

From: Very Reverend Lawrence J. Fama, Director Respect Life Office

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RE: ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE AND EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

In recent weeks we have all read about, heard and seen the growing number of media stories about the latest rage in fundraising for a cause – ***Ice Bucket Challenges*** for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often called Lou Gehrig's Disease. Already this summer, this staged series of events has raised more than \$10 million for the ALS Foundation, the leading nonprofit working in this field.

No one can dispute that ALS is a disruptive, debilitating disease, currently without a cure. Our natural tendency as compassionate people is to support efforts to find a cure for this and other diseases, and to aid those who suffer from illnesses.

But as fun and engaging as stunts like Ice Bucket Challenges can be, it is important for us to know to what use funds raised from such events are put. Do those efforts conform to or conflict with our Catholic moral teaching regarding issues such as stem cell research?

Sadly, it has been reported through outlets such as Religion News Service and Lifeneews.com that the ALS Foundation ***admittedly supports*** research ***using embryonic stem cells*** and ***stem cells from aborted fetuses***.

The Catholic Church ***strongly supports adult or non-embryonic stem cell research and treatment only***. It ***does not support embryonic stem cell research and treatment or research using stem cells from aborted fetuses***.

As the new school and catechetical program year begins and parishes and schools consider what kinds of service or outreach efforts they may undertake, please be aware that staging an Ice Bucket Challenge or similar event could very easily involve the parish or school in an activity that conflicts with Catholic teaching.

What Can You Do?

The easiest and best thing any of us can do when faced with a decision about supporting a project involving a fundraising effort is to check it out to ensure that any research in which an organization engages conforms to Catholic beliefs and teaching. Check the sponsoring organization's website and other available resources. If it does engage in embryonic stem cell or aborted fetus stem cell research, choose another organization that engages only in adult stem cell research, or that uses its funds to provide other types of support – such as local treatment or lifestyle enhancement possibilities for people with that particular disease.

Another option available to you if you want to participate in the effort to support research for ALS would be to specifically designate to what use any funds raised from

participation in Ice Bucket Challenges or any service project may go. There is no stigma in restricting your contributions to ALS to research using **adult stem cells only, or to non-stem cell research**. In fact, this call could be very enlightening to an organization like the ALS Foundation.

There also may be an organization or hospital more local to the parish or school that is involved in caring for people with a particular disease. Designating funds to that local organization is an effective and personal way to engage in community outreach.