

**Declaration by the Catholic Bishops on Debate a temporary compulsory vaccination**

The corona pandemic, which has dominated our lives for almost two years, continues to pose great challenges. Worldwide various vaccines in use have been shown to protect against severe disease progression. Still, quite a few people have in our country have not yet accepted this vaccination offer. The reasons for it are diverse. Now the State intends to introduce a legal obligation for vaccination against the coronavirus. As Bishops we would like to contribute and help to clarify some related issues.

**Protection**

A broad scientific consensus evaluates vaccination against Covid-19 as an indispensable contribution to protecting people from severe, life-threatening illness. Whoever gets vaccinated protects the public health systems from overload and all those who, not because of Corona, but for other reasons need intensive medical treatment. It is reported daily that the resources in the hospitals are exhausted and that urgent operations need to be postponed. For this reason, we Bishops once again urge all people to be vaccinated. We remember the Words of Pope Francis: "Vaccination is an act of charity". However, since the previous calls have not been enough, the government is now planning one temporary legal obligation to vaccinate.

Compulsory vaccination is a serious interference with the physical integrity and freedom of the individual. It is therefore only permissible if all other options have been exhausted, taking into account proportionality, to protect the population and in the case of a pandemic, the Health system and thus human life. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of those in power to assess whether the prerequisites are met and whether a temporary vaccination requirement is now the appropriate means of protecting the common good. We cannot give a detailed view on the concrete form of the law and will therefore not take part in the assessment process. However, we would like to point out that it is urgently necessary to make exceptions due to the situation or health and also to keep the legal consequences within an appropriate framework. The goal must be to protect health and freedom equally

**Heal**

Along with the debate about the appropriateness of measures we see a dangerous polarization in Society in the fight against Covid. This shows up in the overheated and disrespectful way of being with thoughtless accusations, insinuations and violent language to attack each other. Unfortunately, a threatening level of incapacity for discourse has been reached. In addition to appropriate forms of protest, often the measures introduced to contain the pandemic are increasingly compared to the Nazi regime of injustice. Such shameful belittling of the Nazi Crimes cannot be tolerated.

It meets with our absolute incomprehension when people who fight for the lives of people in medical care and nursing are mocked. It is also clear that we should reject the blanket denigration of all who do not want to be vaccinated.

We urgently need a healing disarmament of words and gestures. Too many injuries and rifts have already happened, presumably with dangerous long-term consequences for our family and social relationships. We have to work towards a new culture of conversation at all levels. Listening is healing! Let us do everything we can to ensure this is the most important prerequisite for any successful learning again how to communicate. Just respect for opposing opinions and different points of view can ensure a peaceful coexistence. However, this also includes the general acceptance of legal requirements that must be met in the interests of the common good.

### **Reconcile**

Advent is the time of preparation for the feast of the birth of Jesus. These days people are longing for more silence, to slow down and to let go. Because of this, we suggest now to avoid unnecessary outrage and fruitless debates as far as possible.

Let us refrain from anything that might degrade, hurt, or humiliate someone. A collective pause like this would do us all good. Let us use the time to reflect on our own point of view and to think about the contribution to reconciliation that each of us makes in his own life. Let us also use the time of Advent for personal and common prayer, in which we give space to the healing presence of God. We Bishops expressly invite you to do so! Prayer does not need a lot of words, just the openness of mind and heart.

Protecting, Healing, and Reconciling is an Advent program that is a real alternative. It shows a spiritual path to one who is a 'reconciled togetherness', which our country absolutely needs in the face of the great challenge.

"Be humble, peaceful, and patient, endure one another in love and strive to maintain the unity of spirit through the bond of peace " (Eph 4,2f), the apostle Paul calls out to us. We consciously ask God's blessings for in this challenging time all people!

Vienna, 6.12.21