

# Pope hopes for COVID vaccine, supports interreligious prayer initiative

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Expressing his hopes for a vaccine against the coronavirus, Pope Francis also gave his support to an interreligious day of prayer and fasting for an end to the pandemic.

After reciting the “Regina Coeli” prayer May 3, Pope Francis said he supported the call of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity because “prayer is a universal value.”

The day of “Prayer for Humanity,” which is set to take place May 14, will be an opportunity for all believers “to pray, fast and do works of charity,” he said.

Expressing his closeness to the victims of COVID-19, as well as those entrusted with their care, the pope also encouraged cooperation between countries to “adequately and effectively” respond to the crisis.

“It is important to bring together scientific capacities, in a transparent and impartial way, to find vaccines and treatments and to guarantee universal access to essential technologies that will enable every infected person, in every part of the world, to receive the necessary health care,” Pope Francis said.

Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of al-Azhar, also expressed his support for “the noble humanitarian call made by the committee.” In a statement posted on Facebook, el-Tayeb urged people to join in prayer “in order to eliminate this pandemic from the entire world,” Emirates News Agency reported May 3.

The Higher Committee of Human Fraternity was established after

Pope Francis and el-Tayeb signed a document in 2019 on promoting dialogue and “human fraternity.”

In calling for the day of prayer and fasting, the committee said that while medicine and scientific research are key in fighting the pandemic, “we should not forget to seek refuge in God, the All-Creator, as we face such (a) severe crisis.”

In a tweet posted May 3, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said that “in difficult times, we must stand together for peace, humanity and solidarity.”

“I join his Holiness Pope Francis and the grand imam of al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, in their support for the ‘Prayer for Humanity’ this May 14 – a moment for reflection, hope, and faith,” Guterres tweeted.

In a statement May 2, the committee said, “Each one from wherever they are and according to the teachings of their religion, faith, or sect, should implore God to lift this pandemic off us and the entire world, to rescue us all from this adversity, to inspire scientists to find a cure that can turn back this disease and to save the whole world from the health, economic and human repercussions of this serious pandemic.”

Calling on all religious leaders and people from around the world to take part, the committee said that in joining together in prayer, “our world will become a better place for humanity and fraternity than ever before.”