



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics



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Dear Friends for Life,

Welcome back—to the newsletter, to a new school year, to workplaces—and many new challenges.

First, I wish to extend a heartfelt *thank you* to everyone who participated in some way with our first celebration of **World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly**. Although we did not have a lot of time to prepare, many parishes rose to the occasion and recognized the treasure of our grandparents and seniors and their relationships with family and community. It was inspiring to see the outpouring of love in the hundreds and hundreds of gift bags, the many pictures of families sharing their Catholic Faith, and the comments we received about the resources on the accompanying microsite: www.catholicgenerations.com. Over the course of the year, I hope you will visit here regularly for ways to connect the generations and grow in faith and holiness. We look forward to expanding these activities for next July and welcome your ideas (and help!).

VACCINE DUTIES

Although there is a restlessness to return to pre-pandemic times, there is, unfortunately, little, if any, resemblance to normalcy. As COVID-19 vaccines have come on the horizon, so too, have many questions about the science, bioethics, civil liberties, conscience, common good, etc. Most disheartening is the discord that has erupted—in the name of charity, so many have become uncharitable! And that goes on either side of any of these debates, no matter the topic. In this, it is important to remember that **the Catholic Church permits but does not oblige one to receive the COVID-19 vaccines** currently available (that is because of the perceived gravity of a pandemic and that there are no morally irreproachable vaccine options). Conversely, it is equally important to remember that **the Catholic Church permits but does not oblige one to decline the COVID-19 vaccines**. It is through a thorough consideration of one's own circumstances with a well-formed conscience (and with one's medical

practitioner) that an individual determines the course of action for his or her own particular situation. It is his conscience, guided by religious principles, that determines this decision.

In addition, there are two often forgotten aspects of each of these positions.

1. If one **receives** the vaccine in good conscience, there is a moral obligation to express objection to the vaccine manufacturers regarding the methods of testing, development and/or production of the vaccines which used cell lines derived from aborted human fetal tissue. This may be accomplished with template letters you can find [here](#).
2. If one **declines** the vaccine in good conscience, there is a moral duty to take appropriate measures to protect others and this may include inconvenient accommodations such as testing or modified roles at school or work. (It is duly noted that with imperfect vaccine effectiveness, precautionary measures should be followed by everyone.)

In a world of soundbites, general impatience, and a superficial grasp of convenient facts (which are not necessarily accurate or comprehensive), true charity calls us to listen to the other with kindness, understanding, and humility. We likewise have a duty to research beyond the pre-packaged information and go deeper to learn authentic Church teaching about the bioethics of vaccines. Because vaccines produced with morally compromised cell lines are morally permissible under certain circumstances and because they are, at the same time, not morally obligatory, we must respect the decisions of others and we should be able to expect that our decisions likewise will be respected.

The heated debate, however, extends beyond individuals, friends, and family circles. With regulatory mandates introduced on an almost weekly basis, there is a new hostility in the workplace, schools and even in private business establishments. Pursuing the common good is noble, but mandates raise many [concerns](#). Issues related to the imposition, enforcement, etc. of such policies are rapidly evolving, but again, civility and respect are imperative for everyone.

VACCINE MANDATES & EXEMPTIONS

I cannot and do not offer any legal advice here, but hope I can clarify some recent concerns about the process through which many are seeking a “religious exemption” from COVID-19 vaccination mandates. It is reasonable that for many people, their first stop would be their parish. However, such an exemption is granted by the one imposing or enforcing the requirement, not the Church. Instead, in requesting a religious exemption from an employer or school, the employee or student should prepare the request and could provide supporting documentation about Church teaching on vaccines which may be helpful in explaining how one arrived at a conscientious objection to the vaccine. But a letter from the Church is not a “[religious exemption](#),” and experts in the field will tell you it is [not constitutional](#) to require a person applying for an exemption to provide a letter signed by a religious leader. (In fact, one can be granted a religious exemption without belonging to an organized religion.)

Moreover, there is not a Catholic religious exemption to the COVID-19 vaccine because the Church does not categorically condemn vaccines—including the COVID-19 vaccine. In fact, to promote the common good, many endorse COVID-19 vaccination, albeit under protest for its remote connection to abortion. Since the Church allows latitude for the decision to vaccinate or not based on one’s conscience-driven consideration, there is not a general Catholic religious exemption as there would be in the hypothetical

case of a policy that required a woman to have an abortion before returning to work. Since procured abortion is an intrinsic evil condemned by the Catholic Church in all circumstances (i.e. there is no latitude for personal, conscience-driven consideration),¹ no Catholic under any circumstances could comply with this policy. In contrast, under certain circumstances, the COVID-19 vaccination may be morally permissible and so some Catholics may be able to comply with a policy for mandatory vaccination while others may not (based on their conscience, not religious dictate). Therefore, in this case, it is most appropriate for an individual to articulate his own request for a “religious exemption,” since this is more accurately a matter of personal conscience not religious obligation.

The [National Catholic Bioethics Center](#) is a reliable resource for presenting authentic Catholic teaching on these vaccine issues and provides excellent information to assist you in pursuing a religious exemption. You may also refer to our [vaccine microsite](#) for updates. If we can be of further help to you, do not hesitate to contact our office, but please understand we cannot provide legal advice, medical advice, or a Catholic religious exemption letter.

NEW ATTACKS ON LIFE IN THE WOMB

Attacks on life in the womb are also intensifying. On September 1, Texas’ new Heartbeat Act took effect. By banning abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected, it essentially prohibits abortions after six weeks in the hopes of saving many innocent lives. At the same time, though, it has emboldened abortion advocates. On the federal level, on September 2, [Nancy Pelosi](#) promised to **codify Roe v. Wade** upon Congress’ return to session. Here in New York, the new governor, [Kathy Hochul](#), outlined an aggressive plan to **reinforce the deplorable Reproductive Health Act** enacted in 2019. With her agenda, we should expect state agencies to be promoting abortion “rights” through imbalanced information campaigns and a “Patient Bill of Rights”—utterly disregarding not only abortion’s murderous outcome, but also the long-lasting damage it inflicts on women (physically and emotionally), their families, our society, and our culture. In addition, she intends to facilitate telehealth access to medical abortions which raises many concerns. And finally, she has requested Facebook to censor on-line information unfavorable to these aforementioned goals.

The **Hyde Amendment** is also still at risk. It is not too late to sign the petition to preserve the Hyde Amendment at www.Not taxpayerabortion.com. Please share this with friends and families.

The partisan “**human infrastructure**” bill proposed in Congress, could pass through “budget reconciliation” with a simple majority vote. Although it includes programs that affirm the dignity of human life, there is significant concern that Hyde protections will not apply, so that our tax dollars will pay for abortions that could be included in plans for expanded health care coverage. The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA is a grassroots partner of the USCCB) has composed a [letter](#) that you can send to our senators and your congressional representative. Please refer friends and families to this initiative, too.

¹ The COVID-19 vaccine’s connection to abortion is remote—recipients of the vaccine did not have any role in procuring the abortion nor any choice in using the cell lines derived from aborted human fetal tissue, which is different than the hypothetical situation used for illustration here in which a woman would be required to *directly procure* an abortion to continue employment.

THE MIRACLE OF LIFE (FROM CONCEPTION TO BIRTH)

Too often someone will say he or she doesn't *believe* that human life begins at "conception." But this is incredibly oblivious to the irrefutable science. From the first cell, the DNA present attests to its complete humanity (even if not visually recognizable) and the course of the next nine months proves it is indeed exploding with life! This is a unique, unrepeatable, priceless human being, an innocent life most worthy of all our protection: within the mother's womb, within the family, and within our society. As we approach October, Respect Life Month, (and as we face these political attacks on the culture of life) it is particularly relevant to keep this in the forefront of our minds.

A few years ago, a most captivating video simulation chronicling the development of the human form was produced by Alexander Tsiaras, "From Conception to Birth." You can see the video [here](#). (Parental supervision for explanation to children is advised.) Note that in the first two minutes, the producer marvels at the incomprehensible intricacies of development all included in that very first cell. He concludes that such extraordinary work could only be accomplished by a Divine Creator. Agreed! But you be the judge and watch the video. As for skeptics, I wonder at what point they can say definitively that this is *not* a human life....

UPCOMING RESPECT LIFE MONTH ACTIVITIES

October is bursting with opportunities to Respect Life!

40 Days For Life campaigns are beginning in Hempstead, Patchogue, Smithtown, and West Islip with kick-off events this weekend. Please consider committing an hour of prayerful witness every week if you can—or whatever you have to give—it **could save a life from abortion and a lifetime from regret!** Daily vigils run from **September 22 to October 31** (please check the schedule for a particular site). For more information see our [website](#).

Please note, it is really helpful to the site organizers and for inspiring others for you to **sign up** officially through the convenient websites:

www.40daysforlife.com/Hempstead

www.40daysforlife.com/Patchogue

www.40daysforlife.com/Smithtown

www.40daysforlife.com/Westislip

Know that your **presence** at any of these sites is **powerful!!!**

Stand Up For Life is Sunday, October 3. This is another excellent opportunity for prayerful witness. You can find more information [here](#).

The **National Catholic Bioethics Center seminar** is October 22-23. Consider joining us this year. [Registration](#) is now open at the NCBC website. You can read about last year's seminar in the The Long Island Catholic [October 2020 issue](#) ("Bioethics Comes to DRVC," page 8).

Remember **October 3, 2020 is Respect Life Sunday**. Please give generously to support the work of the Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics and your parish ministry so that together, we may build a civilization of love and life.

Please pray for the success of our **Project Rachel** expansion, with the first Spanish retreat for women in October. (Registration is closed.)

As we schedule more events for the coming month (e.g. upcoming **Womens' Health webinar** dates to be determined), we will post these on our website, so please stay tuned!

In these trying times, it is clear that prayer is our most effective weapon against the evils attacking both life in the flesh and our immortal souls. So let us invoke St. Michael, whose feast day we celebrate on September 29, with a special fervor in this coming month. St. Michael, pray for us!

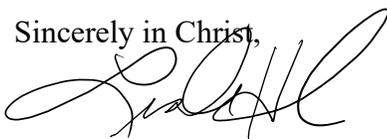
Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle.

Be our safeguard against the
wickedness and snares of the Devil.

May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts,
by the power of God, thrust into Hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits who prowl about
the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Sincerely in Christ,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.