

Two diocesan priests named in sex abuse lawsuits

The Diocese of Wilmington released the following statement June 25.

Two priests of the Diocese of Wilmington — one deceased and one retired — have been named in separate lawsuits alleging sexual abuse of minors, the Diocese of Wilmington announced today. Prior to the filing of these lawsuits, there had been no allegations of this nature against either of these priests.

Rev. John Francis O'Brien, who passed away on January 7, 2003, is accused of abuse of a minor in the early 1960s.

Father O'Brien was ordained in 1962 and during the first ten years of his priesthood he served as associate pastor of St. Paul's Church in Wilmington, St. Helena's Church in Wilmington and St. Ann's Church in Wilmington. In 1972 Father O'Brien was appointed pastor of Our Lady of Fatima

Church in New Castle. In 1982 he became pastor of St. Elizabeth's Church in Wilmington. Father O'Brien was assigned as pastor of St. Mary Magdalen Church in Wilmington in 1997 and served in that capacity until his death. He also served the Diocese of Wilmington as director of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYM).

Rev. James Edward Richardson, retired, age 77, is accused of sexually abusing a minor on two occasions in the late 1960s. Father Richardson denies the allegations.

In accordance with diocesan policy and the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the Catholic Bishops of the United States in June 2002, Bishop W. Francis Malooly has suspended Father Richardson's priestly faculties. Father Richardson is not allowed to function as a priest in public pending the outcome of an investigation into the matter.

Ordained in 1965, Father Richardson served as associate pastor of St. Matthew's Church in Wilmington, St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Hockessin, and Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Wilmington. He was appointed pastor of the Cathedral of St. Peter in Wilmington in 1977. Since 1982, Father Richardson has been involved in drug and alcohol counseling and served as part-time chaplain at St. Edmond's Academy in Wilmington.

It is the policy of the Diocese of Wilmington to deal with allegations of sexual abuse of minors with transparency while acknowledging that individuals are assumed innocent until proven otherwise. The diocese urges anyone who had been sexually exploited or abused by a priest, brother, sister or lay person employed by the diocese or by a church volunteer in service to a parish or school or other church organiza-

tion to notify local law enforcement and to call the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, Peggy McLaughlin, at 302-656-0651, who will arrange for counseling, pastoral and other supportive care.

The Diocese of Wilmington is committed to victim outreach and their spiritual and emotional well-being, having been found in complete compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People for five consecutive years. In 2003 the diocese implemented a comprehensive safe environment program entitled "For the Sake of God's Children." The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and various related documents can be found at www.usccb.org/ocyp/charter. Information on the Diocese of Wilmington and its child protection, safe environment and victims assistance programs can be found at www.cdow.org.

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St. Francis Hospital launches cord blood donation program: Birth mothers can decide to provide the gift of life to others

By Joseph Ryan
Assistant editor

WILMINGTON — "Give Life. Twice." That's the message the Brady Kohn Foundation is sending to new mothers at St. Francis Hospital who can now donate umbilical cord blood from the delivery of their child to be stored and available for people with life-

threatening diseases.

"This is a glorious event for St. Francis' OB-GYN department," said Dr. Ronaldo L. Domingo at a press conference June 22 where the hospital announced the cord blood donation program in cooperation with Community Blood Services of New Jersey and the Brady Kohn Foundation.

"Now we are part of the cord blood collection for adult stem cells that will help a lot of people in need," Domingo added. "I want to thank the Diocese of Wilmington for letting us participate in this project."

The Catholic Church supports research using adult stem cells like those found in cord blood. The church opposes research using

embryonic stem cells. In a recent message opposing federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research, the U.S. bishops' conference said research using adult stem cells "is ethically sound, harms no one, and is already helping suffering patients with dozens of conditions."

Private banking of umbilical cord blood can cost up

to \$2,000 with a \$120 fee to maintain the unit each year. In the new program at St. Francis, when parents choose the free option, the cord blood is processed for stem cells by Community Blood Services and becomes available for matches worldwide for people who need the cells for transplant therapy or to treat various cancers and blood diseases, including leukemia, breast cancer, lymphoma and sickle cell anemia.

Dr. Dennis M. Todd, president and CEO of Community Blood Services, said minorities, such as African-Americans, face only a 20 percent chance of finding bone marrow donors, compared to 70 to 80 percent "if you're white."

St. Francis' program for cord blood donation will give minorities a better chance, Todd said. "We've seen that the number of African-American transplants and Hispanic transplants facilitated by cord blood donor program are growing exponentially."

Dr. Nancy Petit, director of obstetrics at St. Francis, said the blood cord donation program has been in place at the hospital since the end of May and birth mothers and fathers have been eager to participate so they "can offer a new chance at life."

"The Brady Kohn Foundation has defrayed a lot of the costs," she said, "getting the cord blood donation kits together, getting the information out. They've defrayed the costs of the couriers. We collect the blood; we label it, we



The Brady Kohn Foundation

Kina Thornton of New Castle is expecting a baby in August. She plans to donate the umbilical cord blood from the birth at St. Francis Hospital, which offers the service for free.

store it."

The hospital then notifies Community Blood Services and a courier takes the donation to New Jersey. "It's really worked out well," Petit said. "It's a wonderful thing for patients at no cost to them. They're like, 'How can I not do this?'"

That's what Kina Thornton of New Castle thought when she first heard about the program and became the first person to call to ask about donating at St. Francis.

"My mom had a heart transplant years ago at Hahnemann Hospital [in Philadelphia], so I'm an

organ donor," said Thornton, who's expecting a baby in August. She's donating her cord blood because "somebody saved my mom's life and to be able to do that for somebody else, that's just amazing."

From grief, hope

The Brady Kohn Foundation's work to save lives through cord blood donations was born in grief in 2002.

Brady Kohn, the son of Andrew and Carolyn Kohn of Wilmington, acquired a hepatitis virus in September 2001 when he was 2. The virus shut down his bone

marrow and developed into aplastic anemia. Carolyn Kohn had banked Brady's umbilical cord blood at birth, so when he became sick, Brady became one of the first patients in the world to receive a cord blood transplant using his own saved stem cells. Signs of his recovery looked good until complications ended his life in March 2002.

Citing a young child with leukemia, whose life was saved last fall with a cord blood transplant from a unit saved through the foundation's program at Christiana Hospital, Carolyn Kohn said even though the young patient will never know Brady, "we certainly know the family has been touched by our Brady and in launching this cord blood program ... at St. Francis, we know Brady will continue to touch the lives of many for years to come."

Kohn and her husband now have a son, Jack, who attends St. Mary Magdalen School, and a younger daughter, Charlotte.

Kendall Massett, president of the foundation, said its goals are to educate mothers about the cord donor program at St. Francis and Christiana, find new hospitals to participate, and raise funds for non-embryonic stem-cell research. The Brady Kohn Foundation is the "only volunteer, grassroots foundation" of its kind in the country, she said. "We are totally volunteer-driven."

For more information go to www.TheBradyKohnFoundation.org.

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