



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

September 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As our country continues its fight against the spread of COVID-19, mandatory vaccination is in certain settings being imposed. This has led some people to request of their priests an endorsement of requests to be exempted from mandatory vaccination on the basis of conscientious objection. I have recently given to the priests of this Archdiocese an instruction that explains why such an endorsement cannot be granted. That I might share briefly that same explanation with all of you is the reason for this pastoral letter.

Let us recall, first of all, that the Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories, in communion with the Holy Father himself, have already provided the moral guidance that, in the absence of ethically acceptable alternatives, and in the context of a pandemic that poses a serious threat to public health, it is morally permissible to receive a vaccine approved for use in Canada against COVID-19. (See [Alberta and NWT Bishops Letter to the Faithful on Vaccines – December 2, 2020.](#)) Endorsement by a priest of a parishioner's request for exemption on the basis of religious belief would run counter to this direction given by the Bishops.

Certainly, we do hold, and insist, that individual freedom of conscience must be respected. Where vaccination is mandated, there should also be provisions that respect and accommodate the dignity of the individual conscience in making a decision of conscientious objection. This is integral to the Church's teaching regarding freedom of conscience and its exercise, which must be safeguarded. However, this does not oblige a priest to support a parishioner's request for exemption. He represents the Church, whose role is to inform by her teaching and ensure respect of the individual conscience, but not to legitimize its judgments.

I wish to remind everyone that if, for reasons of conscience, a request to be exempted from vaccination is granted by the relevant authorities, the moral obligation to act in charity towards others always remains. Those who are exempted thus have the responsibility to do their utmost to ensure through other measures that they protect both themselves and others

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from contracting the COVID-19 virus. (See [CDF Note on the Morality of Using Some anti-COVID-19 vaccines, 21 December 2020, n. 5.](#)) We are individuals living in society. As social beings, our actions affect others and thus involve responsibilities towards them. Our concern must always be for the welfare of both others and ourselves.

Should you have any questions or concerns, by all means reach out to your pastor, who will be happy to assist you. You may also find helpful the attached document, which proposes questions to help us form our consciences well on the matter of vaccinations against COVID-19. Let us hold one another in prayer, and ask Almighty God to inspire each of us to do our part in the struggle against COVID-19.

Yours sincerely in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard W. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

✠Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton