

Bishop Michael G. Duca of the Diocese of Baton Rouge issued the following statement this evening (March 1, 2021) on the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage populations around the globe. Worldwide over 2.5 million have died. In the United States the death toll is over half a million, with Louisiana's approaching 10,000. Thankfully, vaccines have been developed to reduce the spread and effects of this virulent killer.

In a letter read in all parishes several weeks ago, I explained,

"Vaccines are now being made available to various groups throughout the United States. I have reviewed these remedies along with the Bishops of the United States and we have determined, reinforced by the Holy Father Pope Francis, that receiving the new Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are justifiable and morally acceptable ways to help end this pandemic. Being vaccinated should be considered as an act of charity toward others in our communities. I encourage all of the faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge to take this moral evaluation to heart as you make your decision to receive the coronavirus vaccinations as they become available."

I continue to encourage everyone to receive a vaccination, but the new vaccine from Johnson & Johnson has some moral concerns we must acknowledge. Unlike the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, Johnson & Johnson uses a line of stem cells procured from abortions performed over 30 years ago in the production of its vaccine. To the question of whether a person should receive this vaccine in good conscience the Congregation of Doctrine has stated,

"As for the moral responsibility of those who are merely the recipients of the vaccines, the Congregation affirms that a serious health danger could justify use of 'a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available.'" *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction (Dignitas Humanae), no. 35.*

Given our present situation and the need to protect ourselves and one another from this virus, my guidance to the faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge is to accept as your first choices the vaccines created by Pfizer and Moderna, but if for any reasonable circumstance you are only able to receive the vaccine from Johnson & Johnson, you should feel free to do so for your safety and for the common good. In addition, I have consulted with Catholic health care representatives, and I understand and appreciate their serious challenges as to the acquisition and equitable distribution of all three vaccines. I therefore support their policy of administering any of the vaccines as circumstances require.

Again, as I have stated in my original letter to the Diocese, "I encourage all of the faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge to take this moral evaluation to heart as you make your decision to receive the coronavirus vaccinations as they become available."

With Hope the Lord,

+Michael G. Duca
Bishop of Baton Rouge

*At the Chancery
March 1, 2021*