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Proposal 2 and social justice

By CHARLES G. ADAMS

This is a time of hope. Even as we face catastrophic financial shortfalls in our city, our country and around the world, we believe that change is at hand. With faith and optimism, we choose to believe in the hope and promise of new leadership. And on Nov. 4, we will choose the new leader who will chart our nation's course away from the rocky shore.

There is another, even more basic hope that we can choose on Election Day — the hope of cures for many of the diseases that blight our community and bring heartbreak, pain and suffering to far too many of us.

We have the real potential to defeat these diseases through science. And we can accelerate that process by voting yes for Proposal 2, yes for the life-giving hope of embryonic stem cell research.

Most of today's best medical scientists believe that embryonic stem cells are the beacon of light in medical research. They allow scientists to look at life at its most elemental stage, to study the dark secrets of disease and chronic ailments.

A fundamental principle of medical research is that new treatments must be developed for a diverse patient population, a population that mirrors the diversity of our society. New treatments that are developed for only one racial group run the risk of not working for other groups.

We are all created equal; but, in medical science, heredity is to some extent destiny. Among Africans and African Americans, our inherited genes can trigger sickle cell anemia, or diabetes and some forms of cancer, in far greater frequency than almost all other people of the world.

But most of the federally approved embryonic stem cells that are available for research today came originally from one human fertility clinic in Israel. This means that embryonic stem cell research in federally funded laboratories is almost entirely limited to the study of cells that do not come close to reflecting the diversity of our society.

Under current Michigan law, scientists in our state would be sent to jail for deriving new, including more diverse, embryonic stem cells for study.

This is a social justice issue.

African Americans must be represented in embryonic stem cell research, or research into the illnesses that disable us and shorten our lives is less likely to yield breakthroughs that will benefit us.

We can be represented with Proposal 2, which will allow couples to donate for research excess embryonic stem cells from in vitro fertilization procedures—embryos that would otherwise be thrown

away.

Many parents rely on fertility clinics to help them have children. In order to do this, the parents work with the clinic doctors to create microscopically small embryos in dishes in the clinic. Not all of them develop normally, and not all can be used to create a pregnancy; so, many of them are discarded. They go into the trash.

We are morally compelled to stop this tragic waste. Proposal 2 will give Michigan parents the right to donate their extra embryos for embryonic stem cell research. Throughout the rest of the country, almost all parents already have this right.

Currently, it is estimated that more than 400,000 embryos are frozen down in fertility clinics, most of which ultimately will be discarded. All of these, including the ones that could never be used for fertility treatment, would be valuable to generate embryonic stem cell lines that might one day help people in our community. But only if Proposal 2 passes.

This is one issue on which both Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. John McCain agree: the need to broaden and diversify embryonic stem cell research. Cures must and can be found.

Your vote is critical. On Nov. 4, I encourage you to stay in the polling booth for another minute after you vote for president. Find Proposal 2 on your ballot, and vote yes. Vote for hope. Vote for life.

CHARLES G. ADAMS *is senior pastor at Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit.*