



Bishops' Letter re: Vaccinations and Religious Exemptions in The Episcopal Church

September 2021

*“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”
Philippians 2:3-4*

The coronavirus pandemic reminds us yet again, as does every challenge and trial we experience, that our lives are interconnected. Our physical health, our spiritual well-being, the political and economic health of our societies - all are interconnected. What affects one affects all.

We affirm and proclaim this truth in our baptismal covenant when we respond, “I will, with God’s help,” to these two questions:

“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

Because our faith binds us to Christ and to one another, we in The Episcopal Church do not recognize a religious exemption from vaccinations for our members. In fact, we affirm the importance of vaccinations for the health of individuals and communities, and we urge people to be vaccinated and to encourage others to do the same.

This position was formally declared in a resolution of the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church in June of 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic began. The Executive Council is elected by the General Convention of the Church to oversee and carry out the programs and policies of the Church. Resolution MB 011 states:

“The Episcopal Church has long maintained that we are guided by faith and reason, and that scientific evidence helps us to better understand God’s creation, our place in it, and ways to alleviate suffering and pain.”

“The Church has long supported fact, evidence, and scientifically based policies.”

“The proper and responsible use of vaccines is a duty not only to our own selves and families but to our communities. Choosing to not vaccinate, when it is medically safe, threatens the lives of others.”



Therefore, “The Executive Council of The Episcopal Church recognizes no claim of theological or religious exemption from vaccination for our members and reiterates the spirit of General Convention policies that Episcopalians should seek the counsel of experienced medical professionals, scientific research, and epidemiological evidence.”

“We urge all religious leaders to support evidence-based measures that ensure the strongest protections for our communities. Furthermore, our congregations and dioceses are asked to partner with medical professionals to counter false information, and to become educated about programs in their communities that can provide vaccinations and immunizations at reduced or no cost to those in need.”

The full text of the resolution can be found here:

https://extranet.generalconvention.org/governing_and_interim_bodies/executive_council/resolution?id=72

We bishops in the Diocese of Virginia stand firmly with this resolution and do not make provision for a religious exemption from the COVID-10 vaccine, nor from any other medically safe vaccine. We urge our members to be vaccinated and to tell the story of their vaccination experience to others as encouragement for others to get vaccinated.

