



FALL 2007

# PATHway

*Post Abortion Treatment and Healing*

## NEW NON-EMBRYONIC SOURCE FOR STEM CELLS

Teams of scientists in the US and Japan have pioneered a new method for providing “pluripotent” stem cells without recourse to human embryonic stem cells. If researchers are able to overcome the hurdles entailed in developing the new process to the point where it can yield real-world applications, it is possible that a variety of diseases may be treated with transplanted tissue grown from the patient’s own cells.

Embryonic stem cells have long been valued for their potential to be developed into a variety of specialized tissues for the purpose of studying disease with the long-term goal of replacing diseased or malfunctioning tissues and organs with healthy tissue “matched” to the recipient. Stem cells can be developed into any of the over 200 different types of cells occurring in the human body; they provide a unique opportunity to study the development pattern of diseases like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and diabetes.

Dr. Shinya Yamanaka of Kyoto University, publishing in *Cell*, and Dr. James Thomson of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (in conjunction with Junying Yu), publishing in *Science*, report a process which “reprograms” human skin cells (fibroblasts) into “iPS” cells which emulate the properties of embryonic stem cells.

Dr. Thomson was among the first researchers to extract stem cells from human embryos, in 1998. After studying animal embryonic stem cells as a graduate student, Thomson determined that the next step in his research into cellular development could not advance without access to human stem cells. Thomson continued his research on stem cells obtained from human embryos, touching off a nation-wide debate. Now he’s pleased to have developed an alternative source of stem cells. He is quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, “If human embryonic stem cell research does not make you at least a little bit uncomfortable, you have not thought about it enough” (Kolata, 11/22/07, *Science* section).

The new process is widely heralded as a path forward. Because it does not implicate human embryos, researchers who use the new process can move forward with their study of disease at the cellular level without the same ethical impediments that attached to research done on stem cells taken from human embryos. Researchers look forward to new funding.

This discovery is no panacea, however. Just as with the stem cells harvested from human embryos, turning these stem cells into medical treatments may be many years down the road. Far into the future is the potential to replace or repair a patient’s diseased tissue with healthy tissue “manufactured” by taking skin cells from the patient’s body and “reprogramming” them first into stem cells and then into specialized tissues and organs.

For the time being, however, the new technique will be used for research rather than therapy. Scientists expect to be able to study the development of targeted diseases by harvesting skin cells from carriers of the disease and then generating stem cells which can be grown into pertinent tissues. For example, the development of diabetes could be studied by “growing” a pancreas from the skin cells of a diabetes patient.

INSIDE

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# From Our Director



Mary Ann McNeil

One of the most heartbreaking aspects of working in PATH is meeting young couples that come for help following an abortion. Typically the abortion has been recent. The couple has experienced all of the questions and pressures one could imagine regarding a crisis pregnancy. A love that was full of hope, promises for the future, and joy suddenly becomes a relationship of resentment and heartache. Both parties have been traumatized. It's as if both "woke up" from a gray murky sea of doubt and ask, "What were we thinking? Why didn't someone warn us? Why did the clinic staff call our child "tissue"?"

Typically one or both parties will say that they knew the aftermath of the decision to abort would not be easy, but that they thought they could be strong and "deal with it." Yet, months later, sitting in our office--fighting depression, despair, and thoughts of suicide--they admit they had no idea.

Recently a young man I counseled researched abortion on "You-Tube." He witnessed a film of an actual abortion. I had no idea that this was available with the click of a mouse.

His words: "It's horrible. I can't believe this is legal!"  
And then...he admits the awful truth: "And *that's* what we did." Fortunately, this story is in the process of ending well. I was able to respond to the couple's obvious self-condemnation with a passage from a book I've been reading recently (see sidebar). Then, when I suggested that they might benefit from our bible study, they wholeheartedly agreed to doing both a bible study and a retreat.

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PATH, Inc. is a registered  
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## RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

*The Miracle of Me* by Amy Pedersen. Self-Published. *The Miracle of Me* is about life in the womb. Written from the unborn baby's perspective, this book uses simple language and poetry to teach about a baby's growth and development each week. Real in utero photography is used along with rulers and scales to visually mark the baby's progress. Endorsed by Priests for Life.

## RESOURCES FOR THE COMMUNITY

Georgia Right to Life. [www.grtl.org](http://www.grtl.org). Geared toward political action and educating the public about life issues, this website offers fact sheets and position papers, news, citizen involvement how-tos, pregnancy resource contacts, and a speaker's bureau. Get Josh Brahm to do his multimedia presentation on "Making Abortion Unthinkable" or "Chastity 101" to your church, school, women's group, or youth group.



## Blessing and Affirmation

*On Saturday, November 10, Sr. Pat, Mary Ann, and LaDonna gave an in-service training for facilitators featuring material they had encountered at this summer's Rachel's Vineyard leadership conference in Philadelphia. Here is a summary of Sr. Pat's presentation, based on a conference presentation by Neil Lozano.*

Inherent in every human being is a desire to know the Father's blessing. We need to know that we are pre-ordained, loved by the Father "before the foundation of the world."

Human beings are born with a desire to be loved for "who I am" rather than for "what I do." This desire is the root of the need for the Father's blessing.

The Genesis stories offer a powerful image of this fundamental human trait: God affirms the goodness of the final act of creation—human creatures "made in the image and likeness of God"—before those human beings have an opportunity to do anything. The goodness of the human creature rests in our being, not our doing.



God designs human beings to be receptive to blessing. Our receptivity correlates with God's desire to bestow blessings upon us.

God uses other people, often and primarily our parents, as vehicles for this divine blessing. God desires that each of us hear in our souls the same words Jesus heard at his baptism in the Jordan-- "My beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

Every human being needs to hear her own goodness revealed to hear by a source outside of herself so that she may come to possess, to connect with, to be at home with herself as good and loveable. Just as this affirmation of Jesus' goodness preceded the activity of his ministry, so also for us our action, work, and accomplishments spring from the affirmation of our "being." Deprivation of this experience results in fears, insecurities, and unhealthy relationships.

Blessing is not something you can do for yourself. It has to come from outside. Picture it like this: Someone has to take your soul, hold it out in front of your eyes where you can see it, affirm it, then put it back inside you where it belongs.

Affirmation is not the same as friendship. In friendship, another gives you her heart; in blessing, another blesses your heart.

What actions can we take to become "affirmers"?

- Meditate on scripture stories about blessing. Gen. 25-27 (Jacob and Esau) is a good example.
- Learn to use the tone of your voice and the touch of your hands to convey blessing.
- Learn to stand behind your words. Effective blessing requires commitment, sacrifice, follow-through.
- Ask yourself: how can I assist this person in connecting with God's plan for his life?



### FUNDRAISER PHOTOS

Top: Jim Tramonte admires Liz Winkler's doorprize. Center: Facilitator Jeanetta Nawrot embraces speaker Ursula Boehme. Below: Terry Gibbs and Eugene Vigil share a laugh.

# The Whole Truth

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This encounter got me to thinking about the often-overlooked responsibility we have to educate our society—especially the young and the uninformed--as to the whole truth about abortion. As a parent I strive to shield my children from the ugly reality of abortion. Yet, is this wise parenting? Wouldn't it be better to inform and equip our children about the world they are entering, even if the material is upsetting? My no means do I advocate viewing an actual abortion on "You-Tube", yet creating opportunities for our children to learn the truth about abortion in age-appropriate ways may serve to prevent deep heartache down the road.

Our children need to know about the world they are entering. But that's not all. They also need to know what's missing from that world. Abortion occurs because our culture has separated the procreative function of human sexuality from the unitive (the "I love you") function. We must retrieve and pass on to our children an appreciation of the awesomeness of sexual intimacy and why it is reserved for marriage. Then, perhaps, abortion will finally become unthinkable.

*Even when we have truly sinned, our self-blaming judgment does nothing to heal us. Harshness with ourselves over our failures, faults and even serious sin is not God's way; it is the work of the Spirit. True contrition fixes our eyes on Jesus, not on ourselves and how awful we are. The Gospels assure us that Jesus comes especially for the sinner, the sick, and the weak. He wants to be with us especially when we are feeling most sinful, and even when we actually are sinful*

*God Is Close to the Brokenhearted: Good News for Those Who Are Depressed*  
Rachel Callahan, CSC, and Rea McDonnell, SSND  
St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996

## LOPEZ: PATH'S "TIDAL WAVE OF DIVINE JOY"

When a woman or man suffering from post-abortion trauma accepts God's forgiveness, there is a "tidal wave of divine joy." That's how Msgr. Richard Lopez, longtime supporter, described PATH's mission in his annual talk for the fundraiser dinner held at Holy Spirit September 29.

Celebrating the loyalty of volunteer facilitators who run quarterly Bible Studies, director Mary Ann McNeil honored Mary Jean Ingebredtsen with an award for 10 years of service. On hand to present the award were previous recipients Sr. Pat Thompson and Teresa Rutledge.

The high point of the evening was a powerpoint presentation featuring the names of babies mourned by their mothers at PATH's quarterly retreats. The room was quiet long after the names had finished scrolling up the screen.

Ursula Boehme, who had herself made a Rachel's Vineyard retreat in 2004, came to the podium to give a personal account of her journey to reconciliation. Here is an excerpt:

*I held on to my sin and refused Jesus' forgiveness...feel(ing) unworthy of his love...I was petrified that the little place I had built for myself in the back of my Church would be taken away...Fr. Fabio Alvarez gently led me to confess. At the retreat, Fr. Joseph Peek reminded me that St. Peter denied our Lord Jesus three times...the sound of those words and the warm embrace of Sr. Pat have been the voice and love of Jesus in my life many times since.*

*I think of my children often during the day...prior to PATH I was tormented by the thoughts, but now I rejoice and I thank them for saving my life.*

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