



# Diocese of Davenport

*Office of the Bishop*

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August 30, 2021

Dear Priests and Deacons of the Diocese of Davenport,

With the recent surge in cases of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus, and with the full approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine by the Food and Drug Administration, you may be approached by parishioners to write or sign a “religious exemption” from employer-mandated vaccination. In Iowa, there is no requirement that a religious representative or clergy person certify someone’s request for a “religious exemption”; the individual simply attests to their claim on a notarized form provided by the Iowa Department of Public Health.

More importantly, our Holy Father Pope Francis, the Vatican (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as numerous reputable Catholic organizations and moral theologians, have written and spoken consistently about the moral permissibility of any of the available vaccines. Moreover, they have in fact encouraged vaccination among Catholics for the sake of the common good and the preservation of human life. Given all of that, it is my firm opinion, after careful prayer, study and consultation, that such a “religious exemption” is not possible and therefore should not be granted by our clergy. In other words, no one may credibly make the argument that their Catholic religion forbids or even discourages them from being vaccinated.

An argument has been made by some for the granting of a “religious exemption” on the grounds of the Church’s consistent defense of the rights of individual conscience, even when that conscience is ill-formed and, therefore, erroneous in its moral judgment. Meanwhile, the Church also consistently underscores the responsibility of the faithful to form their consciences with the mind of the Church.

Included with this letter is an accompanying document that provides a deeper analysis of this issue and identifies many helpful resources.

Above all, we are reminded, in the midst of this ongoing public health crisis, that as a Church we are *one body*, each members of the other (cf. Rom 12:5), and that we have a responsibility toward one another and to society. Along with our Holy Father and my brother bishops, I continue to affirm the moral permissibility of any of the available vaccines for this virus in these circumstances and vigorously urge all Catholics under my spiritual care to be vaccinated.

Let us continue to pray for one another, to treat each other in true Christian charity, and to work together for the building up of the body of Christ and the incarnation of the Kingdom of God here in Southeast Iowa.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

  
+ Thomas R. Zinkula  
Most Rev. Thomas R. Zinkula  
Bishop of Davenport