



DIOCESE OF CHEYENNE

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we continue to endure the stress of the pandemic and people are making decisions about vaccination, I would like to offer helpful information for you about the ethical issues at stake.

Although numbers have decreased from the recent spike, the number of active cases of COVID-19 is still high historically. The current 7-day national average is 58,745 new cases/day, while the peak last spring was 27,143 new cases/day and last summer it peaked at 68,948 new cases/day. Also, the 7-day national average is 1,668 deaths/day. In comparison, at the peak in April 2020, the average was 2,289 deaths/day. Thus, the numbers remain at high levels. Also, we need more information about the novel variants of the coronavirus before we make a change in protocol. Some are predicting a spike in April.

One of the challenges you face in the pastoral settings regards making ethical decisions in the midst of conflicting messages that complicate the task of sorting out complex moral issues. This is the case in the discussion of the use of certain vaccines for Covid-19. I want to be of assistance in this regard, by summarizing what the Church teaches on the use of vaccines.

To guide pastors in these matters, on December 21, 2020, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document available at this link: [“Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines.”](#) Subsequently, the Vatican Commission for Covid-19 and the Pontifical Academy for Life published a joint statement that addressed three specific issues related to the use of vaccines. These documents can be found at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/29/0697/01628.html#notaing>.

The first issue deals with the use of “biological material” obtained from cell lines of aborted fetuses. Based on earlier documents such as the 2008 Instruction *Dignitas Personae*, the Pontifical Academy for Life, in 2017, ruled out any morally relevant cooperation between the use of these vaccines and voluntary abortion, stating: “Hence, we believe that all clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion.” In taking up this question more recently, the Academy, citing the CDF 2020 Note, observes: “This is a matter of material passive cooperation (as opposed to formal cooperation), since it is indirect and remote, particularly given the intention underlying the decision, the contingency with respect to the accused immoral event, and the current circumstances in which we find ourselves.”

We should not place any burden on our people that goes beyond this teaching and they should be advised that they can receive any of the vaccines presently available to us – Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson – with a clear conscience.

This conclusion is deepened by two additional critical points that the Academy underscores in its analysis. The first is “the moral responsibility of undergoing vaccination... (as) this issue also involves the relationship between personal health and public health, showing their close interdependence. In the light of this connection, we consider it important that a responsible decision be taken in this regard, since refusal of the vaccine may also constitute a risk to others... For this reason, such refusal could seriously increase the risks for public health. In fact, on the one hand, those categories of people who cannot be vaccinated (e.g., immunosuppressed) and who can thus only rely on other people’s vaccination coverage (and herd immunity) to avoid the risk of infection, would be more exposed. On the other hand, becoming ill leads to an increase in hospitalizations, with subsequent overload for health systems, up to a possible collapse, as has happened in various countries during this pandemic. This hinders access to health care which, once again, affects those who have fewer resources.” **Thus, people should be encouraged to take seriously their moral responsibility to be vaccinated in view of the connection between their personal health and the public health.**

The final ethical issue addressed in the joint statement regards the universal accessibility of vaccines. “That some countries receive the vaccine late due to prior large-scale purchase by richer states must be avoided.” Citing the CDF Note, the Academy’s joint document states that there is “a moral imperative for the pharmaceutical industry, for governments and international organizations, to guarantee that effective, safe and ethically acceptable vaccines are made available in the poorest countries, in a manner that is not burdensome for them... It is therefore vital to overcome the logic of ‘vaccine nationalism’, understood as an attempt by various States to own the vaccine in more rapid timeframes as a form of prestige and advantage, procuring the necessary quantity for its inhabitants.” **So, we should advocate for universal accessibility of vaccines as an important ethical issue in our teaching and preaching.**

Finally, the Vatican Covid-19 Commission prepared a resource kit for all Church leaders, including parish priests, lay staff, and health and social service agencies. See this link: <https://www.humandevopment.va/en/news/2021/covid-19-resource-kit-for-church-leaders-now-online.html>.

The Resource Kit provides information about the COVID-19 vaccine for varied audiences, relevant quotes from Pope Francis, short messages for websites, parish bulletins or other media. A Family Guide to COVID-19 is designed for local communities and to counter misinformation.

I am grateful for your deep commitment and personal sacrifices as you serve the People of God. I am praying for you daily.

Peace in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Biegl". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Steven