

September 2, 2021

LIFE IN FRATERNITY AND COVID-19 VACCINATION

OBJECTIVE

To provide direction to fraternities with respect to the participation of vaccinated and unvaccinated sisters and brothers in fraternity meetings, chapters and events.

BACKGROUND

1. A large proportion of Secular Franciscans across Canada are seniors and considered vulnerable as far as health is concerned.
2. Many, if not most, older Secular Franciscans have chosen to be vaccinated to protect their own health as well as the health of those with whom they come in contact, especially family members who may not be vaccinated (e.g. children under the age of 12).
3. Although these older individuals are vaccinated, they can still contract the virus if they come in contact with someone who is a carrier.
4. Often, these seniors are also grandparents with grandchildren who are under the age of 12 and unvaccinated. They fear being exposed to the COVID-19 virus and spreading it to their unvaccinated grandchildren.
5. Members of fraternities have expressed/are expressing concern about attending in-person meetings and events that will place them in the same space as others who are unvaccinated. As a result, some are refusing to participate in fraternity meetings and events.
6. Requests for direction have been solicited from the National Minister and National Council.

CURRENT SITUATION

1. Vaccines save millions of lives each year. Vaccines work by training and preparing the body's natural defences – the immune system – to recognize and fight off the viruses and bacteria they target. After vaccination, if the body is later exposed to those disease-causing germs, the body is immediately ready to destroy them, preventing illness. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe for most people 18 years and older, including those with pre-existing conditions of any kind, including auto-immune disorders. Vaccination reduces the risk of getting seriously ill and dying from COVID-19.
(World Health Organization, “COVID-19 advice for the public: Getting vaccinated”)

In addition, Health Canada has authorized the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for youth aged 12 and older; people aged 12 to 17 may receive the same 2-dose

schedule recommended for adults. At this time, no COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for use in children under the age of 12 in Canada.

(Government of Canada, "Vaccines for Children: COVID-19")

2. Demographic statistics highlight that vaccines are effective in preventing the contracting and spreading of the COVID-19 virus. Since the start of the vaccination campaign in Canada on December 14, 2020, Health Canada reported that 99% of all COVID-19 cases reported were with individuals who were unvaccinated, i.e. less than 1% of all COVID-19 cases were with individuals who had been fully vaccinated. Vaccination works.

(Government of Canada, "COVID-19 Daily Epidemiology Update, August 27, 2021)

3. A number of Canadian provinces are in the process of implementing protocols that will require proof of vaccination to access/attend certain venues (called by different names including passports or certificates). For example, on August 23, 2021, British Columbia announced it will require "proof of vaccination" to attend certain social events and organized indoor gatherings such as "meetings and workshops". At this time, similar passports are being considered or have already been implemented in Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. According to Statistics Canada, these four provinces represent almost 80 percent of Canada's population.
4. Pope Francis has joined his voice to those of Bishops across North and South America to urge people to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Pope Francis went on to say that getting a COVID vaccination is an "act of love" and that helping others do the same is also an act of love. "Our choice to get vaccinated affects others," he said, adding that it is a moral responsibility.

(Vatican News, August 18, 2021)

Earlier, the Vatican had also clarified that the use of COVID-19 vaccines is "morally acceptable" and that "all vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience."

(Vatican News, December 21, 2020)

5. It is recognized that everyone has the right to choose to be vaccinated or to remain unvaccinated from the COVID-19 virus. No judgements are being made on an individual's choice. However, as with all choices, there are consequences to the choices made. As can be observed in the secular world, choosing to be vaccinated will allow more freedom to assemble in certain places and events, and to travel. Choosing to remain unvaccinated will curtail some of these freedoms. Similarly, for the Secular Franciscan Order, there are consequences to being vaccinated and being unvaccinated.

DIRECTIVE

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Canada, Secular Franciscans are urged to comply with all protocols developed by provincial governments and public health authorities, as well as with those of their respective dioceses. In addition, the following directive applies to all Secular Franciscan fraternities in Canada:

1. Beginning on October 1, 2021, only Secular Franciscans who are fully vaccinated may attend and participate in fraternity meetings, chapters and events in person.
2. All fraternities must endeavor to accommodate Secular Franciscans who are unvaccinated so that they may continue to participate in the life of the fraternity (e.g. joining in-person meetings via Zoom or by telephone, providing input/obtaining feedback using email or in written form, newsletter updates, etc.).
3. Secular Franciscans who travel to fraternities to preside at chapter elections must also be fully vaccinated.
4. These guidelines will be in place for six months, after which they will be re-evaluated to determine if they should continue to be in place.