

**DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG
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My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As our world continues to suffer due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I ask that you join me in continuing to pray for an end to this pandemic. I also ask that you continue to offer prayers and gratitude for those in medical and emergency response professions. Their efforts have been nothing short of heroic during this year.

As we all eagerly await the release of the COVID-19 vaccine, I write to you to clarify concerns on the moral and ethical development of these vaccines. Of most concern is that these vaccines may have been developed in a way that involved the use of cell lines from aborted babies. This is concerning, especially to Catholics, but it is also a very complex matter. Given the complex nature of this situation, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) carefully evaluated each of the expected vaccines as they relate to Catholic Moral Teaching. They stated that:

“Neither the Pfizer nor the Moderna vaccine involved the use of cell lines that originated in fetal tissue taken from the body of an aborted baby at any level of design, development, or production. They are not completely free from any connection to abortion, however, as both Pfizer and Moderna made use of a tainted cell line for one of the confirmatory lab tests of their products. There is thus a connection, but it is relatively remote.”

I certainly understand the deep desire to avoid vaccines that are in any way connected to abortion. To aid our understanding and clarify teachings regarding vaccines and our Catholic faith, the Holy See has published several documents during the past 15 years to address these concerns. These documents do state that it is immoral to take the tissue from an aborted child for the purpose of making cell lines. However, these documents also state that, *“If there is a grave health risk to the child or the person, and if there is no other option, and if the person taking the vaccine or the parent makes their objections known and actively works to see that alternatives are brought to the market, then they may use the vaccines.”* In short, if there is a serious health concern and there are no other options, then on the level of the recipient, it is morally permissible to accept vaccination.

Based on this information, I wish to reassure you, my Catholic brothers and sisters, that once the vaccines are available and if you choose to receive it after considering the information above, it is morally permissible to do so. Some are asserting that if a vaccine is connected in any way with tainted cell lines, then it is immoral to be vaccinated with them. This is an inaccurate portrayal of Catholic moral teaching.

I thank each of you for your continued observance of our Diocesan guidelines as we strive to maintain safe worship spaces as well as school and work environments. I also pray for your continued good health and for the health of all those impacted by this pandemic.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ronald W. Gainer".

Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer
Bishop of Harrisburg