



MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICY FOR ATTENDING WORSHIP SERVICES AT BYRON UNITED CHURCH

The apostle Paul pointed towards his call for followers of Jesus to be ever 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)

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* (“OHSA”) requirements and relevant human rights legislation.

BACKGROUND

The Church has obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to take *every precaution reasonable in the circumstances* to protect the health and safety of everyone attending worship services at Byron United Church. 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 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. 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 employees, volunteers and contractors who have in-person interactions. 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.

As of October 25, 2021, the Government of Ontario has allowed places of worship the option to lift capacity limits and physical distancing requirements providing they implement PROOF OF VACCINATION POLICIES.

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 congregation members and their families and all those who access our church building. As the majority of activities and roles at Byron United Church involve in-person interactions, the church has determined that all attendees wishing to enter the church building for any service of worship, must be fully vaccinated, with certain accommodations or exemptions, as set out in this Policy.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all members of the congregation, guests and everyone who participates in any service of worship.

For the purpose of this policy, attendees are defined as but not limited to congregants, guests church staff, greeters, ushers, musicians, choir members, Sunday school teachers and multimedia operators.

For the purpose of this policy, services of worship include all Sunday services and any special worship services, weddings, funerals/celebration of life, baptisms and any other religious rites, as well as any activities or events associated with these services.

TIMING

Commencing on December 5, 2021, all attendees, as described in this policy, wishing to enter the church building for any service of worship, must provide both an approved proof of full vaccination and an accompanying proof of identity.

PROOF OF VACCINATION AND IDENTITY

An individual is considered fully vaccinated, in accordance with Ontario Regulation 364/20, if they have received the full series of a COVID-19 vaccine or a combination of COVID-19 vaccines, as authorized by Health Canada. Attendees at any worship service must have received their final dose of the COVID-19 vaccines at least 14 days before providing proof of full vaccination.

The certification process requires that all attendees, upon entry to the church, present a valid provincial or federal QR code or a vaccination receipt confirming that they have been fully vaccinated. Proof of vaccination can be presented in either electronic or paper form.

Each item being presented for verification must include the attendee's name, date of birth, the number of doses received, the date(s) of vaccination(s) and the product name of the vaccine(s) received.

At the same time, all individuals must provide valid proof of identity issued from a governmental body. These documents must include both the name of the identification holder and the date of the individual's birth. For the purpose of this policy, photo identification is not required.

The Church will not collect or store records of the provided proof of vaccination or identity, for any service of worship, in accordance with Ontario Regulation 364/20 under the *Reopening Ontario Act*.

There may be members of Byron United Church or others, who for personal or philosophical reasons, decide not to get the vaccinations and are unable to provide the necessary documents to show proof of full vaccination, for attendance at services of worship. These individuals will not be allowed to enter the church building for any in-person service, but will be advised to access the available live streaming service presentations online.

EXEMPTIONS

The Church recognizes its responsibilities and duties under provincial human rights legislation, such as the Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the "Code"). If any individual wishing to participate in a worship service 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 church members, their guests and others who access our church building. Due to the serious health threat COVID-19 presents to the public, if an individual, wishing to attend any services of worship, 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

Any individual 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 they should be exempted from receiving the vaccine.

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.

Process to Receive an Accommodation

An individual 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.

Approved by Session November 30, 2021

**MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICY FOR
ATTENDING WORSHIP SERVICES AT BYRON UNITED CHURCH**

-Administrative Procedures - November 30, 2021-

1. The Leaders' Board will oversee the administration of the *Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy for Attendance at Worship Services at Byron United Church*.
2. Commencing on December 5, 2021, all attendees, unless listed as "exceptions" below, wishing to enter the church building for any service of worship must provide:
 - the required proof of being fully vaccinated; and
 - the required proof of identity.
3. Exceptions to *Mandatory Vaccination Policy for Attending Worship Services*:
The following individuals are exempt from this Mandatory Vaccination Policy for attendance at worship services:
 - those under 12 years of age;
 - those who provide a written document, completed and supplied by a medical practitioner that sets out a documented medical reason for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and the effective time-period for the given medical reason; or
 - those who provide a valid religious or creed exemption as defined in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.
4. The church organization must provide properly trained staff or volunteers to review and confirm the proof of full vaccination status, and the proof of identity as provided by individuals.
5. No record of the provided proofs noted above will be kept by the church, in accordance with Schedule 1 of *Ontario Regulation 364/20* under the *Reopening Ontario Act*.
6. Definitions of "Fully Vaccinated":
The certification process parallels that required for other venues in the province of Ontario which require proof of vaccination, and requires that all attendees present a valid provincial or federal QR code or a vaccination receipt confirming full vaccination. These items 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. Acceptable vaccination receipts include those issued by the Ontario government or those recognized from another jurisdiction.
7. Providing Proof of Identity:
Validation of identity of the individual will be based on two key identifiers:
 - the name of the identification holder; and
 - the date of birth of the individual.Proof of identity can be established using documentation issued by a governmental body, provided it includes the name of the identification holder and the date of birth. A photo identification is not required.
8. Those who wish to attend worship service but cannot provide the necessary documents to provide proof of full vaccination must be told they may not enter the church building. Such individuals should be advised that worship services are provided on a live streaming service that can be readily accessed in the Byron community.
9. Monitoring:
The Re-Opening Team will be responsible for monitoring this Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy and recommending changes to the Session as warranted.
10. This policy will be posted on the Church's website and distributed by BUC Wheat to members of the congregation. It will also be posted in a public place so all members of the church community are aware of this policy for attending worship services.

Frequently Asked Questions About

Byron United Church's Mandatory Vaccination Policy for Worship

1. *Why do we need a proof of vaccination policy for worship services?*

Our approved Re-Opening Plan was “prepared with the main focus on providing safe in-person worship for members of our church family who desire this option (from Introduction). A proof of vaccination policy would be the best possible option to ensure the health and safety of all attendees.

2. *Why are we introducing this policy now?*

“The Government of Ontario will allow settings to lift capacity and physical distancing requirements if they choose to require proof of vaccination.” (A Plan to Safely Reopen Ontario and Manage COVID-19 for the Long Term – October 25, 2021).

Our in-person worship services are currently at capacity. The above directive from Ontario Regulation 364/20 of the Reopening Act, allows the church to accommodate more people, but only if a vaccination policy is in place.

3. *What will be required to enter the church building for worship services?*

All attendees, as they arrive for worship, must provide proof of being fully vaccinated at least fourteen days prior to the date of the service they are attending and the required proof of identity before entering the church. The certification process requires that all attendees present a valid provincial or federal QR code or a vaccination receipt confirming full vaccination.

4. *Who can be exempt from this mandatory policy?*

Attendees under the age of 12 years are exempt. Attendees who provide a letter from a medical practitioner, which clearly documents a medical reason for not being fully vaccinated against COVID-19, are exempt. Attendees who provide a valid religious or creed exemption, as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code, are exempt.

5. *What does “fully vaccinated” mean?*

An individual is deemed to be fully vaccinated, in accordance with Ontario Regulation 364/20, if they have received the full series of a COVID-19 vaccine or a combination of COVID-19 vaccines as authorized by Health Canada. The individual must have received their final dose of COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days before providing proof of being fully vaccinated.

6. *Why do attendees need to show proof of identity as well as vaccination?*

Validation of identification must also be undertaken to ensure that the proof of vaccination offered by the individual belongs to them. Validation is based on the presentation of a document indicating the name of the identification holder and the date of birth of the individual. The proof of identity document does not require photo identification and is only mandatory for individuals over 21 years of age.

7. *Will the church be keeping records of this proof of vaccination and proof of identity at any time?*

No record of the required proofs will be kept by the church. Attendees will be required to show visual proof of vaccination or proof of an approved medical exemption each time they

arrive for worship.

8. *Who will be responsible for reviewing and confirming the proof of vaccination status and proof of identity as provided by individuals?*

The church's greeters will be fully trained to provide this role for worship services.

9. *When will this policy take effect?*

This policy will take effect on December 5, 2021. Since this is intended as only a temporary measure by the Government of Ontario, the Re-Opening Team will be responsible for monitoring this program and recommending changes to the Leaders' Board and Session.

10. *What happens when attendees wishing to attend worship services in person cannot provide the necessary documents?*

Beginning on December 5, 2021, if an individual wishing to enter the church building cannot provide the required documents to confirm proof of full vaccination or an approved exemption, they may not enter the building. Such individuals will be advised that church services are provided online.