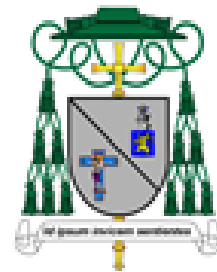




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A Pastoral Message on the COVID-19 Vaccine

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:36-40 (ESV)

We, the College of Bishops for the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America, write to you on a matter of grave importance. We ask all of you reading this letter to prayerfully consider our message encouraging you to get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible. Many lives hang in the balance; the vaccine will only be effective if a majority of people receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Therefore, we feel a pastoral duty to speak publicly, and strongly encourage everyone to get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is available and offered.

As of this writing, 19.4 million Americans have been diagnosed, and 335,000 Americans have died from COVID-19. Data indicate that some 50% of people in various Christian denominations have said they will not get the COVID-19 vaccine. This is very troubling since we know the vaccine is safe, but is only effective if at least 80% of the population get the vaccine. Otherwise, many more thousands of lives will be unnecessarily lost.

While there is a delicate balance between religion and science, we know, as Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, *“In all things, God works for good.”* Religious people have always relied on the God given skill and expertise of highly regarded medical professionals to keep us well so that we can do the work of building the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven.

Jesus tells us very plainly that the greatest commandment is to love God, and love our neighbor as ourselves; Love – God – Neighbor – Self. COVID-19 has imposed death and destruction throughout the world, but God has not abandoned us. In so many ways, God has brought us closer together, and the expressions of love, neighborliness, and faith have been extraordinary. It is our moral obligation to do all we can to participate in God’s healing love. In this time, that moral obligation includes getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. The only exception to getting the COVID-19 vaccine should be for health reasons.

Let us all engage in cooperative grace with our loving God. In the end, it is, indeed, a personal choice to receive or decline the COVID-19 vaccine, but we must always remember that every personal choice we make has an impact on others and in this case can have life or death consequences.

In faith and hope,

Bishop Anthony Santore, FCR, Presiding Bishop
Bishop Francisco Betancourt, FCR
Bishop Anthony Green, NFCR
Bishop Carl Purvenas-Smith, OSB
Father Joseph Reynolds, Chancellor
Bishop Willard Schultz, Retired
Bishop Ronald Stephens
Bishop Michael Theogene