



SOUTH DAKOTA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**Statement of the Bishops of South Dakota
Regarding Covid-19 Vaccination Requirements**

August 10, 2021

Feast of Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr

We have recently received a significant number of inquiries from the faithful concerning general requirements for some persons to receive a Covid-19 vaccination.

We addressed many moral aspects of choosing a vaccine in a [statement](#) on December 30, 2020. As we said then, one may accept Covid-19 vaccines in good conscience if certain conditions are met, but doing so is not a universal moral duty. We echoed the Vatican, which explained in a doctrinal note that “practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation.” Rather, with attention to the common good, the decision to receive a Covid-19 vaccination should be discerned in light of many factors, several of which we described in that statement.

Now, recent inquiries from the faithful raise the corollary question of whether a Catholic must be vaccinated if required to do so by an employer or other authority. The following principles of church teaching apply:

- The Church teaches and right reason affirms that, as a general rule, free and informed consent is required prior to all medical treatments and procedures, including vaccination.
- Consent is *informed* if a person knows the essential nature of the proposed treatment and its benefits; its risks, side-effects, consequences, and cost; and any reasonable and morally legitimate alternatives, including no treatment at all.¹
- Consent is *free* if one has the ability to decline a medical intervention following discernment of relevant information and in accord with one’s certain conscience, without coercion or fear of punishment.
- We are bound to follow our consciences if we are certain of them. We have a duty to form our consciences in accord with right reason and the good willed by the wisdom of God.²
- There is a general moral duty to refuse medical interventions that are in some way dependent upon cell lines derived from abortion; however, such are permissible if there is a proportionally grave need, no alternatives are available, and one makes one’s objection known. Even then, a well-formed conscience might decline such interventions in order to affirm with clarity the value of human life.³
- We have the right to freely follow our conscience. We must not be forced to act contrary to our conscience, *i.e.*, to be compelled to do something we believe to be wrong. Nor must

we be prevented from acting according to our consciences, especially in religious matters, provided that just public order be respected.⁴

- The right to freedom of conscience and religious freedom is based on the inherent dignity of the human person.⁵

This decision is intimate and personal. Consistent with the above, a Catholic may, after consideration of relevant information and moral principles, discern it to be right or wrong to receive one of the available Covid-19 vaccines. If he or she thus comes to the sure conviction in conscience that they should not receive it, we believe this is a sincere religious belief, as they are bound before God to follow their conscience. We support any Catholic who has come to this conviction in seeking religious exemption from any Covid-19 requirement.

We urge that these principles be acknowledged by both public and private entities so that a climate of responsible freedom and respect for religious conscience will prevail.

These questions come following a year and a half of great difficulty for many. The hardships of the last 18 months have included loss of life and serious illness; they also have included various public measures intended, at first, to slow the spread of the Covid-19 illness and, later, to eliminate the disease altogether, measures that have not been without their own social consequences. We are grateful to all those in healthcare and public service who have sacrificed greatly in order to heal and comfort the sick, and to reasonably protect the healthy, especially the aged and immunologically-weakened. Most importantly, throughout this time, God has invited all of us to trust more completely in his loving providence. We commend and thank those of God's faithful who have offered joyful witness to God's saving love to those who have been lonely, frustrated, frightened, or discouraged! We pray every person might know how deeply and personally God loves them, especially in the midst of difficulty.



The Most Reverend Donald E. DeGrood
Bishop of Sioux Falls



The Most Reverend Peter M. Muhich
Bishop of Rapid City

¹ *Ethical and Religious Directives* (6th ed.), nos. 26-27.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (2nd ed.), no. 1776 et seq.

³ *Dignitatis Personae*, no. 35; see also "Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses," Pontifical Academy for Life (2005).

⁴ Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 3.

⁵ Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis Humanae*, nos. 2, 9.