



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

March 10, 2021

Dear Brothers,

I got shot, and I hope that you will too. Of course, I am referring to the COVID-19 vaccine. Last week I received my second dose, and while I was a little run-down the day after (as are many), I quickly recovered. A little fatigue seems like a small price to pay for a vaccination against a virus that has impacted the lives of so many, including members of our religious community.

Just about everyone at Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake has now had the vaccine, including many of our employees. The same is true of Sacred Heart Monastery and Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. Many SCJs throughout the province report that they have either had the vaccination or expect to receive it soon.

It has been approximately a year since much of the world went on lockdown, attempting to mitigate the virus through physical distancing. The hygiene protocols put in place at that time continue to be an important tool in the fight against COVID-19. However, the vaccine now gives us an even better tool in ensuring the health of our community and those with whom we collaborate.

I bring this to your attention for two reasons. First, I strongly encourage each member of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, our students, and our employees to get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible. I ask you to do this for yourselves individually, but also for our communities. Fewer people with COVID-19 mean fewer possibilities of others getting COVID-19.

The second reason for this letter is an urgent call to all members of our religious community — all SCJs — to begin the process of moving forward, of returning to the responsibilities we have to each other in community. This means being not just spirituality present to each other in prayer, but physically present. As someone who has personally struggled with a number of health concerns in recent years, I have empathy for those who have isolated themselves from their communities, fearful of contracting COVID-19.

No vaccine can fully prevent illness. However, repeated studies have shown that all three of the vaccines significantly limit the possibility of contracting the virus, and more so, that the few who may still get COVID-19 will most likely not suffer significant symptoms. On Monday, March 8, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidelines regarding those who are fully vaccinated, stating that they can visit indoors with other fully vaccinated people without wearing masks or social distancing. Read more the CDC website at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p0308-vaccinated-guidelines.html>

We take risks every day when we walk out the door. However, we do the best that we can to minimize these risks. We cannot remain hidden in our rooms —as our founder would say — hidden in our sacristies. With the vaccine, we can greatly minimize our risks of becoming ill.

I know that for many of us, returning to what we knew before the pandemic may not be easy. Most likely, we will all face some type of “new normal.” But at some point, we must begin to do just that, take the first steps toward our new normal.

I ask in the strongest terms possible that all SCJs in the US Province, once vaccinated, begin to make those first steps. If you have been taking your meals in your room, I ask you to return to communal dining with your brothers. If you have avoided communal prayer due to concerns about the virus, again, I ask you to return to prayer with your brothers.

Note that I am “asking” you to do this. But my intention is much stronger than the word implies. We are brothers in religious life. We have made a commitment to each other. It hurts me personally as a fellow religious, and as provincial superior, to see some of our members separate themselves from their confreres, of creating “bubble communities” within communities. Actions may be taken in the event that an SCJ chooses not to return to community voluntarily.

While I strongly ask for this return to community, I also ask that we all emphasize our sense of hospitality in the weeks ahead. We SCJs often pride ourselves on our hospitality to others. Right now, we need to double our efforts to offer that hospitality to each other. If a member of your community who has been distanced takes the first steps to return, help him to feel welcome. Transitions take time, and many of us have developed strong feelings in regard to the pandemic and our response to it. Let us be gentle with each other.

Fr. Dehon wrote that “The Providence of God never puts us in a relationship with our neighbor without the purpose of being a benefit to him.”

Let us be neighbors to each other in religious community; let us be a benefit to each other.

May we keep each other in prayer,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Kilianski, SCJ". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Ed Kilianski, SCJ
Provincial Superior