



## ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

*The Church in Central and Southern Indiana*

# Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

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### Getting vaccinated is morally acceptable, an “act of love.”

In recent weeks, because of the resurgence of COVID-19 and variants of this disease, certain government agencies and other institutions and employers are requiring vaccination for their workers, but allowing for a “religious exemption” in certain circumstances, for those who choose not to receive it.



This has created confusion and concern among religious people, including some Catholics, who wonder whether there is a valid religious or moral argument against being vaccinated. Some Catholics in different parts of our country have asked about obtaining a letter from their pastor that would somehow serve in granting this exemption when needed. Because of this confusion, it is important to make some appropriate clarifications.

Late last year, the Vatican 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 on the morality of vaccinations in the current global crisis.

The Vatican document makes the Catholic Church’s position clear. Because of the gravity of the threat posed by COVID-19, and the absence of alternative means of prevention, vaccines designed to protect us from this deadly disease are not only morally acceptable, they are strongly encouraged.

Pope Francis has taken this a step further. In a recent statement, the Holy Father said:

*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. Love is also social and political, there is social love and political love; it is universal, always overflowing with small gestures of personal charity capable of transforming and improving societies (cf. [Laudato si'](#), no. 231, cf. [Fratelli tutti](#), 184).*

Getting vaccinated is not only a morally acceptable option for Catholics, and all people who care about the common good, it is an act of love.

As always, individual medical decisions need to be made in consultation with a physician who has the training and expertise to assess what is best for each person. With this in mind, it is important for Catholics to seek out doctors and healthcare professionals who have a proper understanding of the human person and respect the Catholic Faith and moral teaching. When dealing with one's personal health and well-being, 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.

Every individual has the right to determine—on the basis of qualified medical opinions and a fully formed conscience—whether or not to be vaccinated. However, 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 response to local media inquiries, on Wednesday, August 18, I issued the following public statement:

*Archbishop Thompson has supported the position of Pope Francis and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is an act of charity that serves the common good to end the world-wide suffering and death the pandemic is causing. Pope Francis just today said that getting vaccinated is morally acceptable and is an “act of love.” Although some Catholics may personally be opposed to getting vaccinated, a religious exemption based on Church teaching is not warranted in this particular situation.*

All Catholics in southern and central Indiana are strongly encouraged to prayerfully consider the best ways to protect themselves, their families and all with whom they come in contact against this highly contagious, deadly disease. For most, this will mean getting vaccinated.

Let's all pray that by the grace of God improved and morally sound medical solutions will bring this global crisis to an end. Let's ask that the Holy Spirit will bring healing and strength to all, especially to the sick and vulnerable among us. May our Blessed Mother Mary, Health of the Sick, intercede for all of us so that we can receive the healing power of her Divine Son, Jesus.

+Charles C. Thompson  
Archbishop of Indianapolis

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## CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

### Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines

The question of the use of vaccines, in general, is often at the center of controversy in the forum of public opinion. In recent months, this Congregation has received several requests for guidance regarding the use of vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19, which, in the course of research and production, employed cell lines drawn from tissue obtained from two abortions that occurred in the last century. At the same time, diverse and sometimes conflicting pronouncements in the mass media by bishops, Catholic associations, and experts have raised questions about the morality of the use of these vaccines.

There is already an important pronouncement of the Pontifical Academy for Life on this issue, entitled "Moral reflections on vaccines prepared from cells derived from aborted human fetuses" (5 June 2005). Further, this Congregation expressed itself on the matter with the Instruction [Dignitas Personae](#) (September 8, 2008, cf. nn. 34 and 35). In 2017, the Pontifical Academy for Life returned to the topic with a Note. These documents already offer some general directive criteria.

Since the first vaccines against Covid-19 are already available for distribution and administration in various countries, this Congregation desires to offer some indications for clarification of this matter. We do not intend to judge the safety and efficacy of these vaccines, although ethically relevant and necessary, as this evaluation is the responsibility of biomedical researchers and drug agencies. Here, our objective is only to consider the moral aspects of the use of the vaccines against Covid-19 that have been developed from cell lines derived from tissues obtained from two fetuses that were not spontaneously aborted.

1. As the Instruction *Dignitas Personae* states, in cases where cells from aborted fetuses are employed to create cell lines for use in scientific research, "there exist differing degrees of responsibility"<sup>[1]</sup> of cooperation in evil. For example, "in organizations where cell lines of illicit origin are being utilized, the responsibility of those who make

the decision to use them is not the same as that of those who have no voice in such a decision”.<sup>[2]</sup>

2. 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 Covid-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process.
3. The fundamental reason for considering the use of these vaccines morally licit is that the kind of cooperation in evil (passive material cooperation) in the procured abortion from which these cell lines originate is, on the part of those making use of the resulting vaccines, remote. The moral duty to avoid such passive material cooperation is not obligatory if there is a grave danger, such as the otherwise uncontrollable spread of a serious pathological agent<sup>[3]</sup>—in this case, the pandemic spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19. It must therefore be considered that, in such a case, all vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive. It should be emphasized, however, that the morally licit use of these types of vaccines, in the particular conditions that make it so, does not in itself constitute a legitimation, even indirect, of the practice of abortion, and necessarily assumes the opposition to this practice by those who make use of these vaccines.
4. In fact, the licit use of such vaccines does not and should not in any way imply that there is a moral endorsement of the use of cell lines proceeding from aborted fetuses.<sup>[4]</sup> Both pharmaceutical companies and governmental health agencies are therefore encouraged to produce, approve, distribute and offer ethically acceptable vaccines that do not create problems of conscience for either health care providers or the people to be vaccinated.
5. 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. 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. In particular, they must avoid any risk to the health of those who cannot be vaccinated for medical or other reasons, and who are the most vulnerable.

6. Finally, there is also a moral imperative for the pharmaceutical industry, governments and international organizations to ensure that vaccines, which are effective and safe from a medical point of view, as well as ethically acceptable, are also accessible to the poorest countries in a manner that is not costly for them. The lack of access to vaccines, otherwise, would become another sign of discrimination and injustice that condemns poor countries to continue living in health, economic and social poverty.[5]

The Sovereign Pontiff Francis, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 17 December 2020, examined the present Note and ordered its publication.

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on 21 December 2020, Liturgical Memorial of Saint Peter Canisius.

Luis F. Card. Ladaria, S.I.  
Prefect

+ S.E. Mons. Giacomo Morandi  
Titular Archbishop of Cerveteri  
Secretary

## Footnotes

[1] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction [Dignitas Personae](#) (8 th December 2008), n. 35; AAS (100), 884.

[2] [Ibid](#), 885.

[3] Cfr. Pontifical Academy for Life, “Moral reflections on vaccines prepared from cells derived from aborted human foetuses”, 5th June 2005.

[4] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruct. [Dignitas Personae](#), n. 35: “When the illicit action is endorsed by the laws which regulate healthcare and scientific research, it is necessary to distance oneself from the evil aspects of that system in order not to give the impression of a certain toleration or tacit acceptance of actions which are gravely unjust. Any appearance of acceptance would in fact contribute to the growing indifference to, if not the approval of, such actions in certain medical and political circles”.

[5] Cfr. Francis, [Address to the members of the "Banco Farmaceutico" foundation](#), 19 September 2020.

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## A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

In a brotherly spirit, I join in this message of hope for a brighter future. Thanks to God and to the work of many, we now have vaccines to protect us from COVID-19. They grant us the hope of ending the pandemic, but only if they are available to all and if we work together.



Being vaccinated with vaccines authorised 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. Love is also social and political, there is social love and political love; it is universal, always overflowing with small gestures of personal charity capable of transforming and improving societies (cf. *Laudato si'*, no. 231, cf. *Fratelli tutti*, 184).

Vaccination is a simple but profound way of promoting the common good and caring for each other, especially the most vulnerable. I pray to God that everyone may contribute their own small grain of sand, their own small gesture of love; no matter how small, love is always great. Contribute with these small gestures for a better future.

God bless you, and thank you.

(VIDEO MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE PEOPLE ON THE VACCINATION CAMPAIGN AGAINST COVID-19)

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## **My Prayer for You**

Heavenly Father, you send your Holy Spirit into our world to bring healing and hope to all, especially those who are most vulnerable. May we always follow the example of your Divine Son and our brother, Jesus, in placing the needs of others before our own needs. May we have the courage, and the humility, to love one another as you love us. Amen.

*+ Charles C. Thompson*