

MEMORANDUM



To: All Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Rockville Centre
From: Lisa Honkanen, M.D., Director of the Office of Human Life, Family & Bioethics
Re: Moral Questions Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines
Date: December 15, 2020

As the first doses of the new COVID-19 vaccines, authorized by the FDA for emergency use, have begun to be administered to people in our country, a number of questions have arisen regarding the morality of accepting the new vaccines based on the link to abortion in their development and production.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has released a memorandum, entitled *Moral Considerations Regarding the New COVID-19 Vaccines*. This document was authored by Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades, Chairman, Committee on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities. A copy is attached to this memo, and the original may be found at www.usccb.org/moral-considerations-covid-vaccines.

In addition, the National Catholic Bioethics Center has released its own memorandum, entitled *Points to Consider on the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines*. A copy of this memo is also attached, and the original may be found at www.ncbcenter.org.

This memorandum is meant to give a very simple and general explanation of the morality of using the new COVID-19 vaccines regarding their remote connection to abortion. This memo does not address the personal decision of an individual as to whether to be vaccinated or not. For a more comprehensive Catholic moral analysis of the use of the new vaccines, we encourage you to read both memoranda from the USCCB and the NCBC, as well as going to the website of the Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics of the Diocese of Rockville Centre for more information which will be updated periodically: www.respectlife.drvc.org.

Ideally, a vaccine will have no connection at any stage of development or production with the use of cell lines initially derived from an aborted fetus. Unfortunately, none of the three COVID-19 vaccines that will be ready for distribution to the public, either immediately or in the very near future, meets this criterion. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, using mRNA technology, do NOT use morally compromised cell lines in the design, development, or production of the vaccine. A confirmatory test, however, employing a cell line connected to abortion was performed on both these vaccines. Thus, while neither vaccine is completely free from any connection to abortion, in this case the connection to the initial evil of abortion is very remote and finite. In contrast, the AstraZeneca vaccine, using viral vector technology, is more morally compromised because it relies on a cell line produced from a past abortion in the design, development and production stages of that vaccine as well as in a confirmatory test. Therefore, its connection to abortion, albeit remote, is both greater and on-going.

Consequently, on moral grounds related to their connection to the evil of abortion, it is recommended that, of the alternatives available in the very near future, the **Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are preferred to the AstraZeneca vaccine.**

Both the USCCB memo and the NCBC memo concur that, *for grave reasons, it can be morally permissible for Catholics to receive a vaccine remotely connected to the evil of abortion if there are no reasonable alternatives available and they make known their objection to the use of morally compromised cell lines.* Indeed, vaccination under these circumstances may be viewed as an act of self-love and charity towards one's neighbor in limiting a serious infectious disease. However, it should be noted that there is no moral obligation to vaccinate.