



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
OF CHARLESTON
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 2021

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Since my first letter regarding COVID-19 vaccines in December of 2020, I have encouraged all of the faithful who are eligible to seek inoculation if medically appropriate. I also want to make clear the Church's teaching on the importance of personal conscience as it pertains to the public debate on vaccine mandates.

St. Paul VI wrote in *Dignitatis Humanae*, "In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, in matters of religion" (*DH* no. 3, also Catechism of the Catholic Church #1777-1782).

Considering these teachings, no organization should force a person to receive the COVID-19 vaccine if he or she has weighed the benefits and burdens and has determined, based in rightly formed conscience, not to accept a vaccine. Forcing a person to do something against his or her will violates the sanctity of conscience and cannot be tolerated. We can disagree with one another's decisions and opinions, but we cannot lose sight of the dignity of the person or of the duty of each person to obey his or her conscience.

Individuals, like the Church or clergy, have the right and responsibility to raise moral or ethical objections based on the dictates of conscience. Pastors are not needed to sign or issue documentation for an objection to the vaccine mandate because the decision to refuse a medical intervention is personal in nature.

Presently, the state of South Carolina protects the right of any person to refuse a vaccine based on religious exemptions (SC Code of Laws, Section 44-29-40). The Diocese of Charleston affirms that all private and governmental organizations maintain the same protection of individual conscience and personal freedom. This right must be upheld on all grounds in every circumstance.

I also wish to stress that a conscientious objector abides by the principle of the common good. Persons who claim a religious exemption should be ready to assume other medically recommended means of avoiding infection and contagion for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we strive to emerge from this pandemic, I pray that each of us faithfully discerns the best decision for ourselves, loved ones, and the larger community. It is our right and our duty to protect life, and to respect the conscience of others.

In the Lord's Peace,

Most Reverend Robert E. Guglielmo, DD
Bishop of Charleston