

Faith Leaders Respond to COVID-19 Vaccine: 'We Have a Big Role to Play'

With the COVID-19 vaccination rolling out this week, many are looking to faith leaders to gain insight on how to respond moving forward.

The responses are varied, with many prominent faith leaders like Vice President Mike Pence encouraging Americans to be among the first to receive the vaccine.

Vice President @Mike_Pence: "Karen and I wanted to step forward and take this vaccine to assure the American people that while we cut red tape, we cut no corners."

– The White House (@WhiteHouse) December 18, 2020

Others are more cautious, especially those within the Black community.

Surgeon General Jerome M. Adams understandably promotes the vaccine, but addresses the fears of many, saying:

As a Black man, I recognize the very real history of harm people of color have suffered at the hands of the medical community and government. Which is why we must acknowledge these wrongs, address them honestly & engage w/ folks. I hope my vaccination can help restore trust

– U.S. Surgeon General (@Surgeon_General) December 18, 2020

Some pastors are offering words of composure and Spirit-filled direction. Pastor Frederick Haynes of Friendship West Baptist Church says his faith is duly connected to his preparedness.

"It's our responsibility to step up and speak up and lift people up with enlightened information," Haynes says. "My statement is I'm listening to the science and the Savior. I'm listening to medicine and the Messiah."

Rev. Prince Rivers, pastor of Union Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, highlights the work that faith leaders and state-level and government officials must do together to promote conversation about the vaccine.

"I think faith communities and faith leaders have a big role to play in this," Rivers says. "First step is getting the right information."

In this vein, Union Baptist will hold a series of online forums to help make congregants aware of the most up to date information regarding the vaccine, and to allow them to make their own informed decisions.

Other pastors are deferring to medical professionals and encouraging congregations to seek their own treatment with their primary physician.

Pastor Earl Fisher told Fox13Memphis that he plans on doing his own research before deciding to get the vaccine, and he encourages his parishioners to do the same. "I haven't spent the last 10 years as a pastor trying to cultivate a congregation of blind sheep that just do what I say; we seek to be an informed congregation so I'll make sure my congregants have access to all the information," he said.

Luke Bobo of Kansas-based pastor's network, Made to Flourish, concurs: "Pastors must not think for their congregants; rather, they must equip their people with the necessary tools so that they can think and decide for themselves."

Calling on the biblical mandate to care for the least of these and remembering the creative nature of God, Christian and National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins says,

“God gave us both a sense of God’s love and care and compassion, but He also gave us the brain and the opportunity to understand God’s creation, which is nature, which includes things like viruses.” {eoa}