



18 February 2021

**PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE ANGLICAN BISHOP OF NEWCASTLE
REGARDING COVID VACCINATIONS**

Dear people,

In the coming weeks, COVID19 vaccines will be available in Australia. This is good news.

Overseas evidence is showing that the immunisation program is reducing the number of hospital admissions and reducing the severity of illnesses arising from the virus. This also is wonderful news.

At the heart of the Christian understanding of human relationships is God's command, emphasised through his Son Jesus, that we are 'to love our neighbour'. This is captured in the Anglican Mark of Mission, 'to respond to human need by loving service'. You may have seen pictures of the Archbishop Justin of Canterbury receiving his vaccination and heard that Pope Francis has also been immunised.

The clear scientific evidence is that when a sufficient number of members of the community are immunised the risks associated with COVID reduce significantly. We will still need to engage in social distancing, hand-hygiene, careful attention to outbreaks and mask wearing in some circumstances. However, with a successful immunisation program, we will be able to engage more fully in activities that promote a good society (locally and globally) and ensure human flourishing. This places a personal responsibility on each of us to consider receiving the vaccine when it becomes available to us as an act of loving service.

Late last year, there was significant media coverage reflecting concern about the source of stem cells that been used in the development or testing of the vaccine. Since then, the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith of the Roman Catholic Church has considered this matter carefully and advised their faithful that 'All vaccinations recognised as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience.' The Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America have strongly encouraged all those eligible to access the COVID-19 vaccination to do so. The British Islamic Medical Association has also strongly supported vaccination.

I strongly encourage all Anglicans and all citizens, to be vaccinated when the opportunity for them to do so arises as part of the Commonwealth Government vaccination roll out. Every person should do so on the basis of any advice they receive from their medical practitioner.

I also strongly encourage us all to be patient about the vaccination roll out. As global citizens, we know that the tragic toll the pandemic has taken will be lessened when all countries, especially some of the poorest, have equitable access to the vaccines. I commend the work of the Australian Government in assisting the availability of vaccines in our region.

Please continue to pray for those affecting by or responding to COVID as well as those who have the responsibility of ensuring our community is safe for all people.

With every blessing,

**The Rt Rev Dr Peter Stuart
Bishop of Newcastle**