

NEWS

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STATEMENT FROM THE DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH ON

“Bodies...The Exhibition”

It is a fundamental Catholic understanding that the human person, composed of body and soul, is made in the image and likeness of God. The Church witnesses to this in many ways, including the requirement that the bodies of the deceased be given care, dignity and appropriate burial.

The Church has long supported the donation of bodies for scientific research and educational purposes as long as the bodies are treated with dignity and are not displayed for entertainment purposes or for profit alone. It is also critical that whenever possible, the previous permission of the deceased or family members has been obtained.

Beginning in October 2007 through April 2008, “Bodies...The Exhibition” will be held at the Carnegie Science Center. The exhibit features dozens of preserved cadavers in posed positions, fetuses in various stages of development, and other body parts. The bodies were obtained by Premier Exhibitions from the Dalian Medical University in China, a leading international institution in anatomical studies.

“Bodies...The Exhibition” has raised a number of concerns, most particularly the fact that the bodies were obtained without valid and informed consent. The bodies had been unclaimed and unidentified and were obtained by Dalian Medical University from Chinese police.

Representatives of the Diocese of Pittsburgh met with those involved in the exhibit at Carnegie Science Center to discuss the issues involved. All agreed that the educational benefits of “Bodies...The Exhibition” were clear. Additionally, the location of the exhibition allows manifold opportunities for reflection and exploration of the issues involved in the display, while making an extraordinary visual presentation of the dignity and miracle of human creation.

Our concern remained the source of the bodies, particularly when noting China’s record on human rights and mandatory abortion policies. The Carnegie Science Center supplied documentation and affidavits assuring that the bodies were of those who had died from natural causes and had been deceased and unclaimed for no less than four years. In addition, the bodies will be returned to China at the proper time for cremation or interment. Finally, we were assured that the fetuses had died naturally *in utero* and were not the result of abortions.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh recognizes the extraordinary opportunity this exhibit can provide in teaching on health issues, poverty and justice, and the dignity and sacredness of every human life. "Bodies...the Exhibition" is also being held in the proper educational setting in a non-profit institution. Serious efforts will be undertaken to work with the Carnegie Science Center to provide further information and dialogue on the ethical and moral teachings of the Church concerning the human body. We hope that other faith communities will do the same.

With the assurances that the affidavits provide over the source of the bodies and fetuses, and the understanding that it is morally ethical that bodies unclaimed over a definitive period of time can be used for medical study and education, the Diocese of Pittsburgh concludes the following:

1. "Bodies...The Exhibition" can provide worthwhile and effective opportunities to promote learning and to explore issues in the natural sciences, morality and spirituality;
2. "Bodies...The Exhibition" is certainly not appropriate for all audiences. Individuals in general and parents in particular must consider their own and their children's sensitivities when determining whether or not to attend the exhibit;
3. The discussion generated in the public arena in anticipation of this exhibit is a valuable one that has raised serious questions about the dignity of the human person and how that dignity is expressed, protected and promoted. We applaud this public discourse on a matter so important to the fostering of a good society. We encourage continued dialogue on these important topics and welcome the opportunity to participate in them over the course of the exhibit's stay in Pittsburgh.