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PROOF OF VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS

Thank you to local community of faith leaders. When they accepted these roles, few expected to be coping with a global pandemic. The regional council offers advice but the decisions are made in the community of faith. All congregations are encouraged to applaud and support the efforts of leaders who have been navigating changing regulations, consulting with their local health unit, and instituting protocols to keep the church available to others and to ensure the safety of all who access it.

Worship

The legislation that came into effect on September 22nd continues to exempt worship from proof of vaccination requirements.

Event Other Than Worship

On September 21st, we received a legal update on this topic. Here is a link to a Government of Ontario resource on this:

Proof of Vaccination Guidance

The law uses the term “patrons” when referring to people who are required to show proof of vaccination and specifically exempts “Workers, contractors, repair workers, delivery workers, students, volunteers, inspectors or others who are entering the business or organization for work purposes and not as patrons”. The advice received suggests the term workers could include volunteers, such as the members of the congregation helping at the food bank. If governing bodies intend to use this broader definition for “workers” over one referring exclusively to paid employees, they are encouraged to define who is considered a “worker” and who is a “patron.” That said, legal advice recommends erring on the side of caution and requiring proof of vaccination, especially to attend any event that is being led by paid staff.

Tenants & Rentals

Tenants covered by a lease are themselves responsible for complying with the legislation. The governing body may want to confirm with the tenant how they are complying with the legislation since as landlords they may have some liability risk.

One-off rentals may be the responsibility of the church. Churches should stipulate in any one-off rental contracts that the renter is responsible for complying with all COVID-restrictions then in place, including verifying vaccinations, as required.

Proof of Vaccination for Church Employees

The legal advice received is quoted directly on this topic.

From a regulatory perspective, O. Reg 364/20 that requires that “The person responsible for a business or organization that is open shall operate the business or organization in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials operate in the compliance with the advice / recommendations of the health units.” And some of those units have recommended that employers implement a mandatory vaccination policy. For example, Toronto Public Health announced August 20, 2021 that it now “strongly recommends” that employers implement mandatory vaccinations in their workplace:

Toronto Medical Officer of Health

Please check with your local public health unit.

The Office of Vocation is addressing proof of vaccination and ministry personnel. Ministry personnel who are not able to provide proof of vaccination will find themselves hampered in fulfilling certain of their duties in person (long-term care and hospital visits) and will need to determine how to handle other elements such as home visits safely. They are encouraged to meet with their Ministry and Personnel Committee to discuss their plan to fulfill the requirements of their position description. Acting Personnel Minister, Micol Cottrell remains available to work with ministry personnel and Ministry and Personnel Committees until his time with the regional councils concludes October 31st. Micol can be contacted at MCottrell@united-church.ca. Diane Blanchard returns November 1st and, after having an opportunity to catch up on the changes during her sabbatical, will be pleased to do likewise.

Local Public Health Unit

Many communities of faith have written updating the regional council on their public health unit's advice. Please remember that the geography of the regional councils covers multiple health units and varying rates of transmission. Advice must always be contextual. Our goal is to provide communities of faith with guidance for their decision-making based on the provincial requirements. When making decisions, governing bodies are reminded to check with the local health unit for additional input.

Thank you again to the dedicated leaders trying to answer the gospel's call for inclusion as they protect the well-being of all. Your hard work is deeply appreciated.

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