News
Opinion



Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, left, receives a COVID-19 vaccine from Dr. Michael Markel, center, and nurse Dia Hannah at Georgetown University Hospital, Medstar Health, Thursday, January 21, 2021. (RNS/Tom Reese)



Thomas Reese

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @thomasreeseSJ

Religion News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

January 26, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The morning of Jan. 21, I received my first COVID-19 vaccination, which means that two weeks after my second shot, I will be free to leave my house.

What will I do with that freedom?

Since I worked as a writer from home even before the epidemic, I have suffered less than most from the restrictions. Living in an 18-member Jesuit community, I have been able to attend daily Eucharist as well as have the companionship of my brothers while we have been cloistered for our protection.

Only one of us got sick and that was back in March. He fully recovered.

During this time, the younger members of my community have generously stepped forward to do grocery shopping and other things that required leaving the house, since medical experts say that they have a better chance of surviving the virus than us old guys. I turned 76 this month.

All of this will change now that I have been vaccinated as part of Phase 1b of the vaccination process.

In what is called "Phase 1a," the CDC recommends that initial supplies of COVID-19 vaccine be allocated to health care personnel and long-term care facility residents.

Phase 1b is to cover front-line essential workers: firefighters and police officers, food and agricultural workers (including grocery store staff), public transit workers, and teachers and day care workers. Also in Phase 1b are people age 75 and older.

Once my vaccinations are completed, it will be my turn to go out into the world and for the younger men to stay home. It may be months before they are vaccinated.

Frankly, I hate shopping so much that I would have been happy to give my place in line to one of my younger colleagues so he could be vaccinated. Plus, the future of the Jesuits is in these wonderful men, so it is more important to protect them than me. But nobody was going to let that happen, so shopping I will go.

What is happening in my community is about to happen on a massive scale in the United States as older people are vaccinated before younger people. Suddenly millions of senior citizens will be liberated from confinement. What will they do with this newfound freedom?

They can return to yoga class, restaurants, bars, card games, bingo, visiting friends and all the other activities they have had to give up. None of these are bad activities, but we are still at war against this virus and now it is time for us to do our part, at least for the next six to nine months.

Will vaccinated older people take on the roles younger people have been exercising? Will they volunteer at homeless shelters? Will they staff food banks? Will they take over child care? Will they visit the sick and homebound? Will they volunteer at churches and other nonprofits? Will they return to church?

There is one caveat. Medical experts do not know yet whether or not those vaccinated can still transmit the virus even though they will not get sick. That means that those vaccinated will have to continue wearing masks until further notice, a small price to pay to protect the next generation.

I have faith in my generation and my elders. I think we will have an army of gray volunteers stepping up to do what is needed. After all, the young have been doing all they can to protect us; now it is our turn to protect them.

Advertisement