



DIOCESE OF SAGINAW

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 23, 2021

Dear Priests and Deacons of the Diocese of Saginaw,

As we all are aware there has been a surge in cases of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus across the State of Michigan. The Food and Drug Administration has granted full approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19 disease in individuals 16 years of age and older. The vaccine also continues to be available under emergency use authorization (EUA) for individuals 12 through 15 years of age.

I have received questions from pastors about whether they can provide letters to parishioners seeking a religious exemption for the COVID vaccine. There is no requirement that a religious representative or clergy person certify someone's request for a "religious exemption."

Therefore, it is my firm opinion, after careful prayer and study, that such a "religious exemption" is not possible and therefore should not be granted by our clergy. In other words, no one may credibly make the argument that their Catholic religion forbids or even discourages them from being vaccinated.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis, the Vatican (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as numerous reputable Catholic organizations and moral theologians, have written and spoken consistently that any of the available vaccines are morally permissible to receive. In fact, they have been outspoken in encouraging Catholics to get vaccinated for the sake of the common good and the preservation of human life. While I am aware that some people are unable to be vaccinated for various reasons, vaccinations do protect all of us. Getting vaccinated, as an act of charity, is a simple but profound way of promoting the common good and caring for each other, especially the most vulnerable.

An argument is made by some that a "religious exemption" should be granted on the grounds of the Church's consistent defense of the rights of individual conscience. We affirm the individual right of conscience while also affirming our shared responsibility to protect our own health and the health of others in the community in which we live. Meanwhile, the Church also consistently underscores the responsibility of the faithful to form their consciences with the mind of the Church. Included with this letter is an accompanying document that provides a deeper analysis of this issue and identifies many helpful resources.

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Above all, we must remember that as the Church, the one Body of Christ, we have a responsibility toward one another and to society. The holiness of the Church depends upon it. Therefore, in union with the Holy Father and my brother bishops, I continue to affirm the moral permissibility of any of the available vaccines for this virus in these circumstances and heartily urge all Catholics under my spiritual care to be vaccinated.

Let us continue to pray for one another, to treat each other in true Christian charity, and to work together for the building up of the body of Christ across the Diocese of Saginaw.

Sincerely in the Peace of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert D. Gruss". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw