



## THE DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD–CAPE GIRARDEAU

Office  
of the  
Bishop

October 13, 2017

Dear Pastors and Principals,

I am edified by the many pastors, principals, parents, and students who are passionately devoted to the well-being of our diocesan Catholic schools. May God continue to bless our efforts to form students to know, love, and serve Jesus.

As Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, I have an obligation to issue directives regarding the regulation of Catholic schools (Canon 806) when required for the good of the Church. In light of the concern and confusion regarding the vaccination policy of our diocesan school system, I am hereby issuing the enclosed policy which will become effective at the start of the 2018-2019 academic year.

I appreciate the work previously done on this issue by the members of the Diocesan School Board and others, but I am concerned about the discord and uncharitable attitudes the issue has provoked in a few persons. I am under no illusion that the enclosed policy will end all debate or satisfy everyone, but it has the virtue of being in accordance with the recommendations of the Pro-life Secretariat of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (enclosed) and with Catholic teaching on subsidiarity.

The Pro-life Secretariat is made up of nine bishops and is currently chaired by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York. Regarding vaccination policies, they recommend “in an area where public schools are granting a conscience exemption, based on the view of public health authorities that doing so does not pose a serious risk to the population, Catholic institutions should be willing to do so as well.” Given that the State of Missouri grants a conscience/religious exemption for vaccinations, we will not impose a stricter requirement on every school in the diocese.

The Catholic principle of subsidiarity holds that issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution. Our diocese covers 25,719 square miles and 39 counties encompassing many different communities and situations. The risk to public health of allowing unvaccinated children to enroll in a given school will vary from one place to another as will the recommendations from the 39 different county health departments. Therefore, the enclosed policy permits pastors and high school principals to exercise discretion in determining the course of action their institution will follow.

As the Pro-life Secretariat’s statement mentions, the true solution to this situation “lies in working to ensure that future vaccines and other medicines are not based on cooperation with practices demeaning [to] human life. This applies to products based on abortion, as well as to projected therapies from [the] destruction of human embryos for their stem cells.”

Let us continue to work and pray for an end to the evil of abortion and a greater respect for human life in all its stages.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Edward M. Rice

Enc. “Conscience Exemption for Vaccines,” Pro-life Secretariat, USCCB, “Vaccination Policy for the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Springfield–Cape Girardeau”

CC: Diocesan School Board Members  
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