

Be Your Brother and Sister's Keeper. Choose To Be Vaccinated.

By Bishop Neil Ellis
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The coronavirus pandemic has radically interrupted our world over the last two years. Due to the trauma inflicted by this once-in-a-hundred-year occurrence, we've had to endure the hardship of social distancing and separation from our loved ones and experience death in a manner unknown by previous generations.

Fortunately, we seem to have overcome the worst of it. Restrictions have loosened, curfews have ended, and many of us are ready to enjoy life to the fullest. It is understandable that Bahamians wrestle with pandemic fatigue but we must not drop our guards before being fully in the clear. Covid-19 has not gone away. In these times, where resuming our normal lives makes it harder to keep the virus in perspective, we must continue to put our health and safety first. This can only be done with the help of Covid-19 vaccinations.

The Bahamas is indeed a blessed nation. While many countries did not have access to the vaccines early on, our tiny nation was able to distribute Covid-19 vaccine shots for free to its people. We should not take that for granted. I have encouraged Bahamians and residents to take the vaccinations as soon as they were available. In fact, many of the country's religious leaders have encouraged their congregations to be vaccinated. We do this because we believe in the balance between religion and science - we have faith not only in God but also in the knowledge and wisdom that he has given to us.

Admittedly, there was a great deal of mistrust around the Covid-19 vaccines when they were first made available. Through misinformation or a lack of trust in authorities, some had the idea that these life-saving vaccines were harmful to one's health. These myths have not proven true. Two years later, more than five billion people around the world have received the Covid-19 shot, proving that the vaccines are safe and effective. Moreover, they can reduce hospitalizations by more than 90 percent.

More voices - individual and institutional - need to add their voice to encourage our brothers and sisters to get the Covid-19 vaccination. I am encouraged that an organization like the

Templeton Religion Trust, a global charitable trust based in Nassau, is amplifying this message. Their campaign, called *Now Is The Time*, emphasizes a very important point: no matter why you may have waited, now is the time to get vaccinated. It's something that we need to hear as Covid-19 cases start to increase in the United States, Europe and even at home yet our vaccination rate hovers around fifty percent. As I said before, the pandemic is not over.

We must continue to pray while we consider the facts, listen to our resources, and make the best decision to safeguard our nation and ourselves against the negative effects of this virus.

As people of faith, I implore you all to take this responsibility seriously. It is with equal passion that, as a fully vaccinated person, I urge you to protect yourself, your loved ones and our country. Be your brother's keeper. Be your sister's keeper. Choose to be vaccinated.