

## Exclusive: Twenty Years of Eugenic Abortion at Ontario Catholic Hospital Special Report presents hospital policy document approving the procedure

By John-Henry Westen

LONDON, December 5, 2008 (LifeSiteNews.com) - The chief ethicist for the diocese of London in Ontario Canada recently admitted to LifeSiteNews.com in an interview that St. Joseph's Catholic Hospital in London has been performing "early induction" procedures in cases of diagnosed lethal fetal anomalies for twenty years, under his ethical direction. While Fr. Michael Prieur attempted to justify "early induction" for lethal fetal anomaly as not being abortion, the procedure has been condemned as illicit by the US Bishops' Doctrinal Committee and called "direct abortion" by the National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC).

In an "early induction" the mother is induced into labor at a point so early in the pregnancy that even a healthy child would be unable to live outside the womb without specialized intensive care; under such circumstances, a severely disabled child will likely not live more than minutes.

At St. Joseph's "early induction" is used only when the diagnosed fetal disabilities are deemed so severe that the child will likely die within a few months, days or even hours of being born. The St. Joseph's policy on the matter states: "An early induction may be permitted after viability for a proportionate reason which can include grave physical, psychological or psychiatric considerations." Psychological justification for inducing labor in such cases is to spare the mother the pain of carrying to term a child that is likely to die shortly after birth anyway.



St. Joseph's Hospital in London, Ontario.

Pro-life groups and church teaching on the issue, however, consider abortions of such children through early induction to be the same as regular abortion (the unjust killing of an unborn child), but with an added discrimination against those with a handicap.

One of the most extreme cases of lethal fetal anomaly is anencephaly - a congenital anomaly characterized by failure of development of the cerebral hemispheres and overlying skull and scalp, exposing the brain stem. Most infants who have anencephaly do not survive for more than a few days after birth. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church does not permit abortion of such infants. A 1996 document on Anencephaly by the Committee on Doctrine of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops explains: "It can never be morally justified directly to cause the death of an innocent person no matter the age or condition of that person."

In addition to being the chief ethicist at the hospital, Fr. Michael Prieur is a professor of Moral and Sacramental Theology at St. Peter's Seminary, a position he's held for over thirty-five years. He is widely known as one of the nation's foremost defenders of the Winnipeg Statement, a controversial statement of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops which many have deemed a dissent from Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

Fr. Prieur told LifeSiteNews.com that he wrote the protocol on the procedure with a team of obstetricians and neonatologists. "We've been doing it for twenty years now," he said.

He noted more than once that, "This has the approval of the bishop."

The office of Bishop Ronald Fabbro of the Diocese of London was contacted numerous times over the past week for comment but Mark Adkinson, the diocesan spokesman, told LifeSiteNews.com that while the Bishop had been made aware of the situation, the Diocese had no comment at this time. Bishop Fabbro was appointed to the Diocese in 2002, indicating that the initial permission to perform the procedure was given by now-retired bishop John Michael Sherlock.

LifeSiteNews.com spoke with Bishop Sherlock about the situation. "Well, I can't remember any details now. You're on a very specific topic," he said. Asked specifically about Fr. Prieur, Bishop Sherlock said, "I know that he was responsible for ensuring that the Church's moral teaching in the matter of life was maintained at St. Joseph's hospital and I trusted his judgement, and had absolute confidence that he would be utilizing the most advanced moral theology in judging the appropriateness of certain medical procedures and I had trust in him."

Several other Bishops offices were contacted to comment on this story but all refused comment, some stating that it was the prerogative of the local Bishop to comment on the matter.

LifeSiteNews.com has obtained the policy of the Catholic hospital permitting such procedures. (See the 1997 version of the guidelines: [http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2008\\_docs/earlyinductionIC8.pdf](http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2008_docs/earlyinductionIC8.pdf); See the 2006 version at: [http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2008\\_docs/EarlyInductionEthicalG...](http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2008_docs/EarlyInductionEthicalG...))

Fr. Prieur explained the procedure, saying, "Routinely, when we get them we would meet with ten to fifteen people to make sure of the diagnosis and the prognosis. We always pray. Because this is a very difficult area - what's called a conflict area. So we always pray. And then the decision is made to have an early induction."

Fr. Prieur insisted that such procedures were not abortion. "Now it's not called abortion. We're not killing the baby. We're bringing the baby out and allowing the baby to die. That's a very important distinction," he told LifeSiteNews.com. When removed from the womb at 21 weeks gestation, however, even a healthy baby could not survive without highly specialized intensive care treatments.

Prieur explained that in order to do the early induction for infants with lethal fetal anomalies, "the babies have to be viable. It has to be done after 21 weeks just in case there's a misdiagnosis. Then we can bring that child to term in a neonatal intensive care unit." Asked if such life-saving treatments are afforded to a child with the disorder, he replied, "No, no there's nothing you can do. Some of these conditions you know, we've had babies that are terribly deformed. Oh my goodness, I mean you pray that the baby will die. They come out terribly deformed. Nature's full of surprises. And remember we're not bound to the impossible. We don't have to preserve life at all costs. We let people die. That's not foreign to Catholic teaching. Allowing death is a normal thing."

Prieur made a distinction between killing the baby via early induction of labour versus killing the baby by dismemberment in the womb. "And so we do not dismember the baby when we bring the baby out. Some hospitals would use dilatation and evacuation which means they would bring the child out in pieces. We will not allow that," he said.

However, the US Bishops document Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services defines abortion as including such "early induction" procedures. "Abortion (that is, the directly intended termination of pregnancy before viability or the directly intended destruction of a viable fetus) is never permitted," says directive 45 of the document. (<http://www.usccb.org/bishops/directives.shtml> )

In addition, the National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC), which has four Cardinals and several Bishops as part of its board, has called early induction of babies with anencephaly "direct abortion." (<http://www.ncbcenter.org/04-03-11-EarlyInduction.asp> )

The US Bishops' Doctrinal Committee document concerning anencephaly cited above spells it out clearly: "It is clear that before 'viability' it is never permitted to terminate the gestation of an anencephalic child as the means of avoiding psychological or physical risks to the mother. Nor is such termination permitted after 'viability' if early delivery endangers the child's life due to complications of prematurity."

According to Fr. Prieur's interpretation, however, the procedure is totally in synch with Catholic doctrine, and even pro-life. He describes an early induction scenario in this way: "[The babies with lethal fetal anomaly] are dying and basically here's what happens, and I've been doing, we've been doing these for, like I said, for almost twenty years. People who are pro-life to their fingertips want the baby, get the diagnosis, find out that the baby is dying, will say, 'Is there any way we can hold that child while the child dies?' And I've often felt in my heart of hearts that's a signal from God, that what we're doing is the right thing. And there's a factor, and this is a technical term in theology - the instinct of the faith - and it's like, you know, in your heart of hearts you say, you know that makes sense. This is not your normal abortion, where we want to get rid of the baby. Not at all. See what I mean. And here's where we've got Catholic obstetricians here in town that say, 'Yes, this is the right thing to do.'"

Dr. Paul Byrne, a neonatologist and former President of the Catholic Medical Association, disagrees. Speaking on early induction for lethal fetal anomaly he said: "Every time I have been contacted over the many years that I have practiced neonatology, I instruct and encourage the mother to keep the baby in the uterus. It does not help the baby or the mother to deliver early."

Byrne told LifeSiteNews.com, "Parents usually do what they are led to do. Parents ordinarily are not equipped to deal with all this. Parents and clergy need guidance from a pro-life physician. Induction is the frequently given direction and answer to many, if not most situations these days. It brings an end to the immediate problem, but parents and clergy eventually realize that they did not have to impose or encourage death."

Dr. Byrne suggests that babies in utero with lethal fetal anomaly are "not dying, but living in the mother's womb." He adds that "they will die quicker if brought outside the uterus." Dr. Byrne concluded: "Killing is killing even when the baby has an abnormality and short gestation. We must not hasten or impose death. Sometimes when the baby gets out after natural labor, they live better than predicted."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, (2323): "Because it should be treated as a person from conception, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed like every other human being."

The bottom line on the matter from the NCBC is "early induction of an anencephalic child when there is no serious pathology of the mother which is being directly treated is not morally licit, emotional distress notwithstanding. Early induction of labor before term (37 weeks) to relieve emotional distress hastens the death of the child as a means of achieving this presumed good effect and unjustifiably deprives the child of the good of gestation." (<http://www.usccb.org/dpp/anencephaly.htm> )

The witness of parents who have gone through the birth of children with lethal fetal anomalies is powerful. LifeSiteNews.com spoke with one such mother, Barbara Farlow, who had this to say: "My daughter Annie was born with Trisomy 13 and she lived for 80 days. She smiled for the first time 3 days before she died. We would not have had that time if we had chosen early induction. I have come to know many families who had a baby who lived only a short period of time and every minute was unforgettable to them. Nobody has regrets. Families need a lot of support to carry to term and love their children until their natural death. The offer of early induction denies families this precious time and that is a tragedy." Mrs. Farlow has dedicated a website to the life of her child: <http://www.anniefarlow.com/>

Further, Farlow suggested that those interested in learning more about babies with lethal fetal anomalies may benefit from the videos of babies born with Trisomy 13 posted online (See below for links).

Alex Schadenberg, the executive director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, told LifeSiteNews.com that once the child is delivered prematurely, the omission to care for these children may be euthanasia. According to the Catholic Church, "Euthanasia is an action or omission of an action which of itself and by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering ...The error of judgement into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded," he said, quoting the Catechism, Section 2277. The Catechism also states: "Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying person. It is morally unacceptable."

Jim Hughes, National President of Campaign Life Coalition commented, saying, "All of this sounds pretty appalling to me. It sounds to me like this is nothing more than abortion dressed up in more attractive clothing." Hughes concluded: "Can some Catholic authority please put an end to the abortions going on at the Catholic hospital in London. Is this the only Catholic hospital that's doing this or is this widespread?"

To express concerns:

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Videos of Babies born with Lethal Fetal Anomalies:

Trisomy 13 lived 35 minutes  
[http://www.kansascity.com/static/media/Audio\\_Photo\\_Gallery/](http://www.kansascity.com/static/media/Audio_Photo_Gallery/)

Trisomy 18 lived 99 days. (Shown on Oprah a few weeks ago)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th6Njr-qkq0>

Trisomy 18 lived 4.5 years  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6kf6JJnhFg>

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