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August 30, 2021

Dear Father:

Since my letter to you of August 27 regarding the COVID-19 vaccinations, I have been in consultation with some of our clergy and faithful, and I would like to make some clarifications so that further misunderstandings may be avoided.

As I wrote then, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has determined that it is morally permissible to receive the current vaccinations and Pope Francis has stated that receiving the vaccine is an act of charity. Furthermore, I too encourage everyone to consider being vaccinated.

At the same time, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html) has instructed that reception of vaccinations must be voluntary and cannot be mandated. People should not feel coerced to receive a vaccination. To receive or not to receive the vaccine entails a conscious, practical decision made by each individual, and our Faith teaches us that an individual's well-formed conscience is inviolable.

Vatican II affirms in *Dignitatis Humanae* that "the Christian faithful, in common with all other men, possess the civil right not to be hindered in leading their lives in accordance with their consciences. Therefore, a harmony exists between the freedom of the Church and the religious freedom which is to be recognized as the right of all men and communities and sanctioned by constitutional law" (13). Nonetheless, I understand some employers or institutions may actually require a verification of some sort.

If a member of the faithful asks for your support in verifying their conscientious objection to receiving a mandated COVID vaccine, you are to help them understand the fullness of the Church's teaching on this complex matter. I suggest you refer them to the National Catholic Bioethics Center website (<https://www.ncbcenter.org/>) where they will find many helpful resources, including a template an individual may use in requesting an exemption. If the faithful present a situation in which an employer or institution truly **requires** confirmation from a cleric, you are to contact the Chancellor's Office for direction on how to affirm that it is a religious principle that a person must abide by the decision of his or her own well-formed conscience.

It is my hope that this letter will clarify some of the concerns that have been expressed to me. If you have questions, please contact the Chancery. Again, let us be prudent and vigilant in

all our efforts to combat this pandemic, and with the prayers of our Blessed Mother, may we join together in doing so. I remain,

Fraternally yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend Jeffrey M. Monforton
Bishop of Steubenville