



GUIDANCE ON VACCINE MANDATES AND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN EASTERN WASHINGTON

Bishop Daly clarifies that parish schools must follow vaccine and mask mandates as well as exemptions allowed under state law

On Tuesday Bishop Daly wrote to the priests of the diocese clarifying the effect of the vaccine mandate on Catholic schools in the diocese. Parish schools will abide by the state’s vaccine mandate. The letter also clarifies exemptions under state law and how Catholic schools will acknowledge these exemptions.

Bishop Daly recommends that the Catholic faithful of Eastern Washington saying “Inoculation against COVID-19 is an important way to protect the common good, especially children and those who are most vulnerable. I encourage the faithful of eastern Washington to join me in getting vaccinated.”

The Diocese will follow the state mandates regarding vaccination of education personnel and mask mandates both in parish schools and churches. Bishop Daly noted that “We continue to comply with Governor Inslee’s mandate that all school employees receive one of the approved vaccines. The state recognizes two exemptions from this mandate. The first is a medical exemption that one may obtain through his or her physician. The second is a religious exemption which, for us as Catholics, rests on the fact that a properly formed conscience is inviolable.”

In his letter Bishop emphasized the role of an individual’s conscience in Church teaching on matters where a person has moral and legal freedom to choose a course of action. “The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the “conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man.” While the Church seeks to form and mold consciences of the faithful, each person has by virtue of his or her identity as a human person the right to act in conscience, a liberty the Church respects and upholds. A Catholic school employee could, therefore, exercise his or her right to a religious exemption. This exemption places the burden on the individual’s conscience rather than on Church approval.”

Bishop Daly also encouraged priests to speak with employees and parishioners who are uncomfortable with the vaccination for religious or moral reasons and help them to understand why the Church encourages vaccination. The letter closed with a request for prayer and expressed the desire that we would soon see an end to the pandemic. “I am hopeful that mask-wearing and an increase in vaccinations will help bring an end to the suffering and death caused by this pandemic,” said Daly.

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FAQ: Vaccine and Mask Mandates

Is a Mask mandate in place?

Yes, per the emergency proclamation issued by Governor Inslee on August 20, 2021, parishes and parish schools will follow the mask mandate.

(<https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/20-25.15%20-%20COVID-19%20Washington%20Ready.pdf>)

Is the Diocese following the Vaccine Mandate for school employees?

Yes, our schools will comply with the vaccine mandate set forward in Governor Inslee's August 20, 2021 proclamation. (<https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/21-14.1%20-%20COVID-19%20Vax%20Washington%20Amendment.pdf>)

Is the Diocese acknowledging religious exemptions from employees?

Yes, in accord with state law, the Diocese will acknowledge the receipt of self-identified religious exemptions for our school employees.

Does the Diocese and Bishop Daly support the COVID-19 vaccines?

Yes, the Bishop encourages Catholics to get vaccinated, and the Diocese provided vaccination clinics for our teachers in the Spring of 2021. Bishop Daly elected to be vaccinated this spring at a clinic held at a parish in our Diocese. He joins Pope Francis in encouraging vaccination.

Why does the Diocese allow Catholics to exercise a religious exemption?

The Catholic Church teaches that, for the human person, the conscience is inviolable. While the Church exists to bring Christ to the world and bring people into a relationship with Christ, the Church's teaching is that a person's conscience should be respected. The Second Vatican Council emphasized in the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World: "conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man". While the Church seeks to form and mold consciences of the faithful, each person has by virtue of his or her identity as a human person the right to act in conscience, a liberty the Church respects and upholds. For us the inviolability of conscience is a sincerely held belief in our faith, reiterated by the highest authorities of our faith tradition: popes and ecumenical councils.

Will priests sign exemption forms?

No. A Catholic individual, under church teaching, is capable of testifying to the state of his or her own conscience on a particular question. Their self-attestation is sufficient both in regards to state law on religious exemptions and church teaching.

Doesn't Pope Francis encourage all Catholics to be vaccinated?

Yes, Pope Francis has very strongly encouraged Catholics to be vaccinated out of love for their neighbors. At the same time, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Francis's doctrinal office, has spoken to people's right in conscience to decline the vaccine for moral reasons, while insisting those who decline the vaccine must be vigilant by other means to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Read the full document here

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_202121_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html .