



MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICY FOR CHURCH STAFF, INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

PURPOSE

At Byron United Church (the “**Church**”), we are committed to providing and maintaining a safe environment for all. Consistent with this commitment, the Church has established this Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy (the “**Policy**”). The Policy requires that, in accordance with the terms set forth below, all persons subject to this Policy (as defined in Scope, below) be vaccinated for COVID-19 or obtain an approved accommodation or exemption.

The Church has established this Policy, considering reliable scientific evidence, government guidance and protocols, its *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (“OHS”) requirements and relevant human rights legislation.

BACKGROUND

The Church has obligations under the OHS to take *every precaution reasonable in the circumstances* to protect the health and safety of a worker. It is the hope of the Church that this policy will allow the Church to continue to safely meet its mission to celebrate and share the Good News of New Life in Jesus Christ through worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and mission in this church family, our community and beyond.

The objective underlying this Policy is to provide a healthy and safe church environment for staff, volunteers, independent contractors and all members and guests of Byron United Church and safeguard the broader communities in which they live. Our vision continues to be a church community where all find and live God’s love, grace and joy.

The COVID-19 Science Advisory Table for Ontario has stated that the Delta variant is more transmissible and may be more dangerous than other variants of COVID-19, including the Alpha variant. The Delta variant is currently the dominant form of the virus. Medical experts warn that as the Delta variant increases significantly in Ontario, unvaccinated populations remain most vulnerable.

The Government of Canada currently has authorized a number of COVID-19 vaccines for use in Canada. In a report dated March 16, 2021, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) stated that in clinical trials, all approved COVID-19 vaccines are efficacious in the short term against symptomatic, confirmed COVID-19 disease.

The Middlesex-London Health Unit has strongly recommended that all organizations and facilities, within its jurisdiction, develop mandatory vaccination policies for their employees,

contractors and volunteers. The Antler River Watershed Regional Council of the United Church of Canada has encouraged all churches, within its region, to follow the direction of their local health unit.

Safe and reliable vaccines are an important tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19, build immunity in Ontario and protect our communities. As a church, we have a heightened responsibility to ensure we are doing everything we can to protect our staff, independent contractors, volunteers, congregation members and their families and all those who access our church building. As the majority of roles at the Church involve in-person interactions, the Church has determined that vaccinations of staff, independent contractors and volunteers are mandatory, with certain accommodations or exemptions, as set out in this Policy.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all full-time and part-time staff, independent contractors, and volunteers of the Church who have in-person interactions with other members of the church community.

For the purpose of this policy, an independent contractor is defined as an individual who provides regular service for the church and is paid a stipend by the church.

For the purpose of this policy, contractors are defined as any person from an outside company or external service provider who is required to do work in the church. Contractors are required to provide proof of vaccination upon entering the Church.

TIMING

All staff and independent contractors of the Church must provide proof of their first dose of the vaccine by December 6, 2021, and second dose by January 3, 2022 (28 days after the first dose). “Fully vaccinated” includes both doses of the vaccine plus 14 days. It is the responsibility of the staff member or independent contractor to ensure there is sufficient time to receive both doses of the vaccine by January 3, 2022. After November 30, 2021, subject to relevant accommodations or exemptions, any new staff member or independent contractor joining the Church must be fully vaccinated prior to their first day of work.

Staff members and independent contractors who fail to comply with the terms set out in this Policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination from their employment and/or contractual relationship.

All volunteers who serve in-person must provide proof of full vaccination or a valid medical exemption upon request in order to continue in their volunteer roles.

PROOF OF VACCINATION

Once a staff member/independent contractor/volunteer has been fully vaccinated, they are required to provide proof of vaccination to the Church. This must be provided on or before January 3, 2022, or for new staff members/independent contractors/volunteers, prior to their first day of employment/contractual relationship/volunteer position. Proof should be in the form of a copy of the proof of vaccination given at the time of receiving vaccination, or the document

downloaded from the provincial website, confirming the staff member/independent contractor/volunteer has been vaccinated.

The Church will only collect, use and disclose information regarding an individual staff member's/independent contractor's/volunteer's vaccination status in accordance with all applicable privacy laws. Proof of vaccination will be kept in a confidential file, stored in a secure location.

SUPPORT FOR GETTING VACCINATED

The Middlesex-London Health Unit provides updated resources, provincial regulations and pertinent information concerning COVID-19 vaccines on their website. Staff at MLHU are available to provide education and consultation regarding the importance of getting fully vaccinated.

Website – www.healthunit.com Email – health@mlhu.on.ca Telephone – 519- 663-5317

EXEMPTIONS

The Church recognizes its responsibilities and duties under provincial human rights legislation, such as the Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the “Code”). If a staff member or independent contractor is unable to be vaccinated, due to a protected ground, as defined by the Code, the Church has a duty to accommodate to a point of undue hardship.

However, this duty to accommodate must be balanced against the Church's obligations to protect the health and safety of staff/independent contractors/volunteers and members, and others who access our church building. Due to the serious health threat COVID-19 presents to the public, if a staff member/independent contractor/volunteer will not be vaccinated because of a protected ground under the Code, they must request an accommodation or exemption which falls under one of the following two categories:

1. Medical Condition; or
2. Religious/Creed.

Medical Condition Exemption

A staff member, independent contractor or volunteer who is requesting an exemption from this Policy on the basis of a medical condition must provide the Church with a letter from a medical practitioner, clearly stating the reason why the staff member/independent contractor/volunteer should be exempted from receiving the vaccine. This letter must be provided to the Church prior to December 6, 2021. If the staff member/independent contractor/volunteer begins after November 30, 2021, this letter must be provided to the Church prior to their first day of employment/contractual or volunteer relationship.

Religious/Creed Exemption

The Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario defines religion as “the practices, beliefs and observances that are part of a faith or religion. It does **not** include personal moral, ethical or political views”. Creed is more broadly defined, however, has limitations. The following characteristics are relevant when considering if a belief system is a creed under the *Code*. A creed:

- Is sincerely, freely and deeply held;
- Is integrally linked to a person’s self-definition and spiritual fulfilment;
- Is a particular, comprehensive and overarching system of belief that governs one’s conduct and practices;
- Addresses ultimate questions of human existence, including ideas about life, purpose, death, and the existence or non-existence of a creator and/or a higher or different order of existence;
- Has some “nexus” or connection to an organization or community that professes a shared system of belief.

There is no requirement under the Code to accommodate a refusal to be vaccinated arising from a political belief and/or principle. Political belief, such as the objection to receiving the vaccination on a principled basis, is not a protected ground under the Code.

A staff member, independent contractor or volunteer may apply for an exemption, due to religious belief or creed. The Church reserves the right to ask for materials in support of the staff member’s, independent contractor’s or volunteer’s religious belief or creed, including a letter of support from a religious leader or community.

Process to Receive an Accommodation

A staff member/independent contractor/volunteer who seeks an accommodation, including an exemption, should forward a request to the Chair of the Congregation. The individual will receive details regarding the specific information required to support her/his request. Upon receipt of the details of the request, the Chair of the Congregation will consult with others in church leadership to determine whether the accommodation, including an exemption, will be granted.

The accommodation process is a shared responsibility. All parties should co-operatively engage in the process, share information and consider potential accommodation solutions.

Approved by Session November 30, 2021

MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICY FOR CHURCH STAFF, INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

-Administrative Procedures - November 30, 2021-

1. The Leaders' Board will oversee the administration of the *Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy for Church Staff, Independent Contractors and Volunteers*.
2. The workplace for all church staff, independent contractors and volunteers refers to all locations whether indoors or outdoors where work, ministry, or volunteer engagements are carried out in-person on behalf of Byron United Church. For clarity, this includes visiting others in the broader community on behalf of the Church.
3. All information gathered as part of this *Mandatory Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Policy* will be treated in compliance with all applicable privacy legislation and will only be kept for as long as required to fulfill the identified purpose. The information will be destroyed when no longer required.
 - Confidential vaccine-related information will be collected and retained in a strict confidential process and will only be used to administer and implement Byron United Church's *Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy for Church Staff, Independent Contractors and Volunteers*.
 - This personal information will be secured in locked files. Access to this information will be limited to those who need to know it for clearly documented policy reasons only.
4. Church staff and independent contractors who have in-person interactions in any capacity of their work for the Church must provide a paper copy (or an emailed attachment) proof of first dose of vaccination by December 6, 2021 to the Church Administrator, Deb Farrell, and proof of full vaccination no later than January 3, 2022.
 - Proof should be in the form of a copy of the proof of vaccination given at the time of receiving vaccination, or the document downloaded from the provincial website, confirming the staff member/independent contractor/volunteer has been vaccinated.
 - These documents must include key information about each vaccination event, including the individual's name, date of birth, the number of doses received, the date(s) of vaccination(s), and product name of the vaccine(s) received.

Volunteers must provide proof of full vaccination to Deb Farrell when they are requested to serve in a volunteer role. This needs to be provided only the first time requested to serve and must be received prior to the volunteering occurring.
5. Persons who are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons can request an accommodation.
 - Written proof of the medical reason for accommodation must be provided from a medical practitioner and include the following:
 - The reason that the person cannot be vaccinated against COVID-19; and
 - The effective time period for the medical reason and the expiry date (i.e., permanent or time-limited).
 - The Leaders' Board reserves the right to ask for more specific documentation from the physician.

- If the medical reason is time-limited, within 30 days of expiring, proof of vaccination must be provided. If not received, the person will be considered unvaccinated.
6. If an accommodation is required based on reasons protected by the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, provide documentation on the reason for the accommodation need by December 6, 2021.
- Accommodation based on creed will be reviewed, validated, and approved.
 - The Leaders' Board reserves the right to ask for additional and substantial information on the reasons for the accommodation needs.
7. Church staff:
- a) Employees who are not fully vaccinated on January 3, 2022, but are in the process of becoming fully vaccinated should contact Linda Peck, Chair of the Congregation, to establish a personalized plan for the period from January 3, 2022 until they are fully vaccinated.
- b) Church staff who elect not to submit documentation showing they are fully vaccinated or are in the process of becoming fully vaccinated, and are without a documented medical or human rights accommodation plan in place will not be involved in any in-person interactions at Byron United Church until proof of full vaccination or documented exemptions have been provided to the church. If staff members cannot fulfill their assigned duties remotely, they will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence. Termination of employment will be avoided if at all possible.
- c) A new employee must submit the required proof of full vaccination or medical or human rights exemptions prior to beginning work for the Church.
8. Independent Contractors:
- a) Independent contractors who are not fully vaccinated on January 3, 2022, but are in the process of becoming fully vaccinated will not be involved in any in-person interactions at Byron United Church until proof of full vaccination has been provided.
- b) Independent contractors who elect not to submit documentation showing their vaccination status, and are without a documented medical or human rights accommodation plan in place will not be involved in any in-person interactions at Byron United Church until proof of full vaccination or documented exemptions have been provided to the church.
9. Volunteers:
- a) Any volunteer who is involved in in-person interactions within Byron United Church or on behalf of the church in any way and does not provide documentation proving that they are fully vaccinated or the documented exemptions listed in section 5 or 6 above will not be eligible to continue volunteering at Byron United Church, effective January 4, 2022.
- b) If a volunteer later submits proof of documentation required in section 4, 5 or 6 above, the individual will again be allowed to volunteer in in-person interactions in our church and on behalf of the church.

10. Awareness and Education:

Church staff, independent contractors and volunteers who have not provided the required proof of vaccination or exemption documents will be informed about COVID-19 awareness and education available from the Middlesex-London Health Unit and encouraged to review that information. They will also be encouraged to consult with their own medical physician or practitioner regarding the importance of vaccinations for keeping everyone safe.

11. This policy will be reviewed at least every six months, after implementation.

12. The policy will be posted on the Church's website and distributed by email to all employees, independent contractors, volunteers and members of our church family. It will also be posted in a public place so all members of the church community are aware of this policy.

13. The Leaders' Board has the discretion to accommodate working requirements as they deem appropriate.

Frequently Asked Questions About

Byron United Church's Mandatory Vaccination Policies

1. *Why was this policy for staff, independent contractors and volunteers created?*

The objective underlying this policy is to provide a healthy and safe church environment for staff, volunteers, independent contractors and all members and guests of Byron United Church and safeguard the broader communities in which we live.

In our existing Re-Opening Plan, Byron United Church has policies and processes in place to protect its staff and volunteers. The Plan also indicates that other processes may be required to control the risk of transmission in the workplace.

“The Middlesex-London Health Unit, on September 3, 2021, strongly recommended that all employers require all employees, volunteers, and contractors who participate in any in-person activity to be **fully vaccinated** against COVID-19, with the rare exception of those individuals who cannot be fully vaccinated due to permitted exemptions (medical and other protected grounds under the Ontario Human Rights Code.)” (Primer for Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policies). The Antler River Watershed Regional Council of the United Church of Canada has advised churches within its region to follow the advice of their local health units.

2. *When are staff, independent contractors and volunteers required to be fully vaccinated?*

For staff and independent contractors, proof of vaccination must be provided no later than January 3, 2022. By this date the person must have received the full series of a COVID-19 vaccine or a combination of COVID-19 vaccines, as authorized by Health Canada.

For volunteers, proof of vaccination must be provided upon request.

3. *How will the church ensure the privacy of the information provided by each individual?*

The church will only collect, use, and disclose information regarding an individual staff member's/ independent contractor's/or volunteer's vaccination status in accordance with all applicable privacy laws. Proof of vaccination documents provided to the church will be kept in a confidential file, stored in a secure location.

4. *How does a staff member, independent contractor or volunteer apply for an approved medical or religious/creed exemption?*

A staff member, independent contractor or volunteer seeking an accommodation or exemption should forward a request to Linda Peck, the Chair of the Congregation, for consideration.

5. *What will happen when a staff member, independent contractor or volunteer fails to comply with the terms of this policy?*

Church staff, who choose not to submit proof of a first dose of vaccine by December 6, 2021 will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence, unless accommodation to work remotely is approved by the Leaders' Board.

Independent contractors, who choose not to submit proof of a first dose of vaccine by December 6, 2021, will not be involved in any in-person interactions at the church.

Volunteers who fail to provide proof of full vaccination upon request will not be allowed to continue volunteering at the church.

Individuals from any of the above groups, who can provide documented medical or human rights reasons for not being fully vaccinated, will be exempt from the interventions described above.

Proof of vaccination is a temporary policy during the pandemic and the Session can withdraw these requirements when they deem it safe and appropriate to do so.