

## **GEORGIAN SYNOD: WE WON'T PROMOTE VACCINATION, IT'S GOOD THAT IT'S VOLUNTARY**



The Synod also condemned the divisive work of the “Association of Religions Experts” that claimed the hierarchs wanted to overthrow Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II. The Georgian Orthodox Church appreciates the work of scientists and doctors to protect people’s health, but it will not take responsibility for promoting vaccination against the coronavirus, the Holy Synod resolved at its session on Thursday.

It was reported last week that the Synod discussed issues surrounding the David-Gareij Monastery complex along the Georgian-Azerbaijani border, the topic of vaccination, and issues “from a amoral point of view,” though there was no talk of trying to overthrow His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, despite the prediction of the Russophobic Association of Religions Experts.

The majority of Georgia’s population is not particularly excited about getting vaccinated, according to opinion polls, though the government hopes to at least 60% will be vaccinated, with the help of a large-scale information campaign.

“The Church recognizes that human health is one of the most important rights, and, therefore, it supports all steps aimed at protecting this right without contradicting Christian morality. We welcome the fact that the vaccination process against COVID-19 is voluntary, not mandatory. This is most important, especially

today, when the vaccine has just been created and there are different opinions of health professionals about it,” the Synod writes in its statement issued on Friday.

“The Georgian Church highly appreciates the benefit that medicine brings to protect people’s health, but it will not be able to take responsibility for the promotion of vaccination, as this is the competence and responsibility of medical professionals,” the Synod emphasizes.

The hierarchs also call understanding, highlighting that any person, regardless of social status, should not be harassed or persecuted for not being vaccinated or being vaccinated.

Moreover, since there are many questions in Georgian society and amongst the Georgian Orthodox flock, the authorities should fully explain which vaccine will be delivered to Georgia and explain the origin, production technology, mechanism of action, and the duration and effectiveness of the vaccine, and whether or not the norms of bioethics are protected in producing and receiving the vaccine.

Further, health officials should explain the threat posed by the lack of a vaccine in a pandemic, what short-term and long-term side effects and complications the vaccine has, and what assistance will be provided by the state in case of complications.

And responding to the false report that the Synod is planning to remove Pat. Ilia, the Synod stated: “The slander of the Church and its hierarchs has already become a habit of these people. Their purposeful actions are manifested to achieve populism on the basis of false information, to excite society and discredit the Church. It was noted that their actions are irresponsible and inappropriate for Christians.”

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