



**NEWS**

# Colorado bishops issue religious exemption letter for COVID shots, urging people to 'follow their conscience'

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'We are convicted that the government should not impose medical interventions on an individual or group of persons.'



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*LifeSiteNews has produced an extensive COVID-19 vaccines resources page. [View it here.](#)*

DENVER ([LifeSiteNews](#)) – Colorado’s Catholic bishops released a religious exemption letter template from the COVID-19 experimental injections for Catholics, with the bishops stating that they “continue to support religious exemptions from any and all vaccine mandates.”

The August 5 [letter](#), signed by Denver’s Archbishop Samuel Aquila, along with Bishops Stephen Berg of Pueblo and James Golka of Colorado Springs and Auxiliary Bishop Jorge Rodriguez of Denver, opened by repeating the Colorado hierarchy’s previous statements that “the use of some COVID-19 vaccines is morally acceptable under certain circumstances.” However, the bishops swiftly added that they were aware and “understand” that many people decide not to get the injections based on “well-founded convictions.”

The letter comes after Denver mayor Michael Hancock declared August 2 that “all city employees” along with private-sector employees in “high risk settings” would be subject to mandatory vaccination by September 30. The order affects more than 10,000 individuals and comes despite Hancock admitting that around 70% of those eligible had taken the injection.

However, the [order](#) granted room for those who held medical or religious exemptions from the vaccine. “Employers shall provide reasonable accommodations for any personnel who have medical or religious exemptions from the COVID19 vaccination.”

The bishops welcomed this latter phrase, warning people to “remain vigilant when any bureaucracy seeks to impose uniform and sweeping requirements on a group of people in areas of personal conscience.”

“In the case of the COVID-19 vaccine, we are convicted that the government should not impose medical interventions on an individual or group of persons,” wrote the clergy, referencing the many “human rights violations and a loss of respect for each person’s God-given dignity,” which historically accompanied mandates that ignored the freedom of conscience.

Continuing, the letter provided a brief summary of the moral advice being given regarding the [abortion tainted COVID-19 injections](#), a summary that the bishops said could lead a Catholic to judge it either “right or wrong to receive certain vaccines for a variety of reasons, and there is no Church law or rule that obligates a Catholic to receive a vaccine — including COVID-19 vaccines.”

Describing the COVID-19 injection as “a deeply personal issue,” the bishops urged Catholics to “follow their conscience,” adding that if they discerned not to take the injection, they “should not be penalized for doing so.”

### **Religious exemption letter template**

The letter is an explanation of “how the Catholic Church’s teachings may lead individual Catholics ... to decline certain vaccines.”

This moral teaching of the Catholic Church holds that “a person may be required to refuse a medical intervention, including a vaccination, if his or her conscience comes to this judgment.”

Referring to recent documents and statements from the Vatican, the Pontifical Academy for Life, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the modern catechism, the bishops recalled that vaccination itself must be voluntary.

Furthermore, they noted the “moral duty” to refuse “medical products, including certain vaccines, that are created using human cells lines derived from abortion.” Drawing on moral arguments made by recent documents, the bishops added that “it is permissible to use such vaccines only under case-specific conditions — if there are no other alternatives available and the intent is to preserve life.”

However, the bishops left the moral decision to each individual, stating that such a personal assessment of “whether the benefits of a medical intervention outweigh the undesirable side-effects are to be respected unless they contradict authoritative Catholic moral teachings.” If a person discerns according to his conscience, he must follow that, since the bishops reiterate the Catholic teaching that “a person is morally required to obey his or her conscience.”

The template suggested that a Catholic might refuse a vaccination either on moral grounds, due to the link to abortion, or on grounds of “therapeutic proportionality,” by which a person decides “whether the benefits of a medical intervention outweigh the undesirable side-effects and burdens in light of the integral good of the person, including spiritual, psychological, and bodily goods.”

The Colorado bishops have previously issued two letters on COVID-19 vaccinations, in which they declared that “some” of the injections are “morally acceptable under certain circumstances.” Archbishop Aquila himself received the Moderna COVID-19 injection – an abortion-tainted product – in early January.

Yet despite personal and collective approval for the injections, the bishops decreed in the exemption letter template that those who have “serious moral objections or health concerns” should not be forced to receive them, and their freedom should be respected.

Such an argument is also defended in the Constitution, since the First Amendment “requires state accommodation of individuals who object to vaccinations on religious grounds,” wrote the bishops.

“If a Catholic comes to an informed judgment that he or she should not receive a vaccine, then the Catholic Church requires that the person follow this judgment of conscience and refuse the vaccine.”

## Markedly different to New York archdiocese and the Vatican

The letter from Colorado's Catholic bishops was warmly received by Catholics on social media. Eric Sammons, editor-in-chief of Crisis Magazine, described the letter as “excellent,” and “an example of clear and courageous thinking from our bishops. Kudos to them!”

Tyler Bishop Joseph Strickland also took to Twitter to express his support for his brother clergy: “Thank you bishops of Colorado for standing for freedom of conscience. I stand with you.”

Thank you bishops of Colorado for standing for freedom of conscience. I stand with you.....A letter from the bishops of Colorado on COVID-19 vaccine mandates – Denver Catholic <https://t.co/FjXuboXXhA>

— Bishop J. Strickland (@Bishopoftyler) August 7, 2021

The letter and exemption letter template are in stark contrast to the tone of the Archdiocese of New York, where priests were instructed refuse to sign religious exemption requests submitted by Catholics who object to using the COVID-19 gene-therapy vaccines despite their abortion-tainted nature.

Drawing on the statements of Pope Francis as well as Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Chancellor John P. Cahill, a layman, wrote to pastors, administrators, and parochial vicars: “There is no basis for a priest to issue a religious exemption to the vaccine.”

Cahill went on to assert that, by providing such an exemption, a priest would be “acting in contradiction to the directives of the Pope,” who previously spoke of the moral imperative to take the injection.

In a January television interview, Pope Francis said, “I believe that, ethically, everyone has to get the vaccine. It is an ethical option because it concerns your life but also that of others.” The Pope has himself received the injection, and organized the Pope Paul VI audience hall to be used as a vaccination center in the Vatican.

Some experts have come to the opposite conclusion, though, that vaccines are not needed at all for this pandemic, which they say is effectively “over.” Several thousand doctors in Belgium have stated that “[i]f 95% of people experience Covid-19 virtually symptom-free, the risk of exposure to an untested vaccine is irresponsible.”

In addition, more than 58,000 medical professionals affirm that due to the relatively mild danger of COVID-19 to the vast majority of the population, “those who are at minimal risk” should be permitted “to live their lives normally [and] build up [herd] immunity to the virus” without any need for vaccines.

With the average age of death from COVID-19 being higher than that of the general population, along with very high survivability rates — better than influenza for those under age 70 — one priest asked how there can “even be conceived a justifying cause for using such dangerous or abortion-tainted products.”

In a paper released on December 12, 2020, Bishop Athanasius Schneider, along with co-signers Cardinal Janis Pujats, Bishop Strickland, and Archbishops Tomash Peta and Jan Pawel Lenga, presented a strong moral argument against the injections. They expressed the strong conviction that any use of a vaccine tainted with the “unspeakable crime” of abortion “cannot be acceptable for Catholics” under any circumstances.

The prelates pointed to the contradiction between Catholic doctrine, which teaches that abortion is “a grave moral evil that cries out to heaven for vengeance,” and the commonly found view that abortion-connected vaccines are permitted in “exceptional cases of ‘urgent need.’”

“To argue that such vaccines can be morally licit if there is no alternative is in itself contradictory and cannot be acceptable for Catholics,” the letter read.

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[Priest’s analysis of Vatican documents: It’s ‘mortally sinful to take or facilitate’ coronavirus vaccine](#)

[Restore ye to its owners: On the immorality of receiving vaccines derived from abortion](#)

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