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Dear Brothers:

Making moral choices in a fallen world means sorting complex realities almost always marked by both good and evil. While there has been much discussion about the morality of receiving any of the available Covid-19 vaccines, which remain in short supply, the teaching of the Church makes it clear: **When their turn comes, Catholics can receive whatever vaccine is offered to them with a clear conscience.**

To help guide pastors in this matter, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued the document [“Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines”](#) on December 21, 2020. Subsequently, at the instruction of the Holy Father, the Vatican Commission for Covid-19 and the Pontifical Academy for Life published a joint statement that addressed three specific issues related to the use of now available vaccines. These documents can be found at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/29/0697/01628.html#otaing>.

The first issue deals with the use of “biological material” obtained from cell lines of aborted fetuses. Based on earlier documents such as the 2008 instruction *Dignitas Personae*, the Pontifical Academy for Life, in 2017, ruled out any morally relevant cooperation between the use of these vaccines and voluntary abortion, stating: “Hence, we believe that all clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion.” In 2020, the Academy, citing the CDF’s 2020 note, observes: “This is a matter of material passive cooperation (as opposed to formal cooperation), since it is indirect and remote, particularly given the intention underlying the decision, the contingency with respect to the accused immoral event, and the current circumstances in which we find ourselves.” **In a word, we should not place any burden on our people that goes beyond this teaching and they should be advised that they can use any of the vaccines presently available to us, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, with a clear conscience.**

This conclusion is deepened by two additional critical points that the Academy underscores in its analysis. The first is “the moral responsibility of undergoing vaccination... (as) this issue also involves the relationship between personal health and public health, showing their close interdependence. In the light of this connection, we consider it important that a responsible decision be taken in this regard, since refusal of the vaccine may also constitute a risk to others. ... For this reason, such refusal could seriously increase the risks for public health. In fact, on the one hand, those categories of people who cannot be vaccinated (e.g. immunosuppressed) and who can thus only rely on other people’s vaccination coverage (and herd immunity) to avoid the risk of infection, would be more exposed. On the other hand, becoming ill leads to an increase in

hospitalizations, with subsequent overload for health systems, up to a possible collapse, as has happened in various countries during this pandemic. This hinders access to health care which, once again, affects those who have fewer resources.” **In sum, people should be encouraged to take seriously their moral responsibility to be vaccinated in view of the connection between their personal health and the public health.**

The final ethical issue addressed in the joint statement has to do with universal accessibility of vaccines. “That some countries receive the vaccine late due to prior large-scale purchase by richer states must be avoided.” Citing the CDF’s Note, the Academy’s joint document states that there is “a moral imperative for the pharmaceutical industry, for governments and international organizations, to guarantee that effective, safe and ethically acceptable vaccines are made available in the poorest countries, in a manner that is not burdensome for them.” **We should not fail to advocate for universal accessibility of vaccines as an important ethical issue in our teaching and preaching during the pandemic.**

All of these considerations must be taken seriously, not only by individual Catholics as they make important decisions that affect themselves, their loved ones and neighbors, but also as the Church’s leadership offers guidance to the faithful and advocates for ethical public policies. This is surely the intent of the Resource Kit released this evening by the Dicastery for Human Development on their website <https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/news/2021/covid-19-resource-kit-for-church-leaders-now-online.html>. Also attached to this letter is the pdf format of that Kit.

Let me close by acknowledging that we all continue to suffer under the stress of the pandemic and there are reasons to believe that we are far from being clear of the danger, as many are still being infected and are dying each day. I am sensitive to the particular challenges you face in your pastoral settings. My hope is that these remarks assist you as you pastor the people under your care, relying on the wisdom the Church has to offer.

You continue to be in my prayers, and I ask for your own for me.

Sincerely yours,



Archbishop of Chicago