

## Trinity St Andrews United Church

### COVID-19 Vaccine and Mask POLICY

#### 1. THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

While scripture does not offer us exact equivalents for this (pandemic) situation or, for that matter, for almost any social or ethical issue with which we wrestle, the Epistles, and Paul's letters in particular, give us evidence for how early Christian congregations tried to handle the social and ethical issues of their day, living as they did in a society in which they were a tiny minority.

I Corinthians contains Paul's responses to a series of questions about such matters posed to him by the Christian community in Corinth. Especially instructive may be Paul's response in I Corinthians 8 to the question of whether it was okay for Christians to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. The concern was whether some people might be led astray and to believe in idols if they saw members of the Christian community eating such food. Paul's answer was that there was no harm in doing so because he and much of the community knew that the idols did not exist. But if someone (perhaps someone new to the Christian community) saw them eating in a "pagan temple" or eating food sacrificed to an idol and believed the idol was real, that person could be led astray. Paul's guidance was to ask "What would be the loving thing to do?"

In Romans 14, where Paul was responding to similar concerns about whether certain foods should be avoided, he makes the point that while he considers all types of food to be okay to eat, "if your brother or sister is injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love." The basic principle Paul uses, when wrestling with a question, is once again, "What is the loving thing to do?" The loving thing can mean one thing for our interactions with other members of the community of faith as we gather for worship and something different in terms of our interactions with others whom we meet or who may use our sanctuary or other parts of our building. It is helpful to approach such matters by asking, "What is the loving thing to do? (*based on resources from GC and ECORC*)"

#### 2. PURPOSE

As Trinity St Andrews United Church (TSA) lives out its mission we are committed to providing a safe working environment for our employees, our congregation, and members of our community with whom we interact. The purpose of the Vaccination and Mask Policy (the "Policy") is to provide guidelines pertaining to the expectations and requirements of all who enter the building with respect to COVID-19.

In our day-to-day site operations, we have a responsibility to protect all workers and the community in which we operate. In addition, the teachings of Jesus Christ call us to care for the most vulnerable. For these reasons, it is critical that TSA and its staff take any and all precautions to protect against COVID-19. A mandatory policy requiring congregants to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to attend in-person is acceptable since our Community of Faith has an obligation to keep employees, congregants, and other visitors as safe as possible. In addition, appropriate mask, physical distancing and hand hygiene practices as identified by the Ministry of Health will be enforced.

### **3. SCOPE**

This Policy applies to all church employees, congregation members, community groups, visitors, and any other individuals volunteering or using TSA United Church in any capacity. One-off Visitors and events (such as repair person or a wedding in the sanctuary) will be considered on a case-by-case basis according to current pandemic protocols since each event presents unique circumstances and a rigid policy might be more cumbersome than helpful. All such visitors are required to wear a mask and follow current Public Health directives

### **4. POLICY**

#### **4.1 Mandatory Vaccination**

It is the policy position of Trinity St Andrews that all church facility users, eligible for vaccination, must be vaccinated against COVID-19, or have a documented medical exemption, as recommended by the Ministry of Health and Provincial Health Officer.

Further, it is the position of Trinity St Andrews that safety protocols including appropriate mask, physical distancing and hand hygiene practices as identified by Public Health will be enforced.

##### **4.1.1 Staff**

Staff of TSA must provide to the Ministry and Personnel Committee, in writing, confirmation of their vaccination status (vaccinated/not vaccinated) or medical exemption certificate from their Primary Care Provider. Proof of vaccination or medical exemption will be maintained in their secure HR file. Once proof is filed, employees are not required to keep showing their vaccination receipt. Employees with a medical exemption will work with M&P to create an accommodation plan

Where a staff member chooses not to be vaccinated and does not have a medical exemption, the individual will provide in writing to M&P Committee, the reason for requesting an exemption. This information will be kept confidential and secured in the confidential HR files. The M&P Committee will review the information and will implement necessary actions which might include restricting access to the building or modifying their contract of employment up to placing the individual on an unpaid leave of absence which may lead to termination of employment.

##### **4.1.2 Congregation Members, Volunteers and Occasional Use**

A mandatory vaccination and mask policy for attendance at the building will be communicated to all congregation members, visitors and user groups. Proof of vaccination or proof of medical exemption is required to enter the premises (i.e. a vaccine receipt or passport). Each group (i.e. Committee Chair, Group Leader, Use of Rooms signatory, etc.) is responsible for communicating this expectation to their members and for ensuring compliance. Contact information for each event, and masks for all indoor events (except for those medically exempt from wearing a mask), as well as physical distancing and hand hygiene are mandatory. The Committee Chair, Group Leader or Use of Room signatory is responsible to maintain the Contact List for a period of 30 days.

#### **4.2 Accommodations**

Where an individual provides proof of medical exemption for having not received a COVID-19 vaccination, we will work with the individual to develop and implement an appropriate accommodation.

### **4.3 Non-Compliance**

#### **4.3.1 Staff**

Staff failing to follow this policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

#### **4.3.2 Congregation Members, Volunteers and Occasional Use**

User Groups unable to follow this policy are to speak with a member of the TSA Council or the Administration staff to explore possible accommodation that would be supported by Public Health. Users failing to follow this policy may have limited access to the facility or a termination of the lease agreement.

Existing lease holders or user groups will be notified of this policy and requirement to comply. All future agreements will incorporate this policy, or other wording to this effect.

## **5. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Information relating to an individual's proof of vaccination and/or the reason(s) for not receiving a COVID-19 vaccination will remain confidential and used only for the purposes of ensuring the safety of TSA United Church employees, congregation members, visitors, volunteers providing services onsite and local communities, in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

## **6. IMPLEMENTATION**

Trinity St Andrews United Church will communicate this policy to all congregation members, adherents, and user groups in print and online formats. Signs will be posted along with all other COVID-19 Information informing visitors to the building of this policy. Where an individual provides a medical reason for not having received a COVID-19 vaccination, the church will work with the individual to develop and implement an appropriate accommodation. Medical exemption for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 will be in the form of documentation provided by a physician or nurse practitioner.

Those providing proof of vaccination are consenting to the use and disclosure of this personal health information for the purposes of enforcing this policy. This information will only be shared with persons working for or volunteering at TSA in the various capacities charged with enforcing the policy.

### **6.1 Staff**

M&P will oversee the implementation with all staff members.

### **6.2 Congregation Members**

The Chair of Council will prepare a letter to be distributed to all congregation members and adherents informing them of this policy. This will be distributed with the weekly bulletin, the newsletter, an email blast, and posted on our website.

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Approved by: TSA Council

Congregation members will be asked to show proof of vaccination or medical exemption as they enter the building for worship. This includes those in a leadership position within the church (i.e. greeters, choir, committee members and volunteers in a role that requires them to interact with others) Failure to comply may result in restricted access to the building or alternate means of participating.

### 6.3 Other users

Lease agreements with existing tenants will be revised or new agreements prepared to reflect this policy. All future agreements will incorporate this policy, or other wording to this effect and compliance for user group members will be the responsibility of the lease signatory.

## 7. Conclusion

Current public health guidelines provide proven strategies for mitigating the risk of infection, including maintaining physical distance; wearing masks; limiting indoor gatherings, especially in spaces with poor circulation. These measures have been shown to be effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19, and should be continued in addition to a mandatory vaccination policy. Other means include continuing online programming and keeping a contact list of individuals who attend at the building in person in order to ensure those impacted by this policy are still able to participate.

This policy allows us to gather community, offer compassion and. deepen faith in the safest way possible.

This policy will be reviewed and revised regularly to ensure continued adherence to Public Health guidelines. At minimum a review will occur every six months

***Trinity St Andrews United Church developed this policy based on the policy of Lakefield United Church. We thank them for their generosity.***

For Reference:

<https://livingskiesrc.ca/united-church-communities-of-faith-and-vaccination-policies/>

<https://ecorcuccan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Vaccination-Policies-in-Congregations-24Jun2021-002.pdf>

<https://niagaraanglican.ca/uploads/Guidelines%20-%20Policies/Loving%20Our%20Neighbours%20-%20Ecclesiastical%20Province%20of%20Ontario%20-%20TEMPLATE%20FOR%20REOPENING%20-%20FINAL%20DN.pdf>

<https://niagaraanglican.ca/uploads/Guidelines%20-%20Policies/June%2011%2C%202021%20-%20Ministry%20Guidelines%20During%20COVID-19%20Pandemic.pdf>

[https://niagaraanglican.ca/uploads/Guidelines%20-%20Policies/Parish%20Amber%20Stage%20Re-Opening%20Guide%20-DN%20-%20COVID19%20Pandemic%20June%202021.pdf?fbclid=IwAR25LuXn0TK3MgJCG2QhL1I\\_uvpRw5MxPFxgZ\\_AfnKlw9MxshSydsvfBz3U](https://niagaraanglican.ca/uploads/Guidelines%20-%20Policies/Parish%20Amber%20Stage%20Re-Opening%20Guide%20-DN%20-%20COVID19%20Pandemic%20June%202021.pdf?fbclid=IwAR25LuXn0TK3MgJCG2QhL1I_uvpRw5MxPFxgZ_AfnKlw9MxshSydsvfBz3U)

<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-reopening-recovery-rebuild/covid-19-reopening-guidelines-for-businesses-organizations/covid-19-guidance-faith-based-organizations/>