



DIOCESE of TYLER

Pastoral Letter from Bishop Joseph E. Strickland On the Ethical Development of COVID-19 Vaccine

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Tyler,

As your Shepherd, I spiritually journey with you through the Easter season toward the glorious celebration of Pentecost and pray that we all continue to cling, tenaciously, to our Easter faith. Let us exclaim, “He is Risen, Alleluia!”

The Light and Joy of Easter is especially poignant during this burdensome and challenging time as we all do our best to sift through and address the economic hardships and human sufferings resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic. I realize there is much confusion, fear and shaken faith among you, but with Christ by our side, we will weather this storm, together, just as the disciples weathered the storm on the Sea of Galilee. As your bishop, I will guide you through the confusion and fear as best as I can.

Over the past several weeks, my eyes have been opened to realities, some of which, I must admit I was ignorant and unaware. I have made an effort to address realities which concern human life and suffering. Recently, I voiced my concern regarding the rationing of health care which, if allowed, would have greatly diminished the dignity of the human person, and opted not to utilize Mass Critical Care guidelines which would have included endorsing an interpretation that allows providers to stop futile care for one patient if its provision denies care for another critical patient. Instead, I opted to utilize the SOFA (Sequential Organ Failure Assessment) guidelines which we have in place at our CHRISTUS Catholic hospitals. SOFA provides an assessment based on the human person, not on the number of medical devices on hand. The Diocese of Tyler will continue to utilize Catholic ethical teachings to navigate the sea of serious human life questions which continue to surface as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. This situation has reminded me that, as Catholics, we must deeply root ourselves in the fundamental teachings of the great Deposit of Faith which we have inherited. The most basic teaching that human life is sacred from conception to natural death is more important than ever.

Now, I ask you to join your voices with mine in an effort to bring to a halt a reality of which, until recently, I knew very little about – the use of in line stem cells from aborted babies in developing vaccines. We all know the sad saga of abortion in our nation and throughout the world which continues to grow more diabolical even as we energetically proclaim, with ever deeper clarity, the precious gift of every unborn child. As the world battles the Coronavirus and marches toward a vaccine or cure, the ugly culture of death is exposing itself in an even more serious way. The Church has long defended the right to life and love owed to our children. Recent popes have unanimously pointed to the culture of death that is rampant in our world as a threat that we must address. In his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, in English the letter is entitled “The Gospel of Life.” In his beautiful letter, Pope St. John Paul II said modern society faces a clash between the “culture of death” and the “culture of life” (28). In direct language, he said that “the killing of innocent human creatures, even if carried out to help others, constitutes an absolutely unacceptable act” (63). A better translation of Pope St. John Paul’s powerful phrase in the “The Gospel of Life” would use the phrase HUMAN PERSONS. The child in the womb is more than a creature. The child in the womb is a HUMAN PERSON. Just as we are human persons.

More than ever, Pope St. John Paul’s words call Catholics to give testimony to the glory of the cross that shines brightly in the darkness (50). Sadly, it seems these historic pleas have gone unheeded. Still, many

Christians in our society, Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic alike, are too willing to *allow an unborn child to be killed simply because they believe the unborn child's death will somehow improve their lives.*

Tragically, people are not aware of or have chosen to turn a blind eye to the advances in medical science which allow vaccines to be developed with the wholesale use of aborted children's bodies. The Church has previously addressed this gravely serious issue and urged faithful Catholics to demand that medical science find ethical paths to creating these beneficial vaccines. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI already reminded us in *Donum Vitae* (1987), that "what is technically possible is not for that very reason morally admissible" (4). Just because the crime of abortion is considered legal in our nation does not mean it is morally permissible to use the dead bodies of these children to cure a global pandemic. Emphatically, this practice is evil.

Thankfully, ethical means are available and can prove to be just as effective in developing vaccines; umbilical cells, placental cells, adult stem cells – and other sources of cells, including even those of insects, provide completely viable paths to an effective vaccine. Scientists I've spoken with assure me that there is no medical necessity for using aborted children in order to develop the much-needed vaccine to protect us from this particular strain of Coronavirus.

As your Shepherd, I urge you to join me, NOW, in passionately but prayerfully speaking out against this practice. As I said in the beginning of this letter, I will help you navigate this storm as best as I can. In the coming weeks, I will provide a guide to assist you with speaking the truth to all your elected representatives, the pharmaceutical industry, and your local community. We must insist that legislators create legislation which establishes the illegal and immoral nature of any use of the remains of aborted babies for research. Further, we must insist that pharmaceutical companies comply with such legislation. I believe this can be a significant building block in a culture of life which eliminates the taint of economic gain that too easily infects the abortion industry.

I believe today's ugly threat of new vaccines being developed and tested using aborted children gives us an opportunity in divine providence to right this incredible wrong that strikes at the very root of the threats to the sanctity of life that continues to harm human civilization. As the United States Bishops have urged in their April 17th letter to the FDA (<http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/upload/Letter-to-FDA-urging-ethical-COVID-vaccines.pdf>), our immediate task is to demand ethical vaccines for COVID-19. We must go further, however, and pursue the prevention of future development of vaccines using remnants and available cells of aborted children's bodies and to use only ethically developed vaccines.

In closing, I ask you to pray with me for God's conversion of hearts which is the ultimate remedy for the culture of death in which we continue to be immersed. We must beg the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of her chaste spouse St. Joseph, and of all the saints to help us hold sacred the greatest gift of God's creation which is the human person and the precious gift of human life at every age and stage.

Given this day, April 23, 2020 in Tyler, TX.



Most Reverend Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler