



# COVID-19 Vaccination Policy of the Diocese of Thunder Bay

## **PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY**

The Diocese of Thunder Bay (Diocese) is committed to taking every reasonable precaution in the protection of the health and safety of individuals from the hazard of COVID-19. According to public health guidance, vaccination is a key element in the protection against COVID-19. This Policy is designed to maximize protection among clergy (Bishops, Priests and Deacons) who serve in the Diocese, Diocesan Employees, Parish Staffs, Independent Contractors, Volunteers, Parishioners and visitors.

## **APPLICATION**

This policy applies to all Clergy who serve in the Diocese, which includes the bishop, priests and permanent deacons (Clergy); Ministers of Service, office workers, volunteers and contractual workers. Collectively they are referred to under this Policy as "*Clergy/Staff*".

## **TEMPORARY DURATION OF POLICY**

This Policy is in effect as of **October 29, 2021** until further notice. This Policy is intended to be an interim policy of the Diocese and therefore the Policy is subject to change according to public health guidance, government regulations and legislation, as determined in the sole discretion of the Diocese.

## **VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS**

The Diocese does not mandate *Clergy/Staff* to be vaccinated. Given the continuing spread of COVID-19 with new variants, and following public health guidance in Ontario and federally, **full vaccination is strongly recommended** for all *Clergy/Staff* in order to maintain a safe and healthy workplace. Full vaccination means receiving all recommended doses within the recommended time period of an approved Health Canada COVID-19 vaccine, including the 14-day period following the second or last dose (Full Vaccination).

*Clergy/Staff* are **strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated** in order to protect themselves against serious illness from COVID-19, as well as to provide indirect protection to others, including parishioners and visitors at all Diocesan locations, which includes churches, parish or chancery offices, parish halls and cemeteries (Diocesan Locations).

*Clergy/Staff* who cannot or **choose not to receive Full Vaccination** will be subject to the terms of this Policy for **unvaccinated individuals** until they have received their Full Vaccination. (including the 14-day period after their second or last dose).

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## **CONTINUED COMPLIANCE WITH ALL HEALTH AND SAFETY PRECAUTIONS**

The Diocese has and will continue to comply with all guidance directives, regulations and laws of the Provincial Government of Ontario, Federal Government and local Public Health Units in regard to COVID-19. Unless a legislated or regulatory exemption applies, all *Clergy/Staff* are expected and required to continue to comply with all applicable health and safety measures to reduce the hazard of COVID-19, including but not limited to screening, wearing a mask or face covering, using provided personal protective equipment (PPE), maintaining appropriate physical distancing, and self-monitoring of potential COVID-19 symptoms when at work or otherwise engaged in work or volunteer activities at Diocesan locations or at Diocesan events wherever they may be held.

*Clergy and Staff* who remain **unvaccinated**, including those who are exempt due to a medical exemption under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* ("Code"), will be required to take additional infection and prevention control measures, including **providing ongoing proof** of negative COVID- 19 tests as stated below.

## **SUPPORT FOR VACCINATIONS**

The Diocese will support *Clergy/Staff* in receiving their Full Vaccination by **December 17, 2021**. Reasonable arrangements will be made to allow for Clergy and Staff to attend COVID-19 vaccination clinics during work time, without loss of compensation or the requirement to use sick time or vacation time. The maximum paid time allowed is three (3) hours.

*Staff* must have approval from their pastors/managers in advance before attending a vaccination clinic during work time. All efforts should be made to allow *Staff* to use time at the

beginning or end of their work day or to extend lunch and break times to attend vaccination clinics.

*Staff* can take one full day off immediately after their first and/or second vaccination, if there are lingering side effects of the vaccination.

## **PROOF OF VACCINATION**

The Diocese requires to know the vaccination status of all *Clergy/Staff*. Proof means documentation verifying receipt of a vaccination series approved by Health Canada, the World Health Organization or verification using an Ontario vaccine passport (QR code) where available.

*Clergy/Staff* must disclose their vaccination status to the Diocese. *Staff*, independent contractors and volunteers shall provide documentation to the Diocesan Personnel Manager (Susan Nistico) no later than **November 19, 2021**. *Clergy* shall provide documentation to the Diocesan Chancellor (Father Joseph Arockiam) no later than **November 19, 2021**.

**For Confidentiality purposes**, please provide your documentation by e-mail: Susan Nistico - [bpsec@dotb.ca](mailto:bpsec@dotb.ca), - Fr. Joseph Arockiam - [josephjarockiam@yahoo.ca](mailto:josephjarockiam@yahoo.ca).

*Clergy/Staff* who, by **November 19, 2021**, disclose that they have **not** received Full Vaccination or who have **not disclosed** their vaccination status as required, shall be subject to the terms of this Policy for **unvaccinated** individuals. If *Clergy/Staff* subsequently provide proof that they have received Full Vaccination, then they will be deemed in compliance with this Policy for Full Vaccination.

## **PRIVACY**

Vaccination status information as well as proof of valid exemptions to vaccination, will be collected, used and maintained pursuant to the Diocesan Privacy norms, the terms of this Policy, the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*, and other applicable privacy legislation. This information will only be used to the extent necessary for implementation of this Policy, for administering health and safety protocols, and infection and prevention control measures in the workplace. **Confidential information** will be stored **securely** and **temporarily** in the sole discretion of the Diocese and will not become part of a person's Individual Permanent file.

## VACCINATION EXEMPTIONS

*Clergy and Staff* who have a valid medical exemption, including an exemption based on an illness or disability, will be accommodated in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code. A valid medical exemption must be provided in the form of a written document supplied by a qualified medical doctor, nurse practitioner, or registered nurse (Extended Class) setting out a documented medical reason for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and, if applicable, the effective time-period for the medical reason. The Diocese reserves the right to request further information before accepting a valid medical exemption.

For those *Clergy* who have a valid medical exemption or *Staff* who have valid medical under the Code, if there is no ability to accommodate such individuals in accordance with the Code which allows for the continued performance of their duties, then an unpaid leave of absence, or other measures as deemed appropriate, may be provided at the discretion of the Bishop of Thunder Bay.

## RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION

There are **no religious exemptions** under this Policy for those who are Roman Catholics. Religious exemptions for non-Roman Catholic *Staff* will be considered individually. The Diocese reserves the right to request further information in support of a religious exemption, as it deems appropriate.

## ACCOMMODATION PROCESS

*Clergy and Staff* who are not able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine for a reason related to a protected ground as set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code, can request accommodation by contacting the Bishop or the Chancellor at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre.

*Clergy and Staff* with a valid exemption under the Ontario Human Rights Code, or who choose not to receive Full Vaccination without an exemption, must provide **proof at their own expense** of a negative rapid COVID-19 test every *Monday and Thursday morning*, except if such *Clergy* or *Staff* are on vacation or are on sick leave that day, in which case proof shall be provided on the day that the *Clergy or Staff* return to work. *Staff* shall provide **negative test results** to Susan Nistico at [bpsec@dotb.ca](mailto:bpsec@dotb.ca) at the beginning of their work day. *Clergy* shall provide **negative test results** to the Diocesan Chancellor, Fr. Arockiam at [josephjarockiam@yahoo.ca](mailto:josephjarockiam@yahoo.ca). Failure to provide this information as noted by this policy, may result in an unpaid work day.

The Clergy and Staff who receives a **positive rapid test** must follow up with a **PCR Covid 19** test to validate the rapid test.

Those who **choose not to receive Full Vaccination** without a valid exemption, are required to attend mandatory education sessions on the benefits of vaccination as arranged by the Diocese.

### **FAILURE TO PERFORM ESSENTIAL WORK BY STAFF DUE TO VACCINATION STATUS**

Although the Diocese will attempt to reasonably accommodate *Staff* with a valid exemption under the Ontario Human Rights Code (Code), the Diocese may not be able to provide alternative work arrangements or find additional duties for *Staff* to maintain their previous hours. In some circumstances, an unvaccinated *Staff* member may not be able to access the workplace and/or there may be less or no work available to them. If an unvaccinated *Staff* member is unable to perform their duties, the Diocese maintains the right to effectively manage the workplace.

Effectively managing the workplace may include:

1. Revising or reducing duties and/or work hours and with compensation accordingly.
2. Temporary suspension from duties without compensation.
3. Leave of absences or unpaid lay-offs.
4. Disciplinary measures.
5. Termination. Please note that termination will only be considered after a careful review of all potential reasonable accommodation options.

There is **no right to reinstatement** for any *Staff person* who has been dismissed or relieved from their duties for non-compliance with this Policy. Any reinstatement or resumption of duties will be at the sole discretion of the Bishop of Thunder Bay.

### **VOLUNTEERS**

The Diocese **strongly recommends** that all Volunteers who assist in any ministry in parishes or in other areas be fully vaccinated. Diocesan volunteers who cannot or choose not to receive Full Vaccination under this Policy, and who do **not** provide a negative rapid test result to their pastor as per this policy, may have their services **suspended** by their pastor temporarily or for

the duration of this policy, or until such time that such individual has received their Full Vaccination. The Diocese appreciates all volunteers and may or may not request that such volunteers resume their services after this Policy expires. Although the unvaccinated status of some minister/volunteers may endanger the health of our people more than others, it is important that the policy include all the volunteers to avoid the misinterpretation of the policy or laxity in its implementation.

### **UNVACCINATED CLERGY**

To protect our parishioners, visitors and the public, the Diocese considers that *Clergy* (priests and permanent deacons) who have **not received Full Vaccination** may be unable to properly and safely carry out certain ministries, due to restrictions from other institutions (Hospitals, School Boards, etc.) including, but not limited to the following:

1. Hospital visits.
2. Nursing home and long term care home visits.
3. Home or Communion visits to the elderly or other parishioners.
4. School visits

Due to these restrictions and the failure to be vaccinated, the Bishop may **revoke the Faculties** for priests or permanent deacons to minister in the diocese or may curtail their ministry to a certain area. v.g. only in a church setting, while this policy is in force.

Please note that the Bereavement Association of Ontario (BAO) is currently reviewing their policy in regards to funeral home and mausoleum and cemetery services. We will follow their directions for these locations.

### **INTERPRETATION OF POLICY**

The terms of this Policy are, at all times, subject to interpretation by the Bishop of Thunder Bay at his sole and absolute discretion.

### **ONGOING MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF COVID-19 WORKPLACE SAFETY MEASURES**

The Diocese will continue to closely monitor its COVID-19 risk mitigation strategy and the evolving public health information. If it is determined that additional precautions are necessary, the Diocese will amend this Policy accordingly.

Any questions concerning the interpretation and/or applicability of this Policy should be addressed to Bishop Fred Colli or Susan Nistico at the Pastoral Centre.

Dated in Thunder Bay - **October 20, 2021**