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Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination

Dear Clergy, Religious, and Lay Faithful of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon:

Our world, our nation and our local community continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the numbers of those hospitalized and in intensive care in our province has increased in recent weeks, putting strain upon our entire health system. In the face of this challenging and unprecedented situation, I assure you all of my deep concern and my prayers. I ask you to join me in praying for those who have died during this time of pandemic and for those who grieve for them, for all those who are ill with the coronavirus and all those who care for them, and for our government and health leaders who make decisions about the safety of our community.

In response to increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases, public health measures recently announced in Saskatchewan include mandatory masking in public places as of Sept. 17, 2021, and a “proof of vaccination or negative test” policy for access to a list of establishments, businesses and events as of October 1, 2021. In addition, a range of government, health care, education and social services agencies, as well as businesses and corporations, have also increasingly started to require “proof of vaccination or negative test” as a condition of employment.

I am grateful that places of worship are exempt from requiring proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test. At the same time, I have been and I remain fully committed to implementing all of the protective measures established by the Saskatchewan Health Authority and the Government of Saskatchewan to protect the vulnerable and stop the spread of the coronavirus. In all of this, I strongly echo Pope Francis in encouraging everyone eligible – including clergy and diocesan employees – to be vaccinated as an act of love of neighbour. At the same time, Catholic teaching holds that such medical decisions must be voluntary, according to individual conscience, and the diocese will not take steps to force or compel anyone to be vaccinated.

The recent implementation of “proof of vaccination or negative test” policy has resulted in requests to the diocese and our parishes from some members of the faithful, asking for “letters of exemption” from mandatory vaccination, based on religious belief.

While I respect the freedom of a person's individual conscience, as our Church teaches, the diocese and its ministers cannot objectively attest or endorse a person's process of discernment in coming to their decision or their exercising of conscience. Therefore, the diocese and our parishes will not be issuing letters of exemption from vaccination based on religious belief.

As stated by my many of my brother bishops across Canada and in communion with the Holy Father, it is morally permissible to receive a vaccine approved for use in Canada against COVID-19, and while there are many possible reasons for one to struggle in their conscience with such a vaccine being mandatory, the diocese will not take the position or role of endorsing an individual's conscience and decision.

It can be an act of love to undergo COVID-19 vaccination in view of protecting the lives of others, and in response to a public health crisis bringing about mental, emotional and economic stress to so many. At the same time, provisions for reasonable accommodation that respects and promotes the dignity of the individual conscience and the decision of conscientious objection must continue to be part of vaccination mandates. However, individuals must do their utmost to ensure that they take all precautionary measures possible to avoid places and circumstances where they and others would be vulnerable. This is everyone's moral responsibility.

In all of this, I urge everyone to exercise charity towards others regarding COVID-19 vaccination mandates and personal decisions about vaccination, and to avoid the polarization of those we disagree with, which unfortunately has become an increasing feature of our social contexts. Let us go forward above all in charity and care for our sisters and brothers.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten our minds and hearts, and give us wisdom, courage and a spirit of love and charity, as we continue to deal with this global pandemic, and strive to protect.

Yours in Christ,



✠ Most Reverend Mark A. Hagemoen

(You can find more resources regarding the questions surrounding COVID-19 vaccines on our website: <https://rcdos.ca/2021/02/02/vaccine-information/>)