



August 12, 2021

## Info for AG Church Leaders in Washington

RE: Governor Mandated Covid-19 Order

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** This document is intended for NW Ministry Network Assemblies of God ministers and pastors/churches residing in the State of Washington, but we have included our Idaho ministers and churches as some of the information may be relevant to you, and some on the border have members and constituents from both states. We recognize that a wide diversity of opinion exists on the topics of Covid-19, government mandates that impact the church and believers, masking, social distancing, and vaccines. Our aim, as always, is to provide resources and information that will be helpful to our ministers and churches during the pandemic. Whatever your personal opinion might be about the various Covid-19 vaccines, we encourage you to be cautious and kind in communicating with and helping your fellow ministers, church members and constituents who may have an opinion that differs from yours. As you will see from this document, the NWMN respects various personal opinions and positions regarding Covid-19 vaccinations and wants to help those among us who are employed by the State of Washington or are healthcare workers in the State of Washington, and who have sincerely held religious beliefs about this and are seeking an exemption.

Washington Governor Jay Inslee on August 9, 2021 issued an order mandating vaccines for all state employees and healthcare workers, with exemptions for “religious beliefs.” Washington pastors can expect some of their members and constituents who are not vaccinated for religious beliefs may turn to them for guidance on this matter. This document is meant to provide background history and information for pastors and church leaders facing such situations.

Here is a link to the state’s referenced FAQ sheet about the August 9, 2021 order mandating Covid-19 vaccination for all state employees and health care workers. It is also available [here](#).

According to the FAQ, employees wishing to be exempt from the requirement for religious reasons should contact their HR department. Employers may be legally allowed to request, if such request is reasonable and objective, that an employee requesting a religious exemption show that his or her exemption request is based on a “sincerely held belief.” As we cannot ascertain the specifics of what every employer may reasonably request in every given context, we advise pastors to consider the following if contacted by parishioners about verifying their “religious objection/exemption.” Use discretion in sharing any or all of this information. We want to be helpful, and not hurtful nor divisive.

1. The Assemblies of God does not have a position against vaccines in general, nor the Covid-19 vaccine in particular. Historically, the Assemblies of God has largely held a “personal conscience” stance regarding matters such as the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, the Assemblies of God does not object to medical care, while also affirming our

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biblical belief in Divine healing. Rather than an either/or position, we have endorsed a both/and position historically regarding healing and health. In other words, we believe that both physicians (recognized medical health professionals) and God play a role in our health and healing. The official Assemblies of God position paper on Divine Healing states: "Belief in divine healing neither opposes nor competes with medical doctors." The entire position paper may be accessed [here](#).

2. The Assemblies of God recently published an article on the subject of the Covid-19 vaccine, "[Should Christians Take the Covid-19 Vaccine?](#)" Following a lengthy discussion about the history and ethics of the vaccine, the author states: "At the appropriate time, everyone who can safely do so should take the vaccine. Ultimately, the pandemic will end when enough healthy individuals choose to be vaccinated against COVID-19."
3. Two significant Assemblies of God churches in Springfield, MO recently (July 2021) hosted and endorsed forums or clinics encouraging citizens in their county (with one of the highest rates of Covid infections in the USA) to be vaccinated. See article [here](#).
4. Our church recognizes the role of vaccines in eradicating many major modern plagues of disease. Smallpox, polio, measles, diphtheria, mumps, and other once common diseases are now rare or non-existent because of mass vaccinations due to modern medical advances available in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Virtually all of these mandated (for school children and others) vaccines started with much public skepticism, and some with very little in the way of clinical studies, etc. Persons who have received these in the past without objection may have a challenge in stating a strictly religious objection to the Covid-19 vaccine.
5. However, as noted above, the Assemblies of God also has a history of recognizing and respecting certain matters of personal conscience for our members and constituents. These include personal religious decisions about warfare/military service, contraception, certain types of medical care, and other issues for which a wide variety of biblical opinion exists. So we would choose to affirm those who have a truly religious objection to use of a vaccine they oppose on religious grounds, while at the same time affirming those who choose to be vaccinated against Covid-19. This is in alignment with historical Assemblies of God traditions and beliefs about health, healing, and medical care.
6. Edith Blumhofer (noted Assemblies of God historian) states in a published paper titled, "THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD TRADITION: RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND HEALTHCARE DECISIONS," The following guiding principles underline Assemblies of God understandings of health and healing:
  - a. Humankind is created by God and bears God's image.
  - b. God values human life.
  - c. All human life is sacred.
  - d. God gives life, and God takes life.
  - e. God is in control; assertions of personal autonomy rebel against God's sovereignty.
  - f. God offers forgiveness and reconciliation, but God never condones sin.

7. Blumhofer continues to state this about individual medical decisions: “The denomination encourages physicians to discuss with patients the choices and circumstances of medical treatments so that patients can be informed and involved. Patients whose immediate families do not share their religious beliefs may value the counsel of fellow believers over that of family members. They may also respond more readily to the advice of an evangelical physician than to the opinions of someone who does not speak their language of religious conviction.” The entire paper is available [here](#).
8. In Governor Inslee’s recent vaccine mandate, his office published the earlier cited FAQ document noting that state employees may request “reasonable accommodations” related to religious exemption for the vaccine mandate noting additionally that private sector organizations “may choose a different process” related to accommodations. In employment contexts related to this mandate, this means that religious exemptions potentially are available to a state employee and that private sector employers may adopt a similar methodology regarding reasonable accommodations. This means that an employee may request an exemption from a vaccination mandate if he or she holds a sincerely held religious belief regarding the use of vaccines. Even in such contexts, an employer may deny such requests for religious exemption if allowing such an exemption would cause an “undue hardship” on the organization. Again, in light of the historical and doctrinal positions taken by the Assemblies of God, pastors, parishioners and constituents should consider strongly the nature of the objection held and whether it is based on a sincerely held religious belief. Certain organizations and religious groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, object as a group to certain medical treatments, such as vaccines. As noted above, however, the Assemblies of God does not officially object to the use of medical treatment or vaccines. The State of Washington has designated the ability of objections related to sincerely held religious belief, but have yet to dictate any forms or procedures specifically related to such objections in the context of COVID-19 vaccination mandate(s). Private sector employers likely will verify any such exemption requests by their own demands and needs of their own organization(s).
9. Many pastors and church leaders will be contacted regarding such requests for religious exemption, both by individual parishioners and perhaps by their respective employers. Prior to making statements regarding an individual’s sincerely held belief regarding vaccinations, it is imperative that pastors have a keen understanding as to the historical position of the Assemblies of God generally and the pastor’s congregation specifically. Additionally, while an individual may attest to his or her own strongly held belief regarding vaccinations, it is similarly critical that any pastor have a clear understanding that any objection is not based on the historical precedent and position of the Assemblies of God but is rather a position of personal religious conscience or conviction.
10. As a point of reference, you may access the Washington State exemption document for mandated public school vaccines [here](#). However, public school vaccine requirements for minor children are very different issues from employment requirements for adults. For individuals and/or pastors concerned with issues relating to religious liberty as it relates to vaccination, it could be helpful to know that in other contexts (public school vaccinations), there are already forms that have been generated for such inquiries as to

one's religious ideologies and/or an individual's sincerely held beliefs relating to vaccination(s).

11. Although it is not specifically relevant to Washington State mandates, we have provided for your information a document from Pacific Justice Institute regarding "Religious Accommodation for Employees," which applies to federal law, Title VII. You may access this document [here](#).

Sincerely,

**Don Detrick, D.Min.**

Associate Network Leader - Secretary/Treasurer

*Note: NWMN is a provider of ministry resources and as such the information, opinions, and materials provided are of this nature and are not intended to replace the advice of an attorney or accountant. The information in this document is not legal advice, nor is it meant to be accepted as such. It is intended only to inform and for the use of NWMN ministers and churches.*