



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

Prot: 21444:MMsp_1505

4 November 2021

My dear people of the Rockhampton Diocese

Re: COVID-19 Vaccination

Over these 18 months, we have been negotiating life around the pandemic of COVID-19. As a senior citizen, I was offered the vaccine in one of the earlier tranches.

I reflected on the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith guidelines and was guided by the Holy Father. The Congregation's document clarifying the moral questions involved can be found at the following link:

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html

In summary, the Congregation's document makes the following observations:

- The destruction of unborn human life for medical research or treatment is, and has always been, a gravely immoral act.
- Despite this moral evil having taken place decades ago, and the fact that some current vaccines have been developed using cells obtained from these abortions, the reception of such vaccines today is not morally sinful, because of the seriousness of the pandemic and because the co-operation in the immoral act by the person receiving the vaccine is remote¹.
- If people have a choice, they should choose the vaccine that is not developed with the assistance of immoral actions; but if they do not have a choice, they are morally free to receive the vaccine that has been developed with such assistance.

These guidelines were published in my letter to the Diocese in February this year and come from the documents of the teaching office of the Catholic Church.

Many people have died here in Australia and overseas from the effects of COVID-19. The Holy Father's own personal doctor died from COVID-19.

From my own perspective, I have been receiving vaccines and inoculations for all my life. I remember receiving the painful tetanus injection when I ran a nail into my foot while on the farm, then there was the close call of polio and tuberculosis in the 1950's and recently I lined up, because of my age, for the shingles injection. I marvel at the miracles of medical science.

¹ In its teaching the Church has always made a distinction between formal or direct cooperation in an immoral act and that cooperation which is incidental and remote (*Dignitatis Personae* 34-35). This means that, in the absence of alternatives, a person who decides to accept a vaccination today which has some link with fetal cell lines in the past, does not imply any agreement on their part to the abortion from which the cell lines came.

Yet, before I underwent the AstraZeneca (Vaxzervia) vaccine, I consulted the specialist physician at the Mater Hospital. It was on his advice, together with my orthopaedic surgeon and my GP, that I have now received the two doses of the vaccine. In receiving the vaccine, I wanted to protect my health and those whom I may meet through my pastoral ministry.

As your Bishop, I would encourage all who reside in the Diocese to join the vaccination program. The facts are very clear. The virus is present in our country and has found its way into our regions. We are indeed fortunate to have one of the best medical supports in the world, but an outbreak in our region will place enormous strain on our medical staff and hospitals.

Some people, however, may have a valid medical reason for not receiving the vaccination. If you believe this could be the case, you should, as I did, seek proper medical advice.

The Holy Father urged all people as 'an act of love' to get vaccinated. In communion with the Holy Father, I strongly urge all involved in church ministry of our Diocese to get vaccinated, as our ministry involves contact with other people, including those more vulnerable.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael McCarthy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton