

The Story behind the Story of Baby Joseph

By DAVE ANDRUSKO

We've written a number of stories online about "Baby Joseph" Maraachli, the gravely ill 15-month-old baby whose parents fought an ultimately successful battle to have a tracheotomy for Joseph so that he could go home and spend whatever time he has left with his parents and brother, Ali. (For background, please check out our daily blog, www.nationalrighttolifenews.org.)

chief of pediatrics at Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center—provided a great many important details that were not well known, if at all, adding important context.

Blythe Bernhard reported that a prominent physician had been contacted by Baby Joseph's advocates who in turn contacted Wilmott and "presented the case to Wilmott from a medical

demonstrated other spontaneous movements while at Cardinal Glennon, the doctor said. The child seemed to respond to touch and liked having his arm stroked."

Bernhard's story is rich in background material. The original plan was to connect Joseph to a portable ventilator so he could leave the hospital—but within three weeks of having the surgery to open his airway, Joseph was weaned from a ventilator and went home to Windsor, Ontario!

As a result of having a breathing tube inserted in his throat instead of through his nose, it not only allowed for more stability, "It also allowed the Maraachli family to

its statement it also "referred to Cardinal Glennon's Catholic affiliation."

Wilmott told Bernhard, "Our decision would have been the same if we had a Catholic affiliation or not."

Perhaps the most encouraging news for Joseph and his family came from a story that appeared in the *Windsor Star*, in which the family celebrated Joseph being home for Easter.

Reporter Jeff Bolichowski ended his story with a tender portrait of the family.

"As Joseph roused from his rest Sunday, his older brother Ali was quick to act," he wrote. "The beaming six-year-old clambered up into his younger



Joseph and his six-year-old brother, Ali, taken on April 10, 2011.

Photo Credit: Brother Paul O'Donnell, FBP

The controversy over Joseph, who was born in Canada, is rich in complexity. These are the basics. Doctors at London Health Sciences Centre in Ontario diagnosed Joseph to be in "persistent vegetative state" (PVS). They adamantly refused to perform the tracheotomy—arguing that the surgery was futile and invasive—and won court permission to remove Joseph from life support.

The parents fought back with determination and skill. With the help of lawyers and Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life, a transfer was arranged to Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center and Joseph was flown to the hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 13. This much was common knowledge.

But a story that subsequently appeared in *St. Louis Post Dispatch*—built around an interview with Dr. Bob Wilmott,

perspective." Wilmott had personal experience (his adult daughter had needed a tracheotomy as a child).

"I'm sure it's affected me some," Wilmott told Bernhard. "You have to assume parents know best ... and support them in decisions they make."

Wilmott was too kind to publicly second-guess the diagnosis of London Health Sciences Centre. While Wilmott agreed the baby's condition is fatal and progressive, he said Joseph has a "disorder of consciousness."

This is not nit-picking. A PVS diagnosis is routinely taken as providing carte blanche to do nothing, including removing life support and ending feeding the patient.

"We've seen some responses I think other doctors didn't witness," Wilmott told Bernhard. Bernhard added, "Joseph would sometimes open his eyes and



"Baby Joseph" Maraachli, with his parents, Sana and Moe. This was taken on April 12, 2011 while Joseph was at the Cardinal Glennon Hospital in St. Louis.

Photo Credit: Brother Paul O'Donnell, FBP

hug Joseph more easily, and see his face without any tubes or tape," Bernhard wrote. "He started to look much more like a baby again," Wilmott said."

More than a few people responded to our online stories by asking why Baby Joseph looked bloated in pictures. That's because the baby's caloric needs are much lower—and he'd been given too much formula through a feeding tube. "On a limited diet, the child should now drop to a more normal weight," Wilmott said.

London Health Sciences Centre vigorously objected to the transfer. In

brother's crib, a storybook in hand, ready to read to him—and to give him a little kiss.

"Ali has become a part of Joseph's care, too. Maraachli said he's taught him to be something of a nurse. An actual nurse does watch Joseph at night.

"He's responsive to his family, Maraachli said. He said Joseph knows when he's being held by his father.

"Now, he said, things are returning to normal for the Maraachli family. He said even after the tracheotomy, Joseph's daily routine isn't that different from a normal baby's."