

*Christian ethics:*

## Facing the Promise & Challenge of Stem Cell Research

*by Dick Crossman (Mount Zion member Rev. Dr. Richard Crossman, is a former president of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and Professor of Ethics who continues to study and write on topics relating to Christian ethics.)*

It's no wonder some people have labeled this 21<sup>st</sup> century "the biotech century." Christians, and all of creation, find themselves faced with very real and profoundly life-changing questions relating to stem cell research and use. It's regular reading in everything from scientific journals to mass circulation magazines and newspapers. It's real because it's happening.

The fuss was accelerated near the end of the last century - in November of 1998 - when scientists isolated something called *stem cells* from human embryos and aborted fetuses. The excitement was about the enormous potential this could mean for the healing work of medicine. It could mean *any disease* involving the death of cells (e.g. Alzheimers, Parkinsons, hepatitis, spinal cord injury treatment, multiple sclerosis, diseases of the blood and bone, cancer, HIV/AIDS, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and more) *could* be a candidate for stem cell therapy.

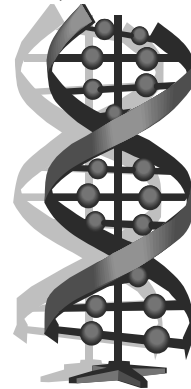
The basic idea would be to replace a patient's dead or malfunctioning cells with new cells generated by transplanted stem cells. As one can imagine, the benefits might be enormous. That's why stem cells are often called the "Holy Grail" of medicine.

### Holy Grail or Horror?

There is no doubt that the new opportunities and challenges lifted up by stem cell research will dramatically alter the lives of people, now and in future generations. Such alteration can hold much promised good. It can also produce destructive dynamics which may prove very difficult and costly to control. Along with all

people of good will, the task of faithful Christians is to help chart a course that will promote the good and resist the destructive. But that is not going to be easy.

We live in a world where strong forces can ethically blind us: the profit motive, the itch to be "first", the urge to assume that the "end" result of a very desirable good always justifies whatever "means" we might take to achieve it, and the urge to do something simply because the power and/or curiosity are within our grasp to do so.



### Complicated issue

Stem cell research is about discovering how the cells of a human organism (human being) can be used to fight disease, ease suffering and prolong living. But that's the simplest statement that can be made about it. The complications and debates begin as soon as you talk about the type and source of different stem cells.

Some stem cells are called *multipotent*. They are found throughout our adult bodies and can only become a limited range of renewed cell types. For example, blood stem cells normally only become blood stem cells on an ongoing basis: red blood cells, white blood cells or platelets.

Since such cells come from your own body, they are not "foreign" and are not usually subject to rejection problems requiring anti-rejection drugs. For some, no ethical problem is seen in using

these “adult-derived” stem cells for medical or research purposes.

Other stem cells, called *embryonic*, raise tremendous ethical questions. These cells can be easily obtained from aborted human embryos or from laboratory-fertilized human eggs (For those who believe that human life begins at conception, the destruction of such eggs is seen as destroying a human life.). The wonder of embryonic cells is that they are *pluripotent* –they can generate all the many different cells needed for human development – thus raising the spectre of cloning.

### **Ethical debate wide – and heated**

For some Christians, the very idea of using *any* type of stem cell for any purpose amounts to “playing God”. They believe the Creator who has “infinite” wisdom has not delegated to us as “finite sinful creatures” the authority to tamper with genetic material through harvesting and/or manipulating stem cells through the killing of unborn human embryos. To do so they believe is: idolatry, and open to unforeseen dangers which lurk beyond any perceived benefits we as finite creatures might ascertain.

Others may see the use of adult stem cells as inoffensive to their faith and God – but draw the line at using laboratory eggs (embryonic cells) for medical or research purposes. Still others may find all types of research acceptable.

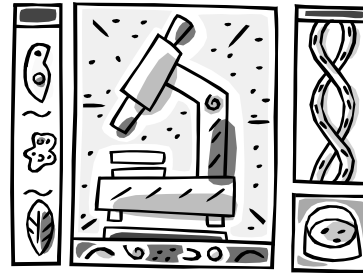
Facing the pressure of the universal dynamic of “change” from science, some may say the best ethical approach is to do a “cost/benefit” (utilitarian) analysis regarding stem cell work. That is, to do that which creates, in their view, the most overall perceived human benefits - balanced against other environmentally perceived costs.

This position is usually proposed on the Christian grounds that we are called to be co-creators with God, and therefore whatever “good ends” we decide are superior will, by definition, in the long run, justify any sacrifices and “means” it takes to achieve them.

### **No easy answers**

In the face of the above concerns and possibilities - and as a result of personal research and study – I

have developed some guidelines that I use in wrestling with stem cell research questions. I share a few of them with you in the hope that they are of some assistance as each of us makes our individual decisions about stem cell work. Further, I share them as a part of an ongoing dialogue that I believe is essential among Christians as scientific discovery continues.



### **Four guidelines for Christian analysis and decision-making concerning stem cell research and application:**

**1. Keep utility and Christian vision in creative balance.** A utilitarian (cost-benefit) assessment can be inviting. But it can also lead to thinking that the “end” we seek as a desirable “good” always justifies any “means” to achieve it. We know this is not necessarily true.

For example, health care spending should not rush after some stunning new costly stem cell breakthrough that will mostly benefit the few, the rich or the powerful, if paying for such innovation will leave unmet the needs of the large number of poor and disadvantaged in the world. Christians are called to have a special concern for the poor, the marginalized, and those less able to make their voices publicly heard.

**2. Be willing to wait.** The “handiest” of means to a desired end is not always the one that promotes the future well being of all. Sometimes we must decline to exercise our “power over” so as to resist the quick and easy, but ethically slippery, path to a desirable goal. An example might be the temptation to use embryonic stem cells obtained and/or derived from the termination of human embryos, rather than the more difficult, time consuming, but less ethically problematic use of “adult” stem cells. We need to

make room for “ethical time”, which is often slower than “technological time” or “market time”.

**3. Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.** Be as sensitive to the suffering our actions create - as we are to the benefits we hope to trigger. We need always to ask who is paying the price for the benefits we seek, how high is the price they pay, and who if anyone is speaking for them. We should be concerned if, in the press to create stem cells for some people’s benefit, we will also be creating a huge demand for human eggs that would end up exploiting women and their future health. The commodification of life should be resisted, because commodities are only valued for the price they can bring or the uses to which they can be put. But life itself—including human activity—carries with it an inherent dignity which is God given and needs always to be honoured.

**4. Be engaged.** We need to be continually informed about stem cell work\* and the choices that will confront us now and in the future. We also need to be in an ongoing community of dialogue about these matters. This will include following the Web, cutting out articles, reading books, attending presentations and discussions, and helping the church recover an ethical voice and raise it in public participation regarding stem cell activity.

It is my sincere hope and prayer that each of us, as Christians, can be “engaged” with each other in working through these vital considerations.

*\*to keep current on developments and discussions:* take a look at the June 2009 issue of *Popular Science* magazine, particularly the article called “The Essential Guide to Stem Cells”.

Dr. Crossman also recommends these websites: [stemcells.nih.gov/info/basics](http://stemcells.nih.gov/info/basics); [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/stem\\_cell\\_research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/stem_cell_research); and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/stem\\_cell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/stem_cell)

## Faith & Science....are they Mutually Exclusive?

By Matt Ramer

A number of years ago I was asked to lead an adult forum at Mount Zion on the topic of science and religion and how as a scientist and a person of faith I am able to reconcile the two. More recently in the media inflammatory journalism and splashy headlines have exacerbated the ‘conflict’ between science and religion. In my own Department of Biology this debate continues to surface. The professor of evolution has led workshops on the ‘fallacy of intelligent design’ citing the classic arguments of lack of physical proof for God, evolutionary biology being scientifically demonstrated, while religion requires faith which is un-provable and un-testable and is therefore incompatible with science. There are members of my own lab who claim to be 'born again atheists' which they describe as being someone who has rejected faith/religion in favor of science arguing that 'truth' can only be found through the scientific process of hypothesis testing and observation. People on this side of the fence would say that a true scientist cannot also be a person of faith/religion, and in fact faith and adherence to a religious belief system will actually cause you to be a poorer scientist because you will be influenced by your beliefs, negatively affecting your scientific results. On the other side of the coin we find people who make the opposite argument - that if you are a person of faith/religion you cannot accept science and its discoveries since first of all it seems to be in contradiction to Scripture (and we always seem to come back to the creation/evolution debate). Second many argue that science leads us into explaining things that we are not meant to know; things that only God is meant to understand. Finally they argue that 'truth' is found through Scripture and faith. And so people on this side of the fence would argue that a person of faith must necessarily reject science as incompatible with faith/religion.

People on each side of this fence seem to view the world as black or white, faith or science; you need to choose because they are mutually exclusive ideas. It seems to me however that we don't live in a black and white world - we live in a world of gray. While in some cases there are extremes, we spend

*Continued on page 7*

# Revisiting the joy of... Stewardship!

Gerry Roeder, *Stewardship Chair*

Mount Zion's Mission Statement declares:

*"We are a welcoming, caring community, called by Christ and enabled by the Spirit to share God's love by living our faith."*

It's a bold statement that we work to live out because it reminds us that we all have the opportunity and responsibility to serve God by serving others.

We also understand:

"...God loves a cheerful giver." *2 Corinthians 9:7*

Unfortunately, too often when we hear those words we may "tune out", because our minds turn almost automatically to giving financially. Although balancing the church budget is certainly important, stewardship is and encompasses so much more.

We also give with our time and talents. The Holy Spirit gives us talents – spiritual gifts – with which to serve one another. Every living person has a gift or capacity of value to others. A strong community is a place that recognizes those gifts, enables them to be given and appreciates their giving! Each of us can ask God if the giving of our time and talents is proportional to the spiritual gifts we have been given.

Communities are built by mobilizing the capacities, skills and gifts of the individuals who make up a community. We could focus on our

needs and deficiencies - but it is ultimately more meaningful and productive to focus on our assets and capacities. It is with this in mind that our Mount Zion community is actively revisiting our understanding and appreciation of concepts of stewardship.

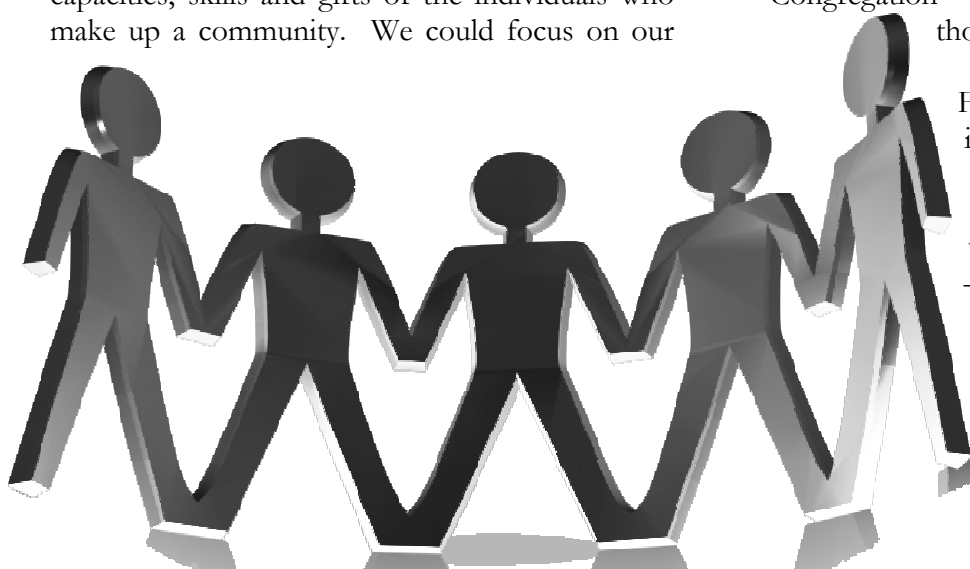
We want to enhance and promote *congregational stewardship* by intentionally identifying capacities, skills and gifts, and making the right connections so these varied treasures can be utilized wisely and effectively in living out our mission.

Stewardship – in its broadest sense – has always been identified as a priority for the ministry of this congregation. And now, to help us stay current in our stewardship thinking, communication and education efforts, terms of reference have been developed by a Task Force for an ongoing stewardship program.

Utilizing some excellent new resources from our Eastern Synod, a congregational Stewardship Committee will begin work this fall. Its mission is to support and encourage members of our Church in their efforts to use the gifts God has given us to express our faith by caring for others around us.

Perhaps one of *your* gifts could be contributing to the efforts of this committee as it works to identify the stewardship needs of the Congregation – and the actions required to meet those needs.

For more information on this vital initiative, please speak to Gerry Roeder or Pastor Tanya. As suggested in 2 Corinthians, we welcome the interest – and talents - of "cheerful givers"!



## Mount Zion Women's Retreat

I have just returned from another spiritually uplifting weekend at Camp Edgewood. It's hard to believe that this was Mt. Zion's 24<sup>th</sup> year to meet in a "Retreat" setting, and once again it was a "Huge Success"! There were 16 of us, with women attending from nine congregations. Those attending from Mount. Zion were: **Anne Woolner, Shirley McCall, Johanna Mildebrath, Pam Buchan** and **Carol Ziegler**.

Pastor Bonnie Schelter-Brown, with her wise leadership and humour led us in the theme "Wisdom on the Way". She helped us discover the wisdom we have in ourselves and the wisdom in Scripture, in particular Proverbs 8. She also introduced us to Sophia, the Greek word for Wisdom.

Anne Woolner led us in morning exercises, Pam Buchan along with Sandy Dotzert of Gads Hill in organized food, and Wilma-Marie Bindernagel of St. Mark's helped with worship. Deborah Pryce helped us create a colourful garden ornament which will be treasured for years to come. A big thank you to all of these people who made our Retreat so memorable.

Pastor Bonnie also challenged us to return to our congregations and make known the plight of our church camp. Camp Edgewood is a very special place and it needs our help to continue to be there for us and our children. The storm on Saturday afternoon left us without power for over an hour. A huge tree branch came down beside Cedar Lodge and almost took out one of the windows. There were other fallen trees which our Camp Director, Fred Ludolph had to deal with along with some shingles which had come off one of the roofs.

Camp Edgewood needs not only our financial assistance, but also men and women power to assist in the up-keep of the many buildings on our property. Let's make Camp Edgewood one of our church's ministries we plan to support in the coming year.

*Submitted by Carol Ziegler*

## Around Mount Zion

We delight in the accolades given by the community to **Rose Frim, Warren Stauch** and **Karen Gastmeier**. Their service provides us all with a beacon about serving. Pages from the newspapers noting these accomplishments are on our bulletin board.

In June we celebrate the over eighty birthdays of **Lloyd Cassidy, Erna Cassidy, Doris Groce, Gertrude Leupold, Gladys Roeder, Marion Schmidt** and **Doris Stockman**. Many happy returns to you and anyone else we may have missed. We wonder how come so many birthdays in June? Was it the warm summer breezes of September or the first cold weather?

## We Care Bags, Continued....

Mount Zion has participated in GHDA's "We Care" bag project for the past 3 years. The Spring 2009 "Partnership" publication by Canadian Lutheran World Relief provided an update on the 2008 We Care project. Following is the text from that article.

*"A shipping container of We Care kits and quilts arrived in Zambia in late January, having been shipped from CLWR at the end of last November. In this latest crate are the usual quilts and blankets, clothing and kits for men and women and children. This shipment also included something extra special: over 1,600 toys that came bundled along with the popular We Care Christmas Kit were included.. Any toys received after the shipment departed are being packaged in future shipments, and are always a wonderful gift when received overseas.*

*The vital support of donors and volunteers throughout 2008 allowed CLWR to send four major shipments with a combined weight of 88,000 pounds and a value of over \$406,000!" says Irma McKenzie, CLWR'S director responsible for donated commodities. In addition to Zambia, destinations included Mozambique, Mauritania and August Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem*

*CLWR thanks everyone who continues to support this long-standing component of our work and looks forward to receiving you We Care kits and quilts in 2009."*

*Again, many thanks to everyone who participated in the most worthwhile project! Every "bit" makes a difference in someone's life!*

## Supporting our Ministries

AS AT: Apr 30, 2009

<u>CURRENT</u>	2009	2008
Income	83,665	92,701
Expense	87,666	83,080
Balance	-4,001	9,621
<u>BENEVOLENCE</u>		
Synod	10,605	10,550
Global Hunger	1,955	1,861
Open Sesame	4,015	3,015
Other	10,836	6,971
<u>CAPITAL</u>		
Income	5,188	5,409
Expense	14,449	0
Mortgage Income	5,436	5,629
Mortgage Interest	207	480

## What happened to Robb?

Robb Wilson has asked that we keep him in our prayers as he begins a new chapter in his life working and being a member of the community at Black Sheep Farm near Chesley, ON. Members of the community strive to grow flavourable food in an ecologically sustainable manner. They also host retreats and special events.

Robb is looking forward to hearing from you  
He can be reached at  
115415 Grey Rd. 3 RR 4 Chesley ON.  
NOG 1L0 519-363-2199 or  
wilson\_robb@hotmail.com

## Save those Grocery Tapes

Mount Zion Church has been accepted into the new Save-A-Tape program. Retail value is the total of the cash register tape. Redemption value is the amount of cheque given to Mount. Zion. For example: 9 bundles of \$1000 worth of tapes equals \$20 in cash. This will help the Mt. Zion Church community and children's programs.

## Together in Worship

Sunday, June 7	<b>HOLY TRINITY</b> <i>Rev. Tanya L. Ramer, Presiding</i> <b>Holy Communion</b> 10:00 am
Sunday, June 14	<b>PENTECOST 2</b> <i>Rev. Tanya L. Ramer, Presiding</i> <b>Holy Communion</b> 10:00 am
Sunday, June 21	<b>PENTECOST 3</b> <i>Rev. Tanya L. Ramer, Presiding</i> <i>Rev. J. Krister Ulmanis, Preaching</i> <b>Holy Communion</b> 10:00 am
Sunday, June 28	<b>PENTECOST 4</b> <i>Rev. Tanya L. Ramer, Presiding</i> <i>Rev. Seminarian Joanna Miller, Preaching</i> <b>Holy Communion</b> 10:00 am

## Council Briefs

Because the installation service of Pastor Krister will occur on the afternoon of Sept 20, Council approved a motion from Worship & Music to have a single service on that morning. We will return to our two-service schedule on September 27.

Last month council reelected Chris Kosumovic as President of council, Karen Gastmeier as Vice President. Jeremy Van Hemmen was elected Secretary.

Council approved a motion from Worship and Music to commission a cantata to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the installation of our organ. The performance is tentatively scheduled for Transfiguration Sunday 2010.

Council commissioned an ad hoc committee to develop a Pandemic Plan that addresses concerns about Communion during a flu outbreak.

## *Faith and Science...from page 3*

most of our time somewhere in the middle. As a scientist I do not find that one is necessarily unduly negatively by faith - in fact in the world of science it is difficult for this to occur; there are many checks and balances to ensure that 'good science' and proper protocols and controls are being followed, maintaining the integrity of the scientific discoveries. I would also argue that the purpose of science is not to try and 'prove God' but to simply explore and describe the world around us and understand how it works. And we should not think of scientific discovery as threatening God's divinity or power or diminishing God's importance or influence; in fact I find that the more we discover, the more questions there are, and the more there is to explore. Rather than diminishing God I am more and more convinced that the complexity and diversity of creation must have required something more than chance and random DNA mutations leading to better adaptations to environmental conditions - what I like to call the 'God Factor'.

Similarly, as a person of faith I cannot reject outright my faith traditions and the writings of Scripture. Take the creation story for example. Those on the religious side of the fence might take this story as literal history - the earth was created in seven days, humans appeared or were placed on earth just as we look today, and there were evil talking snakes slithering around. But then what do we do with all of the scientific evidence indicating the ancientness of the world and the slow development of creation into what we see today? And this is where we run into the problem that many of our intrafaith disagreements boil down to - Biblical interpretation. What if the creation story is just that - a story? Perhaps it is a way of describing the amazingness of creation and describing who the driving force is. Was the earth created in seven days? Maybe a 'God day' is 100 million of earth years. Maybe the real value and 'truth' of the creation story is that it reveals the 'who,' the creator; science can tell us the 'how'.

Science does not diminish or disprove or explain faith/religion. Both science and faith play an

integral role in our exploration and relationship with God and our world. They compliment each other - science reveals to us the awesomeness of our creator God and faith gives meaning to our discoveries of the workings of creation. Science and faith are not in conflict but they both exist in gray.

## Trinity Village

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\$5 per person, includes a nutritious light lunch.

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## The Mountaineer

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