Month and Day, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is name of person making the request for exemption, and I am a baptized Catholic seeking a religious exemption from an immunization requirement. This letter explains how the Catholic Church’s teachings may lead individual Catholics, including myself, to decline certain vaccines.

The Catholic Church teaches that a person may be required to refuse a medical intervention, including a vaccination, if his or her conscience comes to this judgment. While the Catholic Church does not prohibit the use of most vaccines, and generally encourages them to safeguard personal and public health, the following authoritative Church teachings demonstrate the principled religious basis on which a Catholic Christian may determine that he or she ought to refuse certain vaccines:

* Vaccination is not morally obligatory in principle and so must be voluntary.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* There is a moral duty to refuse the use of medical products, including certain vaccines, that are created using human cells lines derived from abortion; however, it is permissible to use such vaccines only under case-specific conditions—if there are no other alternatives available and the intent is to preserve life.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* A person’s assessment of whether the benefits of a medical intervention outweigh the undesirable side-effects are to be respected unless they contradict authoritative Catholic moral teachings.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* A person is morally required to obey his or her conscience.[[4]](#footnote-4)

A Catholic may judge it wrong to receive certain vaccines for a variety of reasons consistent with these teachings, and there is no authoritative Church teaching universally obliging Catholics to receive any vaccine. An individual Catholic may invoke Church teaching to refuse a vaccine that used abortion-derived cell lines at any stage of the creation of the vaccine. More generally, a Catholic might refuse a vaccine based on the Church’s teachings concerning therapeutic proportionality. Therapeutic proportionality is an assessment of whether the benefits of a medical intervention outweigh the undesirable side-effects and burdens in light of the integral good of the person, including spiritual, psychological, and bodily goods.[[5]](#footnote-5) The judgment of therapeutic proportionality must be made by the person who is the potential recipient of the intervention,[[6]](#footnote-6) not by public health authorities or by other individuals who might judge differently in their own situations.

When bishops of the Catholic Church offer instruction, either individually or jointly as a geographical regional conference, they faithfully represent the teaching of the Church that applies to all Catholics, regardless of the jurisdiction the Catholic may live in, so long as the teaching adheres soundly to the official teaching of the Church found in magisterial documents.

The Bishop of the Diocese of Tyler in Texas, for example, has declared in a pastoral letter that Catholics should keep in mind the very serious moral objection to the currently-available COVID vaccines because of their connection to the evil of abortion:

“I urge you to reject any vaccine that uses the remains of aborted children in research, testing, development, or production. Testify to the truth that abortion must be rejected and make a choice that is consistent with the dignity of every human life from conception to natural death and is rooted in a mature faith and trust in eternal life, not fear of suffering in this life.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The Archbishop of San Francisco, who is a member of our local regional California Catholic Conference of Bishops, recently stated the Catholic Church’s position in these terms:

“If you are opposed to getting vaccinated, that is your moral right. But if you do not get vaccinated, please take extra precautions to protect those vulnerable people who might contract the virus and suffer serious injury.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

The affirmation of this moral right, guarded by Church teaching, is echoed also by the Catholic Bishops of Colorado, for example. They have affirmed this in two letters dated December 14, 2020 and March 17, 2021, concerning COVID-19 vaccines, stating:

“The bishops of Colorado affirm that the use of some COVID-19 vaccines is morally acceptable under certain circumstances…. However, if individuals have serious moral objections or health concerns about vaccines, those concerns should be respected by society and government, and those individuals should not be forced into vaccination, contrary to their conscience. The government should not impose the COVID-19 vaccines on its citizens.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Furthermore, the free-exercise clause of the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment requires state accommodation of individuals who object to vaccinations on religious grounds. Government neutrality also requires religious accommodation when the state offers secular exemptions, which is the case in California for medical and non-medical exemptions[[10]](#footnote-10) and exemptions through the Americans with Disabilities Act and Civil Rights Act of 1964.[[11]](#footnote-11) Title VII of the Civil Rights Act states that an individual’s sincerely-held religious belief merits reasonable accommodation regardless of whether or not the individual’s personal belief or religious practice is consistent with the tenets of the religious group to which the individual belongs.

Vaccination is not a universal obligation and a person must obey his or her own conscience. Therefore, if a Catholic comes to an informed judgment that he or she should not receive a vaccine, then the Catholic Church requires that the person follow this judgment of conscience and refuse the vaccine. The *Catechism* is clear: “Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. ‘He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.’”[[12]](#footnote-12)

In summary, please consider this my statement, which I am willing to swear by, that I am a Catholic Christian and I firmly believe that the Christian Scriptures forbid me from cooperating in the evil of abortion[[13]](#footnote-13), which includes accepting the currently-available vaccines using human cell lines derived from abortion. The Scriptures state that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit because God lives within me, and God calls me to be perfect and undefiled as He is perfect. Just as Jesus cleansed the Jerusalem temple of moral defilement so that it could be a holy place of prayer, so also does He expect me to keep the temple of my body and soul cleansed of all defilements so that I can properly pray and worship God. For me to disobey my conscience and participate in these vaccines, I would be offending God, defiling the temple of my body, and ruining my religious practices and relationship with God.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Further, I also firmly believe the religious tenet of my Church that I have the sole authority and right to determine medical interventions in my life after weighing the benefits and risks of each intervention, and that this right must be respected.

On the basis of these considerations I must respectfully decline the currently-available COVID-19 vaccines, and I kindly request accommodation.

Sincerely,

Type your name as the person making the request for exemption, and then sign your name above your typed name in front of the notary public so he or she can witness it

RELIGIOUS LEADER VERIFICATION

I am a religious leader with name of religious organization and hereby certify that the above information provided by name of person making request for exemption, who is a member of my religious organization, is accurate and that this is a request for a religious exemption from a COVID-19 vaccine requirement.

Religious Leader Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Religious Organization: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), “Note on the Morality of Using Some Anti-COVID-19 Vaccines,” December 17, 2020, n. 5: “At the same time, practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Pontifical Academy for Life, “Moral Reflections on Vaccines Prepared from Cells Derived from Aborted Human Foetuses,” June 9, 2005; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction Dignitas personae, 2008, nn. 34-35; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Note on the Morality of Using Some Anti-COVID-19 Vaccines,” nn. 1-3. When there is a sufficiently serious reason to use the product and there is no reasonable alternative available, the Catholic Church teaches that it may be permissible to use the immorally sourced product under protest. In any case, whether the product is used or not, the Catholic Church teaches that all must make their disagreement known and request the development of equal or better products using biological material that does not come from abortions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2018), n. 28. Hereafter “ERDs.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. If he were deliberately to act against it, he would condemn himself...” Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), www.vatican.va, n. 1790. Hereafter “CCC.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See ERDs, nn. 32-33; nn. 56-57; Part Three, Introduction, para. 2; Part Five, Introduction, para. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See ERDs, nn. 56-57. Both of these directives state that the proportionality of medical interventions is established “in the patient’s judgment.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Stand for an Ethical Covid-19 Vaccine.* Bishop Strickland of the Diocese of Tyler in Texas, St. Philip Institute of Catechesis and Evangelization. (2020, December 8). https://stphilipinstitute.org/?s=bishop+strickland%27s+letter+. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Archbishop Cordileone on Covid-19 Vaccines.* Archdiocese of San Francisco. https://sfarchdiocese.org/video. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *A Letter to the Faithful from the Colorado bishops on Covid-19 Vaccines.* Colorado Catholic Conference. (2020, December 15). https://cocatholicconference.org/a-letter-to-the-faithful-from-the-colorado-bishops-on-covid-19-vaccines/. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *State Public Health Office Order of August 5, 2021.* California Department of Public Health.. https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Order-of-the-State-Public-Health-Officer-Health-Care-Worker-Vaccine-Requirement.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act.* U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. CCC, n. 1782, citing Second Vatican Council, Dignitatis humanae, December 7, 1965, n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him; haughty eyes, a lying tongue, *hands that shed innocent blood,* a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.” (Proverbs 6:16-19) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”; and Mt. 21:12-13: “And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple [and defiled it], and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you make it a den of robbers.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)