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Rome, 25th September 2021

Dear confreres,

COVID 19 A message from the General Council.

Over the last year and a half, the COVID 19 pandemic has brought home to us just how vulnerable we are. The almost silent and invisible spread of what has become the most known virus in the world has indeed turned our world upside down. Humanity is seen more and more as an endangered species and such insecurity makes us prey to so many alarming conspiracy theories. The situation certainly has been made worse by what we can only call a social media frenzy with an abundant bombardment of news concerning the ‘for or against’ of vaccinations. More than ever though the pandemic must help us accept the fundamental importance of facing scientific facts, and of honesty and openness about the complexity of the issue and about hard choices we must necessarily face.

For most of us it is with a sigh of relief that we have been able to avail ourselves of the protection afforded by the vaccine and we would dearly wish that all people would have the same opportunity. However, a number of confreres are still hesitating as to whether to avail themselves of such an opportunity. On Wednesday the 18th August 2021 Pope Francis clearly stated his mind about the vaccine. He said : “Thanks to God’s grace and to the work of many, we now have vaccines to protect us from Covid-19,” He added that vaccines “bring hope to end the pandemic, but only if they are available to all and if we collaborate with one another.” Pope Francis went on to say that getting a Covid jab that is “authorized by the respective authorities” is an “act of love.” Helping other do the same, he said, is also an act of love. “Love for oneself, love for our families and friends, and love for all peoples. Love is also social and political.” The Pope noted that social and political love is built up through “small, individual gestures capable of transforming and improving societies.” “Getting vaccinated is a simple yet profound way to care for one another, especially the most vulnerable,” he said. Pope Francis then prayed to God that “each one of us can make his or her own small gesture of love.” “No matter how small, love is always grand,” he said. “Small gestures for a better future.”¹

¹ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-08/pope-francis-appeal-covid-19-vaccines-act-of-love.html>

Most recently in a letter from the Italian Episcopal conference using the words of Pope Francis the bishops state: *Vaccinating, with vaccines authorised by the competent authorities, is an act of love. Contributing to getting the majority of people vaccinated is an act of love. Love for oneself, love for family and friends, love for all people.* The conference then goes on to say: *The health emergency is not over yet and the tools available to curb the spread of the pandemic are still evolving. At the moment vaccines are considered by the competent authorities to be an important means of slowing down and containing the infection and thus prevent COVID-19, at least in its more severe forms.*

Alongside Pope Francis and other leaders of the Church we can only reiterate how necessary it is to encourage all our confreres to help one another and those whom they minister to adopt all such effective measures to combat the pandemic. It is our collective responsibility, a willingness borne out of love and concern to protect ourselves and others and thus work for the common good. The vaccination programme being set up across the globe is indeed like some global defence system. Slowly but surely it is the hope of the World Health Organisation that all people be vaccinated. Yet refusing to be vaccinated will indeed put in jeopardy such a system opening up the possibility of the virus becoming ever more virulent and putting cracks in the very shield that is meant to protect us. We in leadership have a role to play in making sure that we have the wellbeing of all our confreres and those we minister to in mind. Certainly we cannot merely dismiss the hesitancy of some or the challenges they may have in accepting vaccination but we cannot surely stand on the side-lines. The choice is ours but we must be prepared to assume the consequences of our choices.

Many years ago before taking up our first appointments we had to be vaccinated (yellow fever, cholera, tetanus etc.). Not being vaccinated would have meant not being able to enter our country of appointment. All of us made the wise choice for vaccination. Should it be any different today? Let the pandemic empower all us to be part of the cure and truly work for the good of all – out of love. In a spirit of solidarity, we wholeheartedly encourage all confreres to avail themselves of the vaccinations.



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