

Statement of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East on COVID-19 Vaccines



Damascus, 8 February 2021

Considering the spread of Covid-19 pandemic which afflicts the world and its people today, and subsequent to the production of its vaccines, the Antiochian Orthodox Church, after consultation between His Beatitude and the Antiochian Hierarchs, would like to clarify the following to her faithful:

1. In the Pastoral Letter issued in 2019, the Church reaffirmed “the sanctity of life and the necessity of respecting it alongside her openness to scientific advancement.” In the same context and believing in the pivotal role played by scientific progress throughout the ages, the Church encourages scientific research and scientists, and blesses every proper initiative that contributes to the progress of humanity and relieves human suffering. Therefore, she offers her prayers for all those working to safeguard and serve human life, including researchers, scientists, medical doctors, nurses, and all healthcare workers in hospitals. She pleads for their protection, especially that, in this pandemic, they have showed unique dedication, continuous vigilance, and heroic self-sacrifice. May God strengthen

them with His grace. May they be faithful co-workers with Christ our God, the Physician of our souls and bodies. The Church also offers her prayers for the healing of all the sick, the sustenance of their families, the comfort of the bereaved, and the repose of the souls of those who have departed in hope of resurrection and eternal life.

2. After scientists have prepared a set of Covid-19 vaccines and in reviewing various medical reports and consulting with specialists, the Church considers that the matter of vaccination is not the specialty of the field of theological and spiritual studies, but rather specific to the field of medical sciences and its authorities. The decision regarding taking the vaccine is a personal decision. Every faithful has the right to make this decision in consultation with his or her doctor.

3. This pandemic continues to pose a threat to human life, since the health specialists have not yet found a cure for it despite the immunity that the vaccine provides, which we hope is effective. Thus, the Church draws the attention of her faithful to the importance of continuing to adhere to all health measures requested by the competent authorities, whether before or after vaccination, in order to further preserve the safety of society and human life. Moreover, we note that the present vaccines were made in record time with the aim of limiting the spread of the pandemic, thanks to the contemporary medical and technological progress, the concerted scientific efforts, and the procurement of necessary resources.

4. The Church warns against any political or commercial exploitation of the issue of vaccines, especially against withholding them from marginalized groups and distributing them in a way that contradicts the principles of equality, justice, and solidarity among all people.

5. The Church understands that there are different existing opinions stemming from fears and concerns that are being circulated in the media in an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and intimidation. This atmosphere is caused by the way the issue of public health has been tackled and the many pressures that were and are still being practiced. Some have set out to address this issue based on their desire to preserve the gift of life, but without neglecting their faith and spiritual background. The Church confirms that all these people, regardless of their different opinions and various positions, remain her children. She invites them to preserve the bond of peace, unity, and love that brings us together in Christ.

6. There is no doubt that all preventive health measures and vaccinations are beneficial to our physical safety. However, we must not overlook the importance of our spiritual safety, which requires us to turn to that “safe distancing” that we, as humans, practice between us and God, our fellow human beings, and our natural environment. We live in estrangement from God, in a conflict with our brother, and in an incursion into our vital environment through an insatiable consumption of its

resources. This situation is dealt with by changing our behavior through sincere repentance, returning to God in prayer and a life of communion and service. We must renounce whatever harms ourselves, our brother, and our environment. We are called to live the mystery of Divine Thanksgiving, being grateful for God's gifts and mercies, and igniting our hope through reading the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the saints and their teachings. The permanent fellowship with God and all his saints incites the church militant to join the church triumphant, so the latter pours upon the former Divine graces of sincere love, courageous spirit, and genuine solidarity with our fellow human beings.

7. Finally, the joy springing from our belief that Christ is with us until the end of time makes us companions on the way with our Fathers who followed the path of struggle in every time and place. This joy strengthens us in the face of every evil and iniquity, and makes us like them, able to overcome, with God's grace and through concerted efforts, the challenges that face our journey, so that God may be glorified in our words and deeds.

[Antioch Patriarchate](#)