

Interpretive Memo on Ethical Standards for Ministry Personnel and COVID-19 Vaccination Status



From the Office of Vocation – October 14, 2021

On September 29, 2021, the Board of Vocation passed the following motion unanimously:

The Board of Vocation expects all ministry personnel who are actively serving to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, unless medically exempt. Unvaccinated ministry personnel, without a medical exemption, may be found to be acting contrary to the ethical standard that calls upon them to be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of all.

This is not a new policy or a standard for accreditation where compliance is tracked by the Office of Vocation. This interpretive memo links the expectation of ministry personnel being fully vaccinated to an existing Ethical Standard for Ministry Personnel. The Board of Vocation is collaborating through offering another tool for the church, as regional councils, communities of faith, and ministry personnel seek to understand their responsibilities during this pandemic.

The United Church of Canada is committed to providing safe environments for work, worship, and study, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The church also seeks to support ministry personnel towards health, joy, and excellence in ministry practice.

Background and Rationale

The United Church's resource on Duty of Care outlines the theological rationale for this commitment, which is grounded in scripture:

Jesus came into the world to bring life in all its fullness. As followers of Jesus we are called to show love to one another, and to the world (John 13:34–35), to share our gifts and resources, and to build a community of mutuality and respect (Acts 2:44–47). As a church, we have a primary duty to care for those who are marginalized, less powerful or more vulnerable in our community. (Deuteronomy 10:17–19, Isaiah 61:1–2)

[*\(Faithful Footsteps\)*](#)

The [Ethical Standards for ministry personnel](#) define the standards below which ministry personnel are not expected to drop. Specifically, the Ethical Standards outline the need for ministry personnel to be aware of how their actions and choices can affect those who they serve, especially the vulnerable:

6. Relationships with Persons Served

Ministry personnel are aware of and attentive to the possible impact of their words and actions in caring for the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of persons who seek their help. In all relationships, ministry personnel are called to:

e) be sensitive to the needs and vulnerabilities of all, while clarifying and maintaining the professional nature of the relationship;

Finally, the apostle Paul pointed towards his call for followers of Jesus to be mindful of the needs of the community when he wrote, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:4–5).

Expectation

The Board of Vocation expects all ministry personnel who are actively serving to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, unless medically exempt. Unvaccinated ministry personnel, without a medical exemption, may be found to be acting contrary to the ethical standard that calls upon them to be sensitive to the vulnerabilities of all.

This expectation is consistent with the advice of public health officials and scientists from across the country. We are grateful for the gifts and wisdom God has provided to these public health leaders. We will continue to listen for their wisdom as the pandemic continues to evolve.

Ministry personnel with a valid medical exemption will be excused from this expectation and will engage in the accommodation process to explore ways in which they may be able to continue to perform those functions of ministry during this pandemic.

As a denomination, The United Church of Canada recognizes its presence across many provincial and territorial jurisdictions, which have a variety of regulations on vaccination status and/or proof of vaccination. It is a denominational practice that our own expectations for ministry personnel, as religious office holders, meet or exceed provincial regulations.

The Office of Vocation will deal with concerns brought to it relating to unvaccinated ministry personnel in accordance with the procedures found within *The Manual* (section J.6) and Appendix A to the [Office of Vocation: Structure and Responsibilities](#) document.

If you have questions about safety, duty of care, and this expectation, please reach out to your Office of Vocation Minister for a conversation.