Health center offers life-saving cord-blood donation program in diocese

Thousands of babies born at Saint Vincent Health Center in Erie will have the opportunity to become a part of a life-saving mission on the day they are born. That’s because Saint Vincent is the first and only hospital in the region to join a growing number of Catholic hospitals across the country adopting a cord blood donation program.

The program is made possible because Saint Vincent entered into an agreement with The Institute for Transfusion Medicine (ITxM) in Pittsburgh, a not-for-profit public cord blood bank, which accepts donations of cord blood after the birth of healthy babies. ITxM provides transportation, testing, cryopreservation, storage, cataloging and quality control of the donations. The bank works with the National Marrow Donor Program to provide lifesaving cord blood to thousands of patients who desperately need it.

Families are not obligated to make the donation, and can still opt to make paid arrangements with a private organization to store the cord blood for the family’s personal use if needed in the future.

“Cord blood donation is probably one of the world’s most meaningful charitable donations, and Saint Vincent is proud to be a leader in the region in making this option available to our patients,” said C. Angela Bontempo, president and CEO of Saint Vincent Health System. More than 2,400 children are born at St. Vincent each year.

According to Bishop Trautman, cord blood donation is a morally accepted procedure because it does not involve the use of embryonic stem cells, but rather blood taken after the birth of a healthy baby. Advancements in the field of stem cell treatments derived from umbilical cord blood hold the promise of life-saving cures. Cord blood stem cells are used in the treatment of more than 70 life-threatening diseases including cancer, genetic diseases, immune deficiencies and blood disorders.

FAITH’s first Teen of the Year receives highest honor at college graduation

Meghan Larsen, a religious studies major at Saint Mary’s College in Indiana and a member of St. Eulalia Parish in Coudersport, has been honored with two major awards from the college. In April she received the Sister M. Olivette Whalen Award for General Service from the Office for Civic and Social Engagement. The award is one of seven that recognize students who give their time and talent to serve the greater South Bend community.

At graduation on May 16, she received the Lumen Christi Award, given to someone who has excelled in leadership and loyalty to the college and whose presence has had a profound effect on the college community. It is the highest honor conferred by the college upon a student.

Whether participating in an activity through Campus Ministry, volunteering at the Center for the Homeless in South Bend or studying for her classes, Larsen leads a life committed to the spirit that is Saint Mary’s, according to administrators. Debi Haug, campus minister, said Larsen’s service “springs directly from her personal experience of Christ and she draws people to herself, not for her sake, but for his.”

Larsen, a religious studies and psychology double major, has been active with Campus Ministry participating in religious services, retreats, weekly small faith group sessions and the Friends with Sisters program, which connects the Sisters of the Holy Cross living on campus with students. Larsen helped organize a poetry jam at the Center for the Homeless, a weekly program that continues today and has published a booklet of poetry written by the guests.

She is the daughter of Dr. Richard and Mrs. Mary Larsen. “Coudersport is on the map once again!” says Sister Phyllis Schleicher, OSB, of Catholic Rural Ministry.