



HOLY ROSARY PARISH

4139 42nd Avenue Southwest
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August 21, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

On this feast of St. Pius X, we take as our own motto that he chose upon his election to the papacy: To renew all things in Christ. With our eyes upon our Lord Jesus Christ, we can weather any storm and find life and light, joy and peace, and hope as we abide in His love.

Unfortunately the time of quickly changing health guidelines has returned once more as new COVID variants continue to make their impact felt upon the lives of people throughout the world. Besides the reinstatement of the mask mandate this week, Governor Inslee also instituted vaccine mandates for workers and volunteers in state agencies, health care settings and schools. As I have gotten a few questions about it this week, I thought I would share some of my thoughts with all of you.

No, the Church does not teach that vaccines should be mandatory. They are a good preventive measure to help our own personal health and that of others, especially those who are more vulnerable, especially in the face of a quickly spreading virus with little other recourse. The Church, much like Jesus, never forces us to do things that are for our own good, or force us to do things which embody loving our neighbor. However, both earnestly encourage us to do so. That said, Pope Francis has started speaking of the possibility of a moral obligation arising to stem the ongoing pandemic.

Yes, the current vaccines have a remote connection to abortion. Pfizer and Moderna were tested upon cell lines taken from a child who may have died during an abortion. J&J and Astra Zeneca used cell lines from an aborted child at every phase of development and testing.¹ While pharmaceutical companies should discontinue this practice in favor of ethical methods and opportunities, receiving the vaccines is not formal cooperation in that evil, but is what is called passive remote cooperation. It is not directly willed, and our connection is remote – very remote in this case – many, many times removed. It is something that should therefore be avoided, unless there is no alternative or a greater good at stake.

Yes, the Church highly recommends the COVID vaccine. Pope Francis (most recently in a television ad²), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican³, our own US Bishops' CDF⁴, and Archbishop Etienne have all said it is morally licit to get any of the vaccines, especially since there are no alternatives, though Pfizer and Moderna are preferable. This echoes the teachings of the Pontifical Academy for Life when dealing with the same question in 2005⁵, as well as a larger document on bioethics questions, *Dignitatis Personae*, in 2008.⁶ Going further, they strongly recommend them.

¹ <https://s27589.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/06.02.21-warp-speed-vaccines-June.pdf>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5rwTnJF0U>

³ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html

⁴ <https://www.usccb.org/moral-considerations-covid-vaccines>

⁵ <https://immunize.org/talking-about-vaccines/vaticandocument.htm>

⁶ https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitatis-personae_en.html

Yes, you may still have a religious objection. The Church encourages us to form our consciences properly, through the Scriptures and the teachings of Christ and His Church, as we seek to be taught by God. We are required to listen to our conscience, but lest it lead us astray we are reminded of our moral obligation to have a well-formed conscience. To supplant the Pope, the CDF, the US Bishops, and our own local shepherd with our own wisdom is a pretty serious matter which should give us great pause. I would encourage those who struggle with his question to read the various documents referenced. And for those who might feel like judging their neighbor, I would encourage you to reflect on your own life and the ways that you might find yourself in opposition to the universal teachings of a pope, the US Bishops and your own local shepherd. Splinters always abound! When it comes to vaccine mandates, the government recognizes a religious exemption, which is based on your personal religious beliefs and not necessarily that of your ascribed religion, and is between individuals and their employers. As such, priests in the Archdiocese of Seattle will not be signing religious exemption letters.

Yes, you may have personal reasons not to get a vaccine, such as a health condition, which is also a valid exemption from the law. Hopefully this is something you have consulted your doctor about to make sure it is truly in your best interest not to receive a vaccine. I myself did this before getting my vaccine. With my history of anaphylactic reactions, there was some early concern with Pfizer and Moderna in this regard which gave me pause. My doctor, who reads all of the scientific studies and information and raw data from the FDA with each of the approvals, assured me that this was connected to a couple of batches and not a universal concern. It is important that we confront and test our fears and anxieties, and that we be open to answers, even ones we are predisposed not to believe, as we trust those we normally trust to help us with such decisions. This is part of forming our minds, and our consciences, seeking the challenging path of prudence, wisdom and truth. Unfortunately sometimes, like that of my youngest nephew, it simply isn't possible – which is why it is so important for the rest of us to do whatever we can to help these more vulnerable individuals.

Yes, there are some side effects. Side effects are experienced within the first few days to weeks. Most are mild. Some people don't have any at all. And yes, in rare cases, as with all medicines and treatments, there is the possibility of serious and even fatal conditions. And some of the vaccines have more of these than others. But that is true of every drug you take or medical treatment you receive. Commercials for medicines always show people doing all the activities they enjoy while a comforting voice lists off all the ways the medicine might bring more harm than good. Might is the key word. With billions having received the vaccine, it is not surprising that a few thousand will have seriously adverse side effects. I imagine that would be true if billions took any individual medicine. I say this not to be dismissive of the real heart ache and pain of these individuals and their families, but to acknowledge the complexity of human body and the law of averages. I have been in three car accidents (the first of which was actually my fault) and totaled two cars – yet I still drive. If we focused on the rare exceptions of safety, there are all sorts of things we would eliminate from our lives. But we don't because the proportionate good of a neutral or good act far outweighs the possible negative or evil consequences.

Yes, if someone chooses not to get vaccinated, they have an extra responsibility to make every effort to help slow or stop the spread of COVID. While vaccines are an important way of assisting our own health and that of others, especially the vulnerable, it is not the only way, and though very effective, they aren't perfect. Those who choose not to get vaccinated for whatever reason have an extra responsibility of taking other precautions to help their brothers and sisters, as well as themselves, by following the other health guidance and guidelines. We do not live isolated lives, but in community,

which means that our individual choices always affect others. If we aren't going to reduce risk in one major way, it is incumbent upon us to do more and be extra vigilant with regard to the others.

In the Gospels, Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God above all else, and the second is like it, to love our neighbors before ourselves. He invites us to orient ourselves outward. So often in our nation we speak of "my rights." While there is certainly a time and a place for this, we should approach life and community from a different perspective - not from myself, but the other. The common good is something that we should always keep in mind. Increasingly I find listening to politicians, and media pundits in particular, rarely helps me grow in the love of God and neighbor. That is why it is so important to listen to Jesus Christ above all else, and love as He did.

Yes, those who choose not to get vaccinated for any reason are free to do so, and must also live with the consequences of their choices. The Church emphasizes free choice. However, courts have upheld the mandates several times. I was recently asked for my tuberculosis testing history in order to continue volunteering at Mount St. Vincent. I have a right not to get tested, and/or not to share those results. That would mean, however, that I could no longer visit parishioners there and celebrate Mass, because they have a right to protect their members from a TB outbreak by creating this reasonable standard and precaution. I have a right to my own free choices, but I must also live with the consequences of those choices. Unfortunately no exemptions were included if someone could reasonably work from home, for example, and it was incredibly broad to include those who don't work with vulnerable populations. If an individual is right in their objection, they can draw some comfort in the midst of their hardship from knowing they share in the sufferings of the innocent Christ.

Yes, we must renew all things in Christ. We are all worn and weary. At times that means we have lashed out at one another in a lack of patience or kindness. We see only our struggles, failing to see that of others. We see only our own wisdom, unable to empathize with any divergence. Or maybe we disagree over decisions that are made, or some part of them. We could all use a little more love of God and love of neighbor in our lives. Know that you are in my prayers. If you need anything, or want to explore some of these brief reflections more, please let me know. I also don't claim to know or understand everything, and am happy to listen, as well.

If you haven't returned to Mass, I would highly encourage you to do so. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, the gift of God and of His love. It is the kind of nourishment which is necessary to our lives. Let us remain united together in the love of God.

In Christ,
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