



Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon
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Commemoration of All the
Faithful Departed

**UPDATE RE: ONGOING CONCERNS ABOUT THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC AND GOVERNMENT MANDATES**

**Dear Clergy, Religious, Lay Faithful – Sisters and Brothers of the
Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon:**

The occasion of the recent vote of the Saskatoon City Council regarding a proposed bylaw limiting gathering sizes to fight COVID-19, brings me to address the following message.

I begin by indicating my support in principle for the important and difficult service and leadership that our provincial and local political leaders provide for the citizens of our province and our city. Our Premier, Scott Moe, and Saskatoon's Mayor, Charlie Clark – are both the legitimate civic authorities that direct and oversee the pertinent civil affairs of our province and local civic community. During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, government responsibilities have been very much expanded as our country and world is dealing with an extraordinary state of affairs.

The pandemic is causing so much disruption, difficulty, suffering, and confusion. It is also the cause of much division and even acrimony within our communities, including our parish communities and our families! It is indeed a sorrowful state of affairs when our Catholic Christian community is torn apart as, “the gates of Hades” attempt to prevail against it.¹ In such a crisis it is even more incumbent on the Church to pray and work towards the marks of our Catholic faith – we are *One, Holy, Catholic, & Apostolic* community, and we trust in the Saviour of the World during times when the Evil One seeks to tear apart the Body of Christ. This is perhaps the most polarizing situation I have seen in my life – this may be the case for most of you as well. Examples of issues include:

- Care of other people's and one's own health and well -being;
- The role and respect for the exercise of conscience, as this relates to freely choosing medical interventions, including vaccination;
- Dealing with the real crisis and threat to seniors and other health compromised and vulnerable persons to the risks of the effects of infection;
- The disruption of many wide ranging and needed health services because of the increased burden on our hospitals and health care providers as they care for those with COVID-19;

¹ see Mathew 16:18.

- The disruption to people’s families, jobs and livelihoods, and their normal expressions of freedom of movement and association;
- The trust of legitimate civic authority, and the place of citizens, the role of all community institutions in this, including faith—based organizations (including my own); and
- The respect and trust in science, and its important contribution to the health, safety, and well-being of all citizens.

I have now been in Saskatchewan for four years after leaving my appointment in the Northwest Territories. I have found that the people of Saskatchewan do all they can to strive to respect and help others – all while holding strong and principled positions about a range of social, political, and ethical issues. I find that there is a general attitude of support for medical solutions, including vaccines, that will protect one’s self and others from getting the virus – which can greatly impact especially the elderly and health compromised.

As a Catholic bishop, I point out that our statement of faith and religious belief holds strongly the support for the legitimate civic authority in the service of the common good and the good of all persons of our country. ²

I also acknowledge a concern that is growing for many of you during this pandemic. The vaccine mandates for the general population are becoming severe and perhaps ethically questionable in our current circumstances – at least as these relate to environments outside of health care facilities. As many of you cite, it is a long-standing principle in the Catholic faith tradition - and in similar religious and other ethical and social teachings - that free and informed consent is required for all medical interventions. While the expression and exercise of conscience is not an absolute and isolated moral principle, it is an important feature of the principle of the Dignity of the Human Person in upholding the principle of the Common Good: the expression of personal freedoms are in a healthy tension with the right of others to health, dignity, and respect.

I pray that our governments will always be careful that wide-spread mandates re: vaccination will take into account this important albeit difficult tension. This includes navigating carefully the issue of ‘exemptions.’ On this point, I am not speaking about ‘religious exemptions’ but the fundamental exemption that comes from the personal right to a person’s choice to not be forced to assent to a medical intervention.

Furthermore, the exercise of this right to refuse a medical intervention should not then be set up to be scrutinized by members of the public who are called upon to ‘watch’ and ‘report’ the personal, social, or other affairs of fellow citizens to the authorities if they think they have broken a by-law or other social ordinance.

I acknowledge that there must be a very, very good reason to compel a person against their will to undergo a medical procedure. This is a topic of difficult and careful discernment by ethicists in various health, educational, and other society contexts dedicated to the health and welfare of all citizens.

² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

#1897 to #1927 re: *Participation in Social Life: Authority; The Common Good; Responsibility and Participation*;

#2234 to #2240 re: *Duties of Civil Authorities; Duties of Citizens*;

#2106 to #2107: *The Social Duty of Religion and Right to Act in Accord with Conscience*

I also again acknowledge the great concern that Catholics should not be prevented from attending religious services, including the Mass or receiving the other Sacraments, even if they decide to reject vaccination. Other faith leaders would uphold similar concerns for participation in their religious services and observances. I am grateful that so far, our local and provincial governments have basically recognized this very important issue, and are striving to uphold this principle when dealing with directives during the more critical times of rising infection rates.

I also join with all of you in acknowledging the great concern that people are losing their jobs and livelihoods and are making dramatic changes to their own lives and that of their families during this difficult crisis – including those who choose not to be vaccinated. This includes the many persons across our city and province who work in our many health care facilities, for whom no provision is made for loss of job, even after the pandemic is ended. For example, I am hearing that many persons are even forced to relocate from Saskatoon, because the loss of work means the loss of the ability to financially and functionally sustain themselves in a what is generally a relatively affordable prairie city.

I again confirm my full support - as the bishop of this diocese, and as a religious leader in the Province of Saskatchewan - to carry out government health directives to mitigate the spread of infection, and to safeguard the elderly and other health-compromised persons. I also state that I am vaccinated, and I support the development and use of ethically-produced vaccines to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases.

Let us all join together in prayer and renewed commitment to fulfilling the call to be Christ-like and to live and act as members of His Body. This call is all the more critical during this time of great trial for us all. Let us also persevere in prayer for the legitimate government authorities who are tasked with carrying out their entrusted and important responsibilities to the general public and all citizens, as we navigate this difficult crisis, and work towards coming through this as healthy and intact human community.

I continue to 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 and care for all.

Sincerely in Christ,



✠ Mark A. Hagemoen

Cc: Scott Moe, Premier of Saskatchewan
Charlie Clark, Mayor of Saskatoon