



THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE

15 November 2021

Dear brothers,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:2). In light of recent announcements by the Queensland Government that take effect from 15 December 2021, the Archdiocese is in the process of promulgating a COVID-19 vaccination policy which will apply to employees, contractors, students and volunteers working within agencies of the Archdiocese, including those working in parishes. The policy is based on the commitment of the Archdiocese to the health and safety of all of its employees, contractors, students, volunteers and lay religious working within the Archdiocese. It is designed to protect agency clients, parishioners and all the faithful. As an employer, the Archdiocese needs to comply with the government health directions which have been issued in some sectors in which the Archdiocese operates. These directions require specified workers to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to attend their workplace.

I recognise that having a vaccination, including the COVID-19 vaccination, is a matter of personal choice. However, I am the sole member and officer of the Archdiocesan Corporation which in civil law is the employer of Archdiocesan staff, including those working in parishes. I am therefore bound to take seriously compliance with health directions. Further, I have a legal obligation to ensure that the Archdiocesan Corporation meets its workplace health and safety obligations. It is appropriate, further, that I take whatever steps I can to ensure that the Archdiocesan Corporation, as employer, meets its duty of care to its employees and others in the workplace to whom it owes that duty. Clergy of the Archdiocese, including those incardinated in the Archdiocese, and those religious in pastoral ministry in the parishes are also in a category of persons to whom the Archdiocesan Corporation owes a duty of care. In addition to my duties and responsibilities in civil law as the sole officer and member of the Archdiocesan Corporation, I owe the clergy of the Archdiocese (including those religious engaged in parish ministry) a significant duty in canon law. That duty is set out in Canon 384 of the Code in these terms:

A diocesan bishop is to attend to presbyters . . . He is to protect their rights and take care that they correctly fulfil the obligations proper to their state.

Principal among the obligations proper to the clerical state for those engaged in pastoral ministry is set out in Canon 529 §1. A pastor or assistant pastor in parish ministry is to know the faithful, visit families, care for the faithful strengthening them in the Lord and refresh the faithful with the sacraments. Diligently, he is to seek out the poor, the afflicted, the lonely and the exiled. He is to support spouses and parents in fulfilling their proper duties and to foster growth of Christian life in the family. That means that clergy engaged in parish ministry must be close to the people. In the circumstances of the pandemic, clergy engaged in pastoral ministry who are not doubly vaccinated put the faithful of the parish at risk. They present a risk to the faithful to whom they minister, as well as to their families.

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Clergy not doubly vaccinated are failing in their duty to care for the faithful. Canon 1311§2 will become law from 8 December 2021:

The one who is at the head of a Church must safeguard and promote the good of the community itself and of each of Christ's faithful through pastoral charity, example of life, advice and exhortation.

The Code of Conduct "Integrity in Ministry" speaks of clergy at paragraph 2.1 in these terms:

Religious and clergy, among them religious leaders and bishops, are particularly called to witness a spirit of service. Because of the trust they are given and the visibility of their witness and leadership, they are conscious of the unique power and responsibility they have in pastoral relationships.

"Integrity in Ministry" paragraph 2.1 then notes that among the standards flowing from this principle (2.1) is that clergy are to relate to the "people in a spirit of humility, reverence and respect, with a commitment to the deepest well-being of the other".

According to paragraph 5.2 of "Integrity in Ministry", clergy engaged in pastoral ministry in parishes also owe a professional duty to "provide safe and healthy working conditions" for parish staff.

Therefore, I have decided as follows:

1. That by 15 December 2021, all clergy incardinated in the Archdiocese and all religious clergy who are engaged in pastoral ministry in a parish are to:
 - a. have received both doses of a COVID-19 vaccination (subject to the limited exceptions set out below);
 - b. have recorded proof of these vaccinations with the Archdiocesan system mentioned below; and
 - c. provide evidence of these vaccinations.
2. Clergy are responsible for making their own arrangements to receive their vaccinations.
3. An exception to the COVID-19 vaccination because a priest or deacon has a recognised medical contra-indication (a medical condition that prevents him from receiving the vaccination). In such a case, he is to provide a satisfactory medical certificate from a registered medical practitioner which certifies that he is unable to receive a COVID-19 vaccination because he has a recognised medical contra-indication and indicating whether the medical contra-indication would permanently or temporarily prevent his vaccination, the medical certificate must specify when he may be able to receive the vaccination.



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In circumstances where a priest or deacon has not complied with paragraph 1 above by 15 December 2021, I will be asking that he voluntarily stand aside from pastoral duties in his parish and from all pastoral ministry until he has been fully vaccinated. Should a priest or deacon in such circumstances decline to stand aside voluntarily, I will need to consider the temporary suspension of faculties until he fully complies with paragraph 1 (a), (b) and (c) above. If a priest or deacon believes that he is medically exempt from the vaccination requirements set out in this letter or that other exceptional circumstances apply, he should comply with paragraph 3 above by close of business on the day before 15 December 2021.

A medical contra-indication against one COVID-19 vaccination does not necessarily translate to a contra-indication against all vaccines. I will not consider conscientious objection to receiving the vaccination as a valid exception to the provisions set out here. I fully respect the rights of conscience, especially when properly formed in the Catholic understanding. But I too have a conscience; and it is not just legal obligation but conscience which has led to my decision.

Each priest and deacon is required to provide evidence of his COVID-19 vaccination status as soon as possible but no later than 15 December 2021, by uploading a valid vaccination record to his Aurion Employee Self Service (ESS) portal. That is the best and simplest way of ensuring that I comply with my lawful obligations and my duty of care to the faithful of the Archdiocese is to collect and record the vaccination information of all clergy in pastoral ministry in the parishes. Information collected will include the vaccination status of clergy and information about any booking they may have made to be vaccinated. Where an individual has a medical exemption, that information will be collected and recorded. If I do not hold vaccination information about a priest or deacon in pastoral ministry in the Archdiocese by 15 December 2021, I will deem him to be unvaccinated.

The purpose of collecting the relevant information is:

- (a) to enable me to ensure that all clergy in active parish ministry in the Archdiocese comply with their obligations, which include receiving both doses of a COVID-19 vaccination by 15 December 2021 and subsequent booster vaccinations as directed by the government health authorities.
- (b) to enable me to take the necessary steps, if a priest or deacon does not receive both of his doses of COVID-19 vaccination by the stated date or booster vaccinations.
- (c) as part of ensuring that I take all reasonable practical steps to ensure the health and safety of the faithful of the Archdiocese, the workers of the Archdiocese and clients of Archdiocesan agencies who attend from time to time at parishes.
- (d) so that the Archdiocesan Corporation can comply with reporting obligations as may be mandated by authorities.

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Evidence of a COVID-19 vaccination includes:

- (a) a COVID-19 digital vaccination certificate (accessible at the MyGov website or Express Plus Medicare mobile app);
- (b) an immunisation history statement which can be accessed from Medicare online; or
- (c) an international COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate for overseas travel.

In accordance with the Archdiocese Privacy Policy, vaccination information will be securely stored, kept confidential, and will be accessible only to those who are required to access it. You will be able to request access to your vaccination record information at any time and you can request that any relevant updates be made to it. In these difficult times, I trust I can count on your good will and cooperation for the sake of all. May the God of peace bless you and those entrusted to your care.

As always in the Lord,

Archbishop of Brisbane