned Parenthood” because “even this partnering, born out of apparent necessity, unintentionally gives

credence and acceptability to Planned Parenthood due to Komen's excellent reputation."

The earlier statement on Komen said "donors cannot control how the organization designates the funds," but Monsignor Hebert said that also was not true and he has been assured by those who receive grants from Komen "that stringent safeguards are placed upon those funds being used for their designated purpose."

He also said the earlier statement implied a link exists "between procured abortion and increased risk of breast cancer" and that Komen dismisses such a link. The statement cited two researchers who have done work in this area.

But "the National Cancer Institute states that there exists no link between abortion and breast cancer," Monsignor Hebert said. "The preponderance of scientific research states that no such link exists, but there is a minority opinion that insists that such a link exists."

Also claimed in the earlier statement is that Komen endorses embryonic stem-cell research, which the church opposes, he said, but it in fact funds adult stem-cell research, "which would be in line with Catholic moral teaching."

"I will state very plainly, after meeting with the Komen officials of the Arkansas affiliates, that these are good people highly dedicated to finding a cure for breast cancer and preserving life; this is their only goal," Monsignor Hebert said.