



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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WISCONSIN BISHOPS ADDRESS COVID-19 VACCINE CONCERNS

Wisconsin's Catholic bishops have issued a statement that addresses moral considerations regarding newly-developed COVID-19 vaccines. In their letter, the bishops acknowledged the devastating impact of coronavirus infections worldwide, but also lauded the efforts of nations and organizations to develop safe vaccines that will effectively diminish the impact of the virus.

While the promise of inoculation provides hope for the end of the current pandemic, the bishops indicated that many Catholics have raised moral questions about receiving vaccinations, especially the use of vaccines that utilize cell lines from aborted children in development and production. There are also questions surrounding the right of conscience and the duty of all Catholics to advance the common good.

The bishops affirm that the use of cell lines from aborted children is “a significant moral dilemma, since a good end can never justify an evil means. Abortion is gravely wrong and every Christian must avoid participation in this evil.”

The bishops continue:

The two earliest COVID-19 vaccines, manufactured by Pfizer and Moderna, fortunately do not use a cell line derived from an abortion in their manufacturing. During their testing, however, they did make use of abortion-derived cell lines. Potential vaccines from other companies make use of aborted cell lines both in testing and manufacturing, thus increasing the moral dilemma.

The statement continues with a reflection on Catholic moral theology and the distinction between formal and material cooperation in an act which is morally compromised.

Formal cooperation with a moral evil such as abortion is always sinful. An example of this kind of cooperation might be the doctor or nurse who directly assists with, and intends, the abortion itself. Material cooperation can be different in that it does not intend the evil act and is often more distant or remote from the act itself.

In accord with this teaching, the Holy See's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have stated that the use of current COVID-19 vaccines is morally permissible because of the remoteness of material cooperation to an evil act, abortion. However, if a choice of vaccine is possible, Catholics

should request the least morally compromised available. If there is no choice, the Church teaches that it is morally permissible to receive the current approved COVID-19 vaccines.

There will be those who in good conscience do not wish to be vaccinated at this time for any number of reasons and the bishops urge that those who do not wish to be vaccinated be treated with respect. However, those who forgo vaccination must also do all in their power to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ensure that they do not directly endanger the lives of others.

Wisconsin's bishops also reiterated that Catholics have a responsibility to promote the common good in society, act in solidarity with our neighbor, and protect human life. They urged reflection, prayer, and the formation of conscience in determining how best to fulfill this responsibility and affirmed that vaccination is one means of demonstrating love of our neighbor.

Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) Executive Director, Kim Vercauteren, noted that the bishops are very concerned about those who are medically vulnerable and their ability to get vaccinated. Full vaccination is provided through two doses administered with a several week gap in between doses. Vercauteren emphasized the importance of access to vaccination, "those most in need of vaccination should be provided with the means and opportunity to overcome any logistical or economic challenges in receiving the necessary doses."

The Wisconsin bishops stressed the need to advocate for the development of vaccines that have no connection to abortion. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference has developed a "COVID-19 Vaccines: Frequently Asked Questions" document to accompany the bishops letter, which includes a number of suggestions on how Catholics can urge against the continued use of abortion-derived cell lines in vaccine production and instead seek ethical alternatives.

Catholics are encouraged to learn more using the resources referenced in the bishops statement and the WCC's frequently asked questions. Both are available at wisconsinatholic.org.

The bishops conclude their letter by asking all to join in prayer for the end of the current pandemic and with the hope that this shared experience leads to a greater closeness with God.

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For more information, contact Kim Vercauteren at 608-257-0004. A copy of the [Bishops Letter](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) are attached.