



Reuters/CNS

Michael West of Advanced Cell Technology in Worcester, Mass., announced Nov. 25 that the company has successfully cloned a human embryo to treat disease.

Vatican condemns embryo cloning

By John Norton
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican condemned the cloning of human embryos by U.S. scientists, rejecting claims that the research produced simple cells and not human individuals.

Despite the scientists' stated humanitarian aims, the research represents a new form of discrimination against defenseless people, the Vatican said in a Nov. 26 statement.

Scientists at Advanced Cell Technology in Worcester, Mass., announced Nov. 25 in the online journal *E-Biomed: The Journal of Regenerative Medicine* that they had cloned the first human embryo.

The researchers said they would use the technique, known as therapeutic cloning,

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to develop genetically compatible replacement cells for patients with illnesses like diabetes and Parkinson's — not human clones.

But the Vatican, noting that the scientists referred to what they produced as an "early embryo," rejected the claim that no human had been cloned.

It is "beyond doubt, as indicated by the researchers themselves, that here we find ourselves before human embryos and not cells, as some would have (people) believe," the Vatican said.

The Vatican said the determination of when human life begins cannot be fixed by convention to a certain stage of embryonic development, but instead was found "in the

first instant of existence of the embryo itself."

Though in this case recognizing human life was more difficult because researchers created the embryo in a "dis-human" way — without uniting sperm and egg — the resultant being had the same dignity as any other human life, the Vatican said.

The scientists' justification on the grounds of fighting illness "sanctions a true and proper discrimination among human beings based on measuring the time of their development — so an embryo is worth less than a fetus, a fetus less than a child, a child less than an adult," it said.

This overturns "the moral imperative that instead imposes maximum care and maximum respect precisely for those who are not in a condition to defend or manifest their intrinsic dignity," the Vatican said.



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Ministering through disabilities



Sister Kathy Weider (right) leads a group prayer and discussion about the events of Sept. 11 at a "Weekend Getaway" for people with multiple sclerosis at Sunshine Rotary Camp, Rush, Sept. 15.

Several ministers in the Diocese of Rochester have a special understanding of the needs of disabled people because they, too, have disabilities or chronic illnesses.

Sister of St. Joseph Kathy Weider, 50, has traveled the world pursuing her passion for social justice. Yet today, due to multiple sclerosis, a simple distraction can cause her to lose her balance and fall while walking across a room.

Father Gerard "Jerry" Hafner, 66, nearly obsesses about doing aerobic exercises, but they help him to maintain his physical and emotional well-being, and to enjoy living without alcohol.

Father David Bonin, 53, depends on the sight of others to help with readings at Mass and to get him where he needs to go.

And all three repeatedly use the word "grateful" in talking about their lives.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark, 64, who has suffered his own disabilities in the past

Was God crazy to make us fragile?

Mary Jane Owen has a distinctive definition for disabilities: "Disabilities are the normal, expected and anticipated outcome of the risks, stresses and strains of the living process itself. They happen because the human body is fragile and vulnerable."

As executive director of the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities, she advocates not only for the 14 million Catholics living with disabilities, but for all people. "Disability is not something that happens only to the unlucky few but is an event that can be anticipated by us all," she asserts.

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three years, is likewise grateful. Having been forced to curtail activities due to coronary artery disease and vasculitis (an inflammation of the arteries particularly in the upper body), he says he is now "pretty much back to normal" with his activities.

A 'grateful alcoholic'

Ten years ago, Father Hafner became comfortable enough as a recovering alcoholic to speak about it from the pulpit.

Shortly after becoming pastor, he told parishioners at Caledonia's St. Columba Parish that he welcomed invitations to their homes, but not for drinks.

He now serves on the diocesan tribunal and is temporary priest administrator at St. John's Parish, Spencerport.

Drinking wasn't something he experienced in his family life nor during college, he said. But after his ordination in 1962 by

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