

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

This past weekend I promised to send an update on the “**religious exemption**” when the COVID-19 vaccine is mandated by employers. The primary guidance for our Diocese comes from Bishop Paprocki. It is my understanding that Bishop will be sending the priests of the Diocese clear guidance on how to respond to requests for written documentation of a religious exemption.

If you have been following this topic in the news, you undoubtedly have noticed that Bishops are not in agreement on the granting of a “religious exemption” to Catholics.

Some Bishops, including Cardinal Cupich of Chicago (our metropolitan archbishop), has directed his priests to decline to sign any statement requesting a “religious exemption.” He writes: *“Following the lead of Pope Francis, we encourage everyone to be vaccinated as an act of charity. ... Religious exemptions to vaccination cannot be supported by Catholic teaching and I have instructed our pastors not to grant them.”*

Other Bishops are providing templates (forms) for the affirmation of the exemption when requested by a member of the faithful. From the Bishops of Colorado: *We have been asked several questions by the Faithful about relevant Catholic teaching applicable to this issue. The Catholic Church teaches that a person may refuse a medical intervention, including a vaccination, if his or her conscience leads them to that decision.*

Bishop Paprocki has addressed the issue of mandatory vaccinations in an interview regarding the University of Notre Dame’s decision to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for students and staff. The entire article can be found here: [Bishop Paprocki and Notre Dame Mandate](#)

The following is an excerpt from the same article: *Notre Dame should expand its understanding of “religious” objectors to include those whose refusal to be vaccinated are rooted in moral considerations or other objections of conscience. A religious, moral or other exemption of conscience should be ascertained not by documents, but by a simple conversation seeking only to establish that the individual has a sincerely held, reasonable belief that they should not receive the vaccine. This would be in accord with the teaching of Pope Francis, who has said, “The conscience is the interior place for listening to the truth, to goodness, for listening to God; it is the inner place of my relationship with Him, the One who speaks to my heart and helps me to discern, to understand the way I must take and, once the decision is made, to go forward, to stay faithful.”*

When I receive Bishop Paprocki’s official response regarding the request for a “religious exemption”, I will forward it to you. This response is expected early next week.

In the meantime, you are welcome to contact me (sjanoski@dio.org) to set up a time to discuss any requests you may have for such an exemption.

May God continue to bless us as we make important decisions regarding our personal and communal health.

Fr. Steven Janoski
Pastor