



## THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

*Renew Faith • Build Communion • Inspire Hope*

### OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

August 13, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In recent days, it has become clear that, in spite of our hopes that the pandemic was coming to an end, the variant forms of the Coronavirus require us to remain vigilant in continuing to take the necessary precautions to protect ourselves and one another from their ill effects. In the midst of this, a question has been raised as a result of certain institutions and employers requiring vaccination for COVID-19, but allowing for a “religious exemption” in certain circumstances, for those who choose not to receive it. Some members of the Faithful have inquired about obtaining a letter from their parish priest that would somehow serve in granting this exemption when needed. Since this has given rise to confusion it is important to make appropriate clarifications.

Last December, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a “Note on the Morality of Using Some Anti-COVID-19 Vaccines” (December 21, 2020), which effectively articulates the position of the Catholic Church in the midst of the current confusion (please see **attached**). While the document makes clear that the reception of certain vaccines (not all) are morally acceptable, due to the gravity of the threat posed by COVID-19 and the absence of alternative vaccines, at the same time every individual has the right in conscience to make that determination. In other words, “practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary” (cf. n. 5). If a person chooses in conscience not to receive a vaccine, it is incumbent upon him or her to take the necessary precautions to protect others by observing whatever protocols are deemed necessary by health officials to do what can be done to prevent the spread of the virus, especially to those who are most vulnerable.

In light of this, encouragement and support have been given to those who have chosen to receive the vaccine, which is certainly a morally acceptable option. As always, individual medical decisions need to be made in consultation with one’s physician, who has the training and expertise to assess what is best for each person. It is important to seek out doctors and medical staff who have a proper understanding of the human person and respect the Catholic Faith and moral teaching that are a part of the life of those for whose health they care. When dealing with one’s own personal situation, it is also of utmost importance that this be done with a deep awareness and concern for the common good, realizing that the state of one’s health is necessarily related to the health of others.

Put simply, as Catholics, a decision in conscience to either receive one of the morally acceptable vaccines for COVID-19 or a decision not to receive a vaccine (and observe the proper preventative protocols) are both legitimate responses according to Catholic moral teaching. While I have directed that none of our clergy, parishes or institutions should provide a letter/statement to any individual granting “religious exemption”, it is my hope that this letter will help to clarify the rights that all the Faithful have in conscience with regard to the current pandemic.

Please continue to pray with me that improved and morally sound solutions will be sought and discovered, and that our Loving God will bring this pandemic to an end. Asking that the Holy Spirit will bring healing and strength to all, especially to the sick and vulnerable among us, and asking the intercession of our dear Blessed Mother as we celebrate her Glorious Assumption, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ.

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley  
Bishop of Kalamazoo