

Diocese bans Catholic school trips to center where students could 'handle' embryonic stem cells

BY BEN JOHNSON, Thu Sep 12, 2013

MADISON, WI, September 12, 2013 ([LifeSiteNews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com)) – Catholic schoolchildren will no longer take field trips to a center that conducts embryonic stem cell research and gives students the opportunity to handle the aborted cells, the Diocese of Madison has announced in a letter.

Instead Catholic schools should find “morally acceptable means of meeting the educational objectives,” [Michael Lancaster, the diocesan superintendent of Catholic schools](#), wrote in a letter released last Thursday.

The new policy affects visits to the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery, on the campus of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. James Thomson, director of regenerative biology at the center's Morgridge Institute for Research, is a pioneer in embryonic stem cell research.

After a series of complaints from parents and priests, the diocese learned that WID offers what one observer [describes](#) as a “hands-on stem cell workshop,” taken part in by 200 Wisconsin schoolchildren.

“There is the possibility participants in this workshop may handle embryonic stem cells, which would clearly violate Catholic doctrine and teaching,” Lancaster wrote.

Embryonic stem cell research (ESCR), which requires the abortion of unborn children, is condemned by the Catholic Church as inherently unethical.

“This decision in Madison, together with many recent policy decisions in other dioceses, is part of an exciting renewal of Catholic identity in our Catholic schools and college,” Patrick J. Reilly, president of the [Cardinal Newman Society](#), told [LifeSiteNews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com).

Bishop Robert Morlino of Madison approved the decision, which [applies](#) to 7,400 children at 44 schools in 11 counties, local media report.

“The Diocese of Madison should be commended for taking this position,” Adam Cassandra, communications manager at [Human Life International](#), told [LifeSiteNews.com](http://www.lifesitenews.com). “It should be an automatic response that the Catholic Church cuts ties and/or support for an organization once their participation in the destruction of innocent human life is made known to Church officials.”

“I’m sure we can all agree that those field trips were never an absolutely necessary part of the science curriculum, so there is no good reason for the diocese to lend WID and the immoral research they’re doing any credibility with a Church presence at their facility,” Cassandra told [LifeSiteNews](http://www.lifesitenews.com).

The decision bolsters Bishop Morlino's reputation as an orthodox reformer, barring [diocesan contributions to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development \(CCHD\)](#), welcoming [traditional priests](#), and [banning New Age nuns](#) from speaking in his diocese.

But not everyone is happy with the decision. Peter Hess, a Catholic theologian and self-described “advocate of solid science teaching in Catholic schools,” called Bishop Morlino's actions a “huge overreach.”

Rather, Hess – who works at the National Center for Science Education – told the [Wisconsin State Journal](#) that teachers should “empower students to think critically,” and “if there's something the church opposes, you use it as a teachable moment.”



“It’s the great lie of modern times, that ‘critical thinking’ means suspending moral judgment,” Reilly told [LifeSiteNews](http://www.lifesitenews.com). “Catholic schools and homeschool programs that remain faithful to the Magisterium and classical education are among the few remaining opportunities for young people to learn to think critically, grow in wisdom, and discern truth from falsehood, right from wrong.”

Although ESCR had been once been said to hold the cure to a panoply of diseases from diabetes to paralysis, it [has largely been abandoned](#) as scientists have learned that less mature stem cells are more likely to [develop into tumors](#). Yet the [Obama administration has continued funding](#) the fruitless research.

However, [adult stem cell research](#) has assisted patients in [growing a new heart](#), [fighting wrinkles](#), and [treating diabetes](#).

Stem cells from umbilical cord blood helped a [four-year-old girl overcome brain cancer](#), as well as fighting [Type 1 diabetes](#).

Such research, in addition to being productive, is fully compatible with the Catholic Church's moral teachings.