

From: [St. Joseph's Health News](#)
To: [St. Joseph's Health News](#)
Subject: An Important Message from President and CEO Les Luke
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Attachments: [image005.png](#)



Dear Colleagues,

As you may have heard, a federal judge temporarily blocked New York state from enforcing a COVID vaccine mandate on health care workers who sought to obtain a religious exemption. Judge David Hurd issued the order after 17 health professionals argued in a lawsuit that their Constitutional rights were violated with a vaccine mandate that disallowed the exemptions. New York state will have an opportunity to respond and the court may reach a different decision at a later time. In the spirit of our core values of justice and integrity, we assembled a St. Joseph's Health team, including leaders from Trinity Health and St. Peter's Health Partners in Albany, to issue the new guidance below to the nearly 100 colleagues who previously sought a religious exemption.

Please know that we greatly value all colleagues and appreciate the many varying opinions on the vaccine mandate and exceptions that have resulted in response to the rapidly changing regulations at the State and Federal levels. Recognizing that this may be a temporary order and that we have an obligation to follow the law, you can rest assured we remain fiercely committed to doing whatever is necessary to keep all colleagues and patients as safe as possible while still honoring the sacredness and dignity of every person. This is a developing situation, so we will keep you informed as new information becomes available.

Thank you for your commitment to our mission to serve the greater good for our communities and our colleagues.

Sincerely,

Leslie Paul Luke

President and CEO
St. Joseph's Health

leslie.luke@sjhsyr.org

W 315.448.5882

C 615.945.8955

301 Prospect Avenue
Syracuse, NY 13203

sjhsyr.org | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#)



Re: Religious Exemptions to the Vaccination Requirement

Dear Colleague:

We are sending you this email because you previously applied for a religious exemption to the vaccination requirements.

First, we know the uncertainty of this situation is incredibly frustrating and stressful. Please know this was never our intention. We promise to keep you informed and let you know of developments that affect your religious exemption status. The following provides details about where we are today.

While Trinity Health's vaccination requirement allowed an exemption for persons objecting to vaccination based on a sincerely held religious belief, the NYS DOH's emergency regulation does not. This meant Trinity Health could no longer grant religious exemptions to colleagues in our New York Health Ministries. Because of this, we had no choice but to let our NY colleagues who had been granted or applied for a religious exemption know it was no longer available.

Yesterday (September 14, 2021), a federal district court in Utica, NY issued a "temporary restraining order" (TRO) that stops the NYS DOH from requiring health care employers to deny or revoke religious exemptions. The court's decision allows our Health Ministries in New York to once again, include religious exemptions as part of our vaccine requirement policy.

It is important that you understand, the court's TRO is only a temporary ruling. The court may reach a different decision later, or the decision could be overturned. If this happens, Trinity Health may have no choice but to revoke existing religious exemptions and deny pending or future applications based on state law.

As of today, here is where we are:

- 1. Colleagues whose applications were previously approved.** If you previously were granted a religious exemption, it is now in effect again until further notice. Your employment status will not change.
- 2. Colleagues whose applications were timely but pending determination or rejected on the basis of the NY DOH regulation.** If you applied for an exemption on a timely basis under Trinity's policy on or before August 24, but your application is still pending determination or was rejected on the basis of the NY DOH regulation, your application will now be reviewed. You will be notified as soon as possible whether it is approved or denied.
- 3. Recently hired colleagues.** You will have the opportunity to apply for a religious exemption and will be notified of the applicable deadline.

We realize these changes are happening quickly with little notice. However, we have a responsibility to comply with state law and sometimes it requires us to adjust policies on short notice so that we stay in compliance. Again, we apologize for the confusing this may be causing.

As a faith-based health system, we have pledged to protect the most vulnerable. And although the decision to require the vaccination may not resonate with all colleagues, we know it was the right decision.

Adrienne L. Deloff, PHR, SHRM-CP
Sr. Colleague Relations Partner

