



## THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PHOENIX

**August 27, 2021**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We continue to experience the impact of the COVID-19 virus in many ways in our local community. As the number of cases and deaths are increasing with the most recent variant, we must rely on our faith in Jesus and the guidance of the Church to help us navigate these challenging times that have brought pain, confusion, and division. Let us remember always that it is Christ who heals and unites. We rely on His merciful and infinite love.

I want to once again express my gratitude to God for our first responders, medical professionals and public servants who work selflessly during these pandemic times for the common good. May they continue to be protected from the COVID-19 virus, be granted strength in their important work, and used as instruments of healing to those who are most in need. These have proven to be very trying times for those in these noble professions.

In December of 2020 after the release of the first vaccinations, I shared the following guidance: “Due to the serious nature of the pandemic, Catholics should prayerfully consider getting vaccinated and consult their physicians or health care providers for personalized medical information.”

This guidance is given in concurrence with moral and scientific guidance of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, the National Catholic Bioethics Center, and the Charlotte Lozier Institute which indicate that it is morally acceptable for a Catholic to receive certain vaccines. This message is consistent with guidance given by the Holy See and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

As Bishop of a diverse flock with the care of many souls, I continue to encourage the prayerful consideration that each individual must make in regard to receiving the vaccine. For those who have discerned to receive one, they can be assured that they can do so in good conscience. For those who have discerned not to receive one, they too can do so in good conscience. What is primary for us as individuals is to form our conscience through the teachings of the Church. The Catholic Catechism states:

“In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law: ‘Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; . . . [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in

nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.” (CCC 1778)

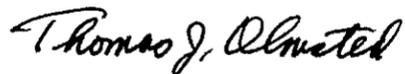
There have been many who have asked their pastors to grant them exemptions; however, it is employers who grant exemptions, not pastors. What we as the Church do is assist in forming the conscience and supporting the decision made by a conscience well formed. Employers and other institutions may require vaccination, but we support them reviewing and extending exemptions for personal religious reasons of conscience.

I encourage our priests, deacons and lay leaders to offer pastoral guidance to our people in the formation of conscience, using solid resources like those of the CDF, the NCBC, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In addition, please find a resource sheet for assistance attached. I remind our Church leaders that it is not for us to make medical decisions for others but rather to support the right of faithful Catholics to come to a personal decision with the help of a well-formed conscience.

Catholics will differ in their discernment, each considering his or her own conscience. Let us respect and support one another and allow Christ to unite us through His mercy and care.

Let us plead to God for an end to this pandemic and for healing for all those suffering from COVID-19. We pray also for the eternal repose of those who have succumbed to the disease.

Asking Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Joseph to pray for us, I entrust you all to the merciful love of our Savior Jesus Christ.



**+Thomas J. Olmsted**  
Bishop of Phoenix