

STATEMENT ON THE MARCH OF DIMES

Medical-Moral Commission Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa

The March of Dimes is a classic case of a health care association which accomplishes much that is good but has some policies and projects which are not in accord with the moral teaching of the Catholic Church.

A local chapter of the March of Dimes may provide education about nutrition needed to prepare for a healthy pregnancy, or provide informational materials on birth defects and problems related to prematurity, or sponsor a bereavement program for parents whose baby has died. Health care facilities may receive expensive equipment from the March of Dimes which helps to save the lives of infants. From a moral point of view, the work of the March of Dimes becomes problematic at the national level in terms of some of its support for medical and scientific research.

The March of Dimes has an explicit policy against research grant monies being used for abortion:

MOD policy states that abortion is not the solution to the problem of birth defects. ...All grantees and contractors regardless of their personal opinions are prohibited from using MOD funds for abortion research, to pay for abortions, or to give directive advice concerning abortions. ...Violation of this policy constitutes grounds for immediate cancellation of a grant or termination of a cooperative agreement. (http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/691_2160.asp)

This policy is a very positive step in respecting human life in all its stages. However, the Medical-Moral Commission has surfaced some research projects funded by the March of Dimes which are not in accord with Catholic moral teaching. For example, MOD has funded research involving the use of fetal tissue, which typically comes from aborted fetuses. MOD has also funded some research projects pertaining to the impermissible reproductive technology of IVF (in vitro fertilization), a technology whose use involves significant loss of embryos. Further, MOD is not opposed in principle to human embryonic stem cell research although, as of 2008, it had not actually funded any such project.

A portion of funds raised at the local level for the March of Dimes may be forwarded to the national office. Thus a portion of one's contribution may or may not be used for research which Catholic moral teaching considers impermissible. However, the March of Dimes does allow financial contributions to be restricted.

Consistent with the archdiocesan policy statement *Morally Responsible Participation in Health Care Associations*, the Medical-Moral Commission offers the following guidelines for individual Catholics and Catholic organizations wishing to support the March of Dimes.

(1) Catholic organizations and individuals may make financial contributions to the March of Dimes, but all financial contributions should be restricted. Specifically, financial contributions should be restricted to projects which do NOT involve or promote human embryonic stem cell research, the use of tissue from aborted fetuses, or assisted reproductive technologies (such as IVF or preimplantation genetic diagnosis).

(2) Contributors to the March of Dimes should send a letter to the organization indicating the restriction on the contribution and the reason for it.

(3) In the case of a Catholic organization (e.g., a school, a hospital) engaging in fundraising for the March of Dimes, the restriction of funds should be mentioned in all publicity.

(4) Further, Catholics who work for the March of Dimes, either on a paid or volunteer basis, should actively work to change the morally impermissible practices of the organization.

Following these guidelines will avoid supporting, or appearing to support, morally impermissible activities on the part of the March of Dimes. Restricting contributions will also exert some pressure on the organization to change its policies and practices at the national level.

The Medical-Moral Commission offers the following model letter to be sent to the March of Dimes restricting a financial contribution:

Enclosed is a contribution of \$--- for the March of Dimes. *As a matter of conscience, I/we restrict this contribution to projects which do NOT involve or promote human embryonic stem cell research, the use of tissue from aborted fetuses, or assisted reproductive technologies (such as IVF or preimplantation genetic diagnosis).* If this restriction is not acceptable, please return the enclosed contribution.

I/we support the March of Dimes in the association's following policy regarding abortion: "MOD policy states that abortion is not the solution to the problem of birth defects. ...All grantees and contractors regardless of their personal opinions are prohibited from using MOD funds for abortion research, to pay for abortions, or to give directive advice concerning abortions." As a financial supporter of the March of Dimes, I/we strongly urge the March of Dimes to extend this policy to embrace a completely consistent ethic of life, respecting human life in all research and projects.

I/we recognize that much good is done by the March of Dimes. However, if MOD continues to support practices which we cannot accept from a moral point of view, I/we will find it necessary to reevaluate involvement in and financial support of the March of Dimes.

The guidelines offered for participating in the March of Dimes may also be applicable to other health care associations.

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