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Statement from the Diocese of Madison in response to reports in the secular media, as well as posts by Fr. James Martin, SJ and others, regarding the Diocese of Madison's decision not to host COVID-19 vaccination clinics for children

Despite how it is being characterized in some news reports and social media posts, the decision for parishes and other diocesan entities within the Diocese of Madison not to host onsite COVID-19 vaccination clinics is not about condemning or discouraging vaccination. Bishop Hying has given guidance on the moral dimensions of the vaccine, and he has even encouraged its reception, alongside his brother bishops in the state of Wisconsin. He has never discouraged reception of the vaccine. However, this is not a decision that involves either an absolute moral imperative or an intrinsic moral evil. As such it should be made by individuals and parents with a well-formed conscience as to what is appropriate for their own circumstances, weighing carefully the medical and moral facts and the potential risks versus the hoped-for benefits. Apart from the moral and medical dimensions of this decision, the issue has become bitterly divisive. Since there are already ample vaccination sites within the eleven counties of the diocese, Bishop Hying has decided that it would be best for parishes and other diocesan entities not to host vaccine clinics.

This is what is missing from some of the reporting and commentary about the Diocese of Madison's decision not to host child vaccination clinics. This distortion has only been exacerbated by the comments on social media from Fr. James Martin, SJ, who called the diocesan decision "Anti life." When there are more than enough facilities to offer vaccinations throughout the diocese, choosing not to host vaccination clinics does not equate to being "Anti life." Rather, it avoids the appearance of unequivocal moral endorsement while also respecting individuals' and parents' ability to make a decision based on their legitimate weighing of the medical and moral concerns involved. For Fr. Martin and other critics to attack this decision of the bishop and characterize it as anti-life is at best a case of rash judgment, especially considering they did not have the decency to contact him first.

For context, the content of the diocesan statement that was partially quoted in the article that spurred this and other uncharitable posts is provided here in its entirety:

"Diocesan locations, parishes, and parochial school sites will not serve as locations for Covid-19 vaccinations, nor will they sponsor vaccination distribution offsite. This should not be in any way interpreted as the local Catholic Church or her leadership discouraging vaccinations. As we have stated repeatedly, it is morally permissible to receive the COVID-19 vaccination in good conscience, but there are also valid reasons, including reasons of conscience, why people might decide not to be vaccinated or have their children vaccinated. Every individual, and now every family, must make a prudent judgment about whether COVID-19 vaccination is appropriate for their own circumstances, weighing carefully the medical and moral facts, and the potential risks versus hoped for benefits. Given that, by all indications, plenty of secular sites are already available in all eleven counties of the diocese, the diocese has not and will not wade into the polarizing and political environment surrounding this issue, especially as it could potentially pressure individuals to act against their consciences.

If any parish has hosted a clinic, it is news to us. Similarly, I don't have any information as to who has contacted our parishes or schools with regard to hosting clinics, only that our guidance has been consistently that of neutrality, as there are sufficient resources throughout the area. As for the other almost 200 dioceses in the United States, you'll find there is a wide variance of guidelines, practices, and allowances on this issue as well as countless others."

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