



Statement from Bishop Pates on Vaccine Mandates

CROOKSTON, MINNESOTA, August 23, 2021 — I encourage anyone eligible for COVID-19 vaccines to get vaccinated. The pandemic's continuation, which has caused incredible loss of life as well as other sufferings and hardships, makes vaccination even more urgent.

Regarding vaccination, Pope Francis tells us, "Being vaccinated with vaccines authorized by the competent authorities is an act of love. And contributing to ensure the majority of people are vaccinated is an act of love — love for oneself, love for one's family and friends, love for all people." It is at the heart of whom we are as Christians, love of God and love of neighbor.

I acknowledge that because of remote connections to abortions that occurred decades ago, there are individuals who may have conscientious objection to the way some available vaccines were tested and/or produced. This fact contributes to the reluctance of some to receive the vaccine.

However, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Catholic Bioethics Center, and the Catholic Medical Association have reviewed the matter and assure us that because of the remoteness to abortion and the gravity of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is morally acceptable for Catholics to receive the vaccine, regardless of objections. As indicated above, in the interest of the common good it is highly encouraged.

At this present time, I do offer a reminder that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines" states:

Practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary. In any case, from the ethical point of view, the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one's own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good. In the absence of other means to stop or even prevent the epidemic, the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed. Those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses, must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent.

I acknowledge that some employers, colleges, and universities are considering or enforcing vaccine mandates. Since vaccination is a decision of an individual's conscience and not a grant of the Church, there is no need for Church attestation regarding individual choice, such as a priest's signature on a document. What is called for at this time, as COVID-19 has unfortunately raised its ugly head and is spreading, is a determination to do all that we can, including vaccination, to stop the spread. With urgency, I stress that freedom is a cherished gift of God, yet we must use it carefully and in service of others.

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