



MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL of CHURCHES

January 22, 2021: Update on CLERGY AND COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

We have heard from many clergy and Church leaders asking for more clarity about the time and manner of COVID-19 vaccinations for those doing ministry across Massachusetts. We understand that [there is both real hope and real hesitancy](#) about the COVID-19 vaccines, sometimes in the same church. As we see across the Commonwealth, [clergy are often serving on the front lines of their communities](#), burying the dead, caring for those suffering, administering the sacraments, and ministering to their communities in ways that put them in necessary and direct contact with the public.

According [to the current Massachusetts COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Timeline](#) (as of 1/21/21 9:00pm), clergy are *only* mentioned as a distinct category of workers in one place: at the end of Phase 1 as “Health care workers doing non-COVID-facing care.” In conversation with public health leaders, MA COVID-19 Advisory Committee members, and interfaith colleagues, this means that “members of the clergy (if working in patient-facing roles)” who are employed by nursing homes, prisons, jails, hospitals, long-term care facilities or other congregate care settings may be vaccinated at the end of Phase 1 by virtue of their employer.

At this time, there is no additional state-issued information about when and how clergy employed in other settings will have the option to be vaccinated. We know this state-led process is confusing. We should all anticipate more changes to the process with the new federal administration. The Massachusetts Council of Churches will continue to post updates on our [social media](#), [website](#), and [newsletter](#) if there are changes to clergy status in the Massachusetts distribution timeline.

The Massachusetts Council of Churches staff have taken time and care to communicate with leadership in member churches. There is not a consensus view on whether clergy should be a distinct category for vaccination. Clergy function differently in our wide range of traditions and settings. Therefore, we suggest that if you would like to express your concerns or advocate for a change to the current plan, you may write to the [COVID-19 Advisory Committee](#) at COVID-19-Vaccine-Plan-MA@mass.gov. Specifically, given the increased work of ministering to the bereaved and burying the dead during the pandemics, [we would recommend advocating that active clergy be included at the same level as funeral directors at the end of Phase 2.](#)

[We know that other New England states, particularly ones with smaller populations have moved ahead with clergy more quickly](#) and that [roll out in Massachusetts has been uneven](#). We understand this level of uncertainty is unsettling, especially as we look towards another Lent and Holy Week in these pandemics, while striving to care well for our churches and our neighbors who are suffering.

We aim to have enduring confidence in Jesus Christ at the helm of this ship, even in these uncertain waters.