



Office of the Bishop

August 11, 2021

My Dear Brother Priest:

During the past week, several pastors have written to me about requests which they have received from individual parishioners asking them to sign a declaration written by the Colorado Catholic Conference on the issue of vaccinations and Catholic teaching.

The purpose of this declaration seems to be to elicit from the pastor a public indication that a specific parishioner's decision to refuse the COVID vaccine is rooted in and supported by authentic Catholic faith.

Such a declaration is particularly problematic because the Holy See has made it clear that receiving the Covid vaccine is perfectly consistent with Catholic faith, and indeed laudatory in the light of the common good in this time of pandemic.

Thus the pastor is being asked not to endorse what the Church does teach on this question, but rather what individuals might discern as their chosen pathway even when that pathway is built upon a rejection of the Church's objective teaching on the morality of the Covid vaccines.

In addition, since the declaration focuses its moral analysis so exclusively on the rights of the individual to his or her choice and personal benefit in society, rather than balancing those realities with the pursuit of the common good in a time of pandemic, it presents a radically incomplete picture of Catholic teaching on the complex but vital question of how to balance individual rights with the public health of all in this terrible moment of rising sickness.

My greatest worry is that signing this declaration thrusts our priests into the impossible position of asserting that "the Catholic Church's teachings may lead individual Catholics... to decline certain vaccines" when those priests recognize that Catholic teaching proclaims just the opposite.

For all these reasons, I ask that you not venture down this pathway that merges personal choice with doctrinal authenticity, and to caringly decline such requests from your parishioners to sign the Colorado statement or other public declarations concerning the actions of specific individuals rejecting vaccine mandates on religious grounds

In gratitude for the pastoral dedication and sensitivity that you have demonstrated throughout this time of pandemic, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy  
Bishop of San Diego