



Diocese of Fall River
Office of the Bishop
Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

August 25, 2021

Dear Father,

Through several public documents and statements, the Church has made it clear that receiving the COVID-19 vaccine is consistent with Catholic faith and can be done in good conscience. Last December, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued its conclusion on the matter, stating, "... it is morally acceptable to receive COVID vaccines." That finding was echoed in a March statement from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released as vaccine use was becoming widespread in this country.

Moreover, in considering the vaccines from a moral perspective, the Church also points out the obligation to consider one's responsibility to the needs of others and to the overall common good in a time of pandemic. Pope Francis said in January, "I believe that morally everyone must take the vaccine. It is the moral choice because it is about your life but also the lives of others," and he shared that belief again in a video released last week. The USCCB March statement concludes with this: "Receiving one of the COVID vaccines ought to be understood as an act of charity toward the other members of the community."

Personally, I have always encouraged those who are able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine to do so. It is a morally acceptable and responsible way to help protect oneself as well as those around us. It is my hope that the FDA's decision this week to grant full approval to one of the vaccines will move those still hesitant to taking the vaccine.

Considering all of this and taking into account the fact that the virus is still very active in our country and in the world, the Diocese of Fall River will not be granting religious exemptions to receiving a vaccine against COVID-19. To do so would be contrary to the Church's guidance on COVID-19 vaccination and our expressed collective responsibility to protect and ensure the health of all in our communities.

For these reasons, all of our priests ministering in the Diocese should follow this same policy and decline requests from parishioners to validate a request for vaccine exemption based on religious grounds. Under Massachusetts law, individuals are free to exercise discretion on getting the vaccine based on medical or other personal reasons, but it is important that Church teaching not be cited inaccurately as the reason for their decision. This is a personal decision that should not be dependent upon an attestation by a member of the clergy.

If you are asked to provide an attestation for religious exemption, I encourage you to use this opportunity to advise the person on the Church's teaching on vaccines in general, and the COVID vaccines in particular. I ask that we all continue to pray for healing for those who suffer from the virus as well as for those who care for them, and to ask for God's peace for those who have died from it.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.
Bishop of Fall River