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Office of the Bishop

October 12, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Every year for more than forty years, we have joined Catholics throughout our country in observing October as Respect Life Month. I invite you to join with me at a special Pro-Life Mass on Tuesday, October 19 at 7:00 p.m. in Saint Paul Cathedral. We will anticipate the Mass with praying the Holy Rosary at 6:30 p.m.

I want to touch base with you on an urgent concern at the University of Pittsburgh and its affiliated medical school. This spring and summer, I engaged with administrators at the University of Pittsburgh and its allied medical institutions when I learned that it used fetal remains obtained from elective abortions. These were children who were denied the right to life by the choice of others. My attention was initially called to a research study on so called “humanized mice,” published in *Scientific Reports*, which researchers from Pitt conducted. Regrettably, I have discovered that the study is not an isolated incident of aborted fetal tissue used in research at the University of Pittsburgh. This practice perpetuates the idea that children in the womb are humans who are “non-human,” that is, subjects without rights. Such practices epitomize the exploitation of human beings, valued not for their intrinsic worth but as commodities.

Certainly, many individuals seek abortion in a moment of crisis. But death is not the solution. Our diocese and a host of other organizations offer medical and social services to women with crisis pregnancies and families struggling to raise children. Academic and medical communities must always honor the pledge to “First, do no harm.”

I do not question the aspirations of Pitt or its medical allies to improve lives. However, the most fundamental ethical norm undergirding all efforts for human betterment is the dignity, sanctity, and infinite worth of all human beings. Indeed, the foundation of a just and free society is the recognition that every human being has value and is the bearer of rights, regardless of strength, ability or origin. That is also the primary inspiration for scientific advancement and should be the moral compass guiding science to true progress.

History has borne witness to the tragic outcomes of relegating one group of humans to sub-human status, whether those persons are women, the aged, immigrants, persons of color, persons of a particular ethnic/national origin, or any marginalized and under-respected community. When any group of humans is prohibited from the care, protection and dignity essential to all, harm is always done regardless of the intentions. As history further attests, when categories of persons are consistently denied protection, society itself deteriorates and greater violations of human rights ensue.

I therefore call upon the University of Pittsburgh, as one of the oldest institutions of higher education in the United States, a leader of higher education for two centuries, to reevaluate its protocols for research. I ask that Pitt surpass established standards by naming unborn children as worthy of the same protection, dignity and respect that all categories of persons are afforded.

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While I speak as a religious leader in our community, it is from the common ground of human interest I make this urgent request that the University of Pittsburgh stop the use of fetal tissue in research derived from elective abortions of those whose right to life was denied and consider what is most fundamental—the integrity of every human being and the rights that are inherent to all. The defense of defenseless human beings has traditionally been a principle shared by people of all faiths and by ethical people who have no religious faith. Human civilization is premised on respect for human rights. We believe those rights begin at the first moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

Please pray with me for an end to these practices at the University of Pittsburgh and its allied medical institutions.

Grateful for our belief that “Nothing is Impossible with God,” I am

Your brother in Christ,

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Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh

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