



## CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WICHITA

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*Office of the Bishop*

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past several weeks, many of my brother bishops have shared their thoughts regarding the Covid-19 crisis we face in the world today and the response we are called to make as faithful Catholics. By means of this pastoral letter, I would like to share my own reflections on this important subject. I do so, knowing full well that some may disagree with my words, while others will welcome them. I only ask that you receive these words with charity and docility. I hope they will help you to form your conscience as you make important decisions regarding your health and that of those under your authority.

First, let me encourage you to remain steadfast in your prayers for an end to this pandemic. We can never underestimate the power of prayer as we seek the divine assistance of God to dispel this evil from our world. I also encourage you to keep praying the Holy Rosary, which I am confident is a spiritual weapon well suited for this moment of crisis. Our Blessed Mother is close to us, as a mother is always close to her suffering children. I pray that through her intercession, God will bring us out of this current darkness. I also want to encourage us to pray for the sick, those who care for them and for those who have died from this virus. May God help to sustain the sick, all health care providers and may He grant eternal rest to the dead and comfort to those left behind.

Friends, this virus has not only caused much sickness and in some cases death, but it is also causing much division in our relationships within families, parishes and communities. It is a sad and tragic reality. How then are we as faithful Catholics to respond when it comes to the means by which we are able to protect ourselves, others around us and to do our part in

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reducing the spread of this potentially deadly virus? And how can we do this with the intention of building one another up, instead of tearing others down? In all times but especially in times of crisis, we Christians must be known for our love of God and neighbor.

Like you, I too have had to discern what means I would take to do my part in this crisis. After considering the teachings of the church on conscience and the common good, and after reading the *Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines*, published in December of 2020 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the document by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled *Moral Considerations Regarding The New COVID-19 Vaccines*, both of which I highly encourage you to read and study, I determined that receiving the vaccine was the best option for me. I am grateful that the Church's teaching clearly states that we can receive these vaccines in good conscience, even though they have more or less been developed and/or tested in an unethical way. Like you, I lament that these vaccines have a connection, even if remote, to the unspeakable evil of abortion. I join the growing number of pro-life people insisting on more ethically developed vaccines. Nevertheless, the Church in her moral analysis of this matter, deems it permissible to receive these vaccines.

Because of that determination, I decided in good conscience that the Pfizer vaccine was the best choice for me, in support of my own health and the desire to continue my ministry uninhibited as bishop as well as in support of the health and well-being of the many with whom I work or have contact. I received this vaccine in January and February of this year and plan to receive the booster as soon as I am able. Happily, I had little side effects from the vaccine and believe it has kept me healthy and able to work. I am confident it has kept others safer in my presence. **Therefore, I want to encourage you to get vaccinated or at the very least to give serious consideration to it, unless you have a medical reason prohibiting you from receiving a vaccine.** At the moment, it is the best weapon we have to fight this virus, to help us continue our mission, to gather safely for the Mass and other sacraments, to keep people working, to keep children in school and to help us overcome the many other challenges Covid-19 has caused in our

society. Pope Francis has stated that he considers getting the vaccine an act of love. I share that same sentiment.

Having said this, however, I acknowledge that some have serious personal objections to the vaccines and are of the mind that they cannot in good conscience take it. While there is no religious teaching of our tradition that opposes vaccinations, the Church teaches that one cannot act contrary to one's conscience. In section 1782 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it states, "Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience." The following of one's sincerely formed conscience is also part of supporting the common good, but one who does so must also weigh the consequences of those decisions and be prepared to accept them, consequences that necessarily require them to utilize other means to do their part in reducing the spread of this contagious virus. **I therefore also stand in support of those who in freedom oppose one or another of these vaccines based on a well-formed conscience.**

We should all therefore respect each person's right to make decisions about their health and that of their children and others under their authority. Shaming, criticizing, and ostracizing others for these decisions is not Christian and should be stopped immediately. Instead, we should respond to others with love and support. Ours is not to pass judgment on those who have judged and chosen differently in regard to these vaccines. St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 said, "Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do." Let this admonition be our moral compass in this and all things.

As for our gatherings at the Mass, and other liturgical prayers, etc. I have communicated to our pastors that they remind you, as I am doing now, that if you are sick, you are excused from the Sunday celebration of the Mass during your illness and that if you feel particularly vulnerable, you may request from our priests a personal dispensation from attending the Sunday celebration of the Mass, that masks remain encouraged, but optional, that we continue to offer Holy Communion only under the form of the Eucharistic Bread, and that the exchange of the sign of peace be discontinued indefinitely. It is my hope that these means will give each of you the



confidence you need to gather safely in our churches and chapels. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

Some parents in our Catholic Schools are expressing concerns about masks. Some are demanding a mask mandate, while others are adamantly opposed. This presents a very challenging scenario for school leadership. Superintendent Janet Eaton and her team of advisors are carefully monitoring this situation, which is changing daily. Mrs. Eaton keeps me well informed. I have complete confidence in her leadership. I ask that you cooperate with our School Office and each of our pastors and principals in responding in the most appropriate way to questions regarding the safety of our children.

My friends, we in leadership are trying to do our very best to respond to the many challenges this current crisis is presenting. Please know of my daily thoughts and prayers for each of you and your families. Please strive for unity in our diocesan family, resisting all temptations from the evil one to divide and conquer us. Most of all, do not lose hope that we will get through this together and emerge from it a stronger and holier community of faith on mission for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you. May God bless you!

*+ Carl A. Kemme*

Bishop Carl Kemme