



November 10, 2021

A note on requests for religious exemptions to the COVID-19 vaccine:

Several of you have reached out asking for guidance regarding requests from members and others for your signature and endorsement of a religious exemption from the COVID-19 vaccine. I commend to you the following resource from the Office of the Presiding Bishop: [Regarding the Question of Vaccination and of Individual Religious Objections to Required Vaccination](#).

The summary for this short resource, as is found in the opening, is as follows: *ELCA leaders have encouraged participation in vaccination programs as a primary means to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. There is no specific ELCA policy resolution dedicated to vaccination, **but in the Lutheran tradition and in ELCA teaching there is no evident basis for religious exemption**. On the contrary both the Lutheran heritage and ELCA social teaching documents, such as *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* ([elca.org/socialstatements](http://elca.org/socialstatements)) urge participation in public health efforts because health is a shared endeavor. There can be medical exemptions, of course.* (emphasis mine)

Not only do religious exemptions fail to fit within our theology or tradition, it is, in fact, quite the opposite. As a church, we strive to do what is best not only for individuals but for the collective. We're encouraging folks to get the vaccine, assuming they have no health conditions that would prevent them from doing so.

As appropriate, it might be helpful to learn from those requesting the exemption how they understand our shared faith as making such an exemption, based on religious grounds, possible.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please reach out to me directly.

Thanks for all you do for the sake of the gospel.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bp. Regina Hassanally".

Bishop Regina Hassanally  
Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA