

**THE ARCHBISHOP OF THE WEST INDIES, PRIMATE AND METROPOLITAN,
AND THE BISHOP OF JAMAICA**

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Joint Vaccination Message for the Province - September 2021

We greet the faithful of the Province in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you are all aware, we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted our world and our nations in ways without parallel, at least in recent history. It has created untold suffering due to infection, sickness, death, disruption in the world of work, schooling and education, lockdown of nations and communities, isolation, disruption of family life, emotional distress, the lockdown of churches, the confinement of vulnerable persons, primarily the ageing and those with comorbidities from social interaction, even as it has served to expose in profound ways the social inequities which exist in our societies. Individuals lost the communities around which they would gather for fellowship or other social activities because of social distancing, restrictions on social gatherings, and the lockdown of certain facilities which impacted the young and the elderly alike.

Through the contribution of the scientific community and the commitment of the health care professionals to the alleviation of all forms of suffering and diseases and the promotion of wellness, we now have available to us in the Caribbean a supply of vaccines, albeit inadequate up to this point, which have the ability to promote immunity and protect against the most severe consequences of infection by the virus.

Vaccinations are not new to the experience of the people of the Caribbean. Indeed, so successful have been the programs of vaccination in the Region that we have been rid of certain infectious diseases which still plague other parts of the world. As Anglicans we believe that there is no inherent conflict between science and religion, and affirm that it is God who endows humanity with the capacity for rational and scientific thinking for the benefit of humanity, even as he has endowed us with the capacity for spiritual experiences and relationship with Godself.

Unfortunately there are persons who have chosen to subscribe to misinformation and conspiracy theories regarding the origin and nature of the vaccine and have sought to encourage others not to take the vaccine. Sadly also, there are some of the newer churches which promote uninformed teaching regarding Scripture and its interpretation and application to our contemporary world, and that have been misguiding persons with notions that the vaccine represents some kind of evil device and instrument for hurting the people of God. You can be assured that this is a fallacy.

Like every form of medicine we take into our bodies, there may be some initial side effects but, its beneficial impact on the human body is far-reaching and the consequences of not taking the vaccines, while undetectable for some, are serious and deadly for others. The daily disclosures regarding new infections, hospitalizations and deaths speak to an undeniable reality. While we can follow certain protocols as a means of preventing infection, the reality is that we cannot be assured that we will not be infected, as it is not a case of our finding the virus but, the virus finding us.

While recognizing the right of every adult to determine whether they take the vaccine, we have come together to make this joint appeal to the faithful of the Province, especially the older members of the Mothers' Union, and those with comorbidities who are among some of the most vulnerable to the ravages of this coronavirus, and to solicit your support in being agents of positive messages and influence within our congregations and within the wider community.

The decision to take the vaccine we believe is part of our moral duty as Christians, unless there are medical grounds for deferring or abstaining from taking the vaccine. It is first of all part of the way in which we take care of our bodies, the temple of the Lord, with a sense of responsibility and accountability. It is also a means by which we exercise our social responsibility. As long as we remain a part of the population that refuses to take the vaccine, where it is readily available, we participate in activities which are counter-productive to the life of our nations and with serious consequences for our people. Among the consequences of our actions are the following:

- We prevent our children from returning to school for face-to-face learning in a situation in which many have already lost a year of education. Those who have responsibility for children who are eligible for the vaccine should see to their vaccination in order for them to return to face-to-face schooling as soon as possible.
- We run the risk of infecting others of our household, workplace, and community.
- We disregard the pain and distress we may cause to our families and loved ones by a refusal to be vaccinated, leading to the unnecessary consequences of serious illness which may remain chronic for life, or which may result in death.
- We retard the process of return to a level of normality for the operation of our national economies.
- We delay the return of our congregations to viable face-to-face worship.
- We are likely to become part of that infected population filling all the beds in hospitals relegated to Covid-19 patients, while preventing others requiring other legitimate medical care from being admitted, and more importantly, over-extending the ability of the medical staff to deliver care to their patients, and having the health care budgets of our nations being drained on unnecessary areas of expenditure.

- We contribute to the maintenance of a context of infection transmission in which other and more serious variants than the Delta variant may evolve.

We join in making this appeal as persons who have taken the vaccine and have been subjected to repeated tests for various reasons, and use this opportunity to strongly urge all members of our congregations, as well as members of our communities with whom we have contact and a measure of influence, to kindly take the vaccines, as an expression of your duty to care for yourself and your responsibility to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Howard Jamaica & Cayman Islands

+ Howard Jamaica and the Cayman Islands
Archbishop of the West Indies

Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families

Sheran Harper

Sheran Harper, A.A.
Mothers' Union Worldwide President