



Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix
Pastoral Center - 8105 North 16th Street - Phoenix, AZ 85020
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August 27, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We continue to experience the impact of the COVID-19 virus in many ways in our local community. As the number of cases and deaths are increasing with the most recent variant, we must rely on our faith in Jesus and the guidance of the Church to help us navigate these challenging times that have brought pain, confusion, and division. Let us remember always that it is Christ who heals and unites. We rely on His merciful and infinite love.

I want to once again express my gratitude to God for our first responders, medical professionals and public servants who work selflessly during these pandemic times for the common good. May they continue to be protected from the COVID-19 virus, be granted strength in their important work, and used as instruments of healing to those who are most in need. These have proven to be very trying times for those in these noble professions.

In December of 2020 after the release of the first vaccinations, I shared the following guidance: "Due to the serious nature of the pandemic, Catholics should prayerfully consider getting vaccinated and consult their physicians or health care providers for personalized medical information."

This guidance is given in concurrence with moral and scientific guidance of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, the National Catholic Bioethics Center, and the Charlotte Lozier Institute which indicate that it is morally acceptable for a Catholic to receive certain vaccines. This message is consistent with guidance given by the Holy See and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

As Bishop of a diverse flock with the care of many souls, I continue to encourage the prayerful consideration that each individual must make in regard to receiving the vaccine. For those who have discerned to receive one, they can be assured that they can do so in good conscience. For those who have discerned not to receive one, they too can do so in good conscience. What is primary for us as individuals is to form our conscience through the teachings of the Church. The Catholic Catechism states:

"In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law: 'Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; . . . [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.'" (CCC 1778)

There have been many who have asked their pastors to grant them exemptions; however, it is employers who grant exemptions, not pastors. What we as the Church do is assist in forming the conscience and supporting the decision made by a conscience well formed. Employers and other institutions may require vaccination, but we support them reviewing and extending exemptions for personal religious reasons of conscience.

I encourage our priests, deacons and lay leaders to offer pastoral guidance to our people in the formation of conscience, using solid resources like those of the CDF, the NCBC, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In addition, please find a resource sheet for assistance attached. I remind our Church leaders that it is not for us to make medical decisions for others but rather to support the right of faithful Catholics to come to a personal decision with the help of a well-formed conscience.

Catholics will differ in their discernment, each considering his or her own conscience. Let us respect and support one another and allow Christ to unite us through His mercy and care.

Let us plead to God for an end to this pandemic and for healing for all those suffering from COVID-19. We pray also for the eternal repose of those who have succumbed to the disease.

Asking Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Joseph to pray for us, I entrust you all to the merciful love of our Savior Jesus Christ.



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COVID-19 Vaccination Catholic Resource Sheet

[Eparchy of Phoenix](#)

- [Diocese of Phoenix COVID-19 Response Webpage](#)
- [Diocese of Phoenix Statement on COVID-19 Vaccines, December 15, 2020](#)

“In concurrence with moral and scientific guidance from the [National Catholic Bioethics Center](#) and [Charlotte Lozier Institute](#), the Diocese of Phoenix affirms that the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are morally acceptable and viable options for combatting the coronavirus. The [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) has provided this guidance as well. These vaccines were granted emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and their development does not originate with abortion-derived cells.

Not all vaccines in development avoid this direct connection with abortion. For example, vaccines developed by Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca used abortion-derived cells in development. This direct connection to the evil of abortion makes these vaccines morally problematic.

Due to the serious nature of the pandemic, Catholics should prayerfully consider getting vaccinated and consult their physicians or health care providers for personalized medical information. The Diocese of Phoenix urges local government leaders to ensure safe and affordable access to these vaccines, most especially for vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.”

[National Catholic Bioethics Center \(NCBC\)](#)

- [Statement on Vaccine Mandates](#)
- [Individual Catholic Conscience Vaccination Exemption letter template](#)

[Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith \(CDF\)](#)

- [Note on the Morality of Using Some Anti-COVID-19 Vaccines, December 17, 2020](#)

In this sense, when ethically irreproachable Covid-19 vaccines are not available (e.g. in countries where vaccines without ethical problems are not made available to physicians and patients, or where their distribution is more difficult due to special storage and transport conditions, or when various types of vaccines are distributed in the same country but health authorities do not allow citizens to choose the

vaccine with which to be inoculated) it is morally acceptable to receive Covid19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.

At the same time, practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary.

[Charlotte Lozier Institute](#)

- [What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccines](#)
- [Vaccine Chart](#)

[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)

- [Moral Conscience](#)

1776 "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment.... For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God.... His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."

1777 Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.

1782 Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. "He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.

1790 A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself. Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed.

[United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)

[Vaccines and Biomedical Research](#)

- [Answers to Key Ethical Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines](#)