



A majority of communities in sub-Saharan Africa subscribe to religion, which is part of the people's way of life. At the center of religion are religious leaders whom communities trust and consult on various issues beyond faith and religion. By partnering with these revered figures and building their capacity to be champions for health we are able to impact the health of these communities in their day-to-day life.

~ **Nkatha Njeru**

Coordinator & CEO
Africa Christian Health Associations Platform (ACHAP)

FAITH 'N' SCIENCE

1. Faith and Mental Health





"Through God's grace we learn to cast all our fears and anxieties on Him, and through His grace we are saved. It is important to talk about our mental health without fear of judgement, what troubles us and causes us worry, sadness, and stress. We cannot bear these burdens alone, and the Church is here to walk with us through difficult times. Psalm 38:18 says, 'The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit.' While we will always pray for help with our troubles, we may at times also need to seek professional help, without fear of being cast out by our friends and family."

"Prayer is good for mental health, but it must be strengthened with professional help! When I visit households, I see so many people who need professional mental health support. In Sierra Leone, many people underwent severe mental stress during the Ebola outbreak. Nearly every other person in a survey said they felt anxious and depressed and nearly three quarters had symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Now that's a serious condition that keeps us in a heightened state of anxiety, where we can't function normally; we may keep remembering and reliving traumatic events, have nightmares and avoid anyone or any place that reminds us of the event. Luckily, this is a treatable condition. Mental health professionals can help diagnose and treat PTSD and other serious mental health conditions in ways that prayer alone cannot. We need both prayer and professional services."



"Mental health conditions are treatable! With proper diagnoses and care from qualified mental health professionals, it is possible to become well and resume a normal routine. While prayer provides comfort and spiritual support, if we need further help in managing anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts, it is nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed of. Many challenges in life can cause mental distress, such as losing one's job, financial struggles, family, and health challenges, experiencing trauma, as well as natural disasters. Disease outbreaks and pandemics have shown us that managing our mental health during times of stress is just as important as taking care of our physical health. The path to healing is comprehensive and can include prayer and support from your church, your family, and friends, as well as a consultation with a mental health professional."



"According to the World Health Organization, across Africa more than 116 million people were already estimated to be living with mental health conditions prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sub-Saharan Africa is reported to have at least 10% of the world's mentally ill. Many more people now suffer from stress and anxiety, yet few have access to quality mental health care services. Equally tragic is that the topic remains taboo in many African countries, and that mental health disorders are often not taken seriously or are attributed to witchcraft. As journalists we have a vital role to play in normalizing conversations about mental health because this is an integral part of our health and wellness, particularly during times of crisis. Talking to a counsellor and asking for help is nothing to be ashamed of."



"I have already taken my two shots of the COVID-19 vaccines and I'm encouraging my followers to take the vaccines too. I'm happy that my followers are also accepting the COVID-19 vaccines. They're following my spiritual guidance."

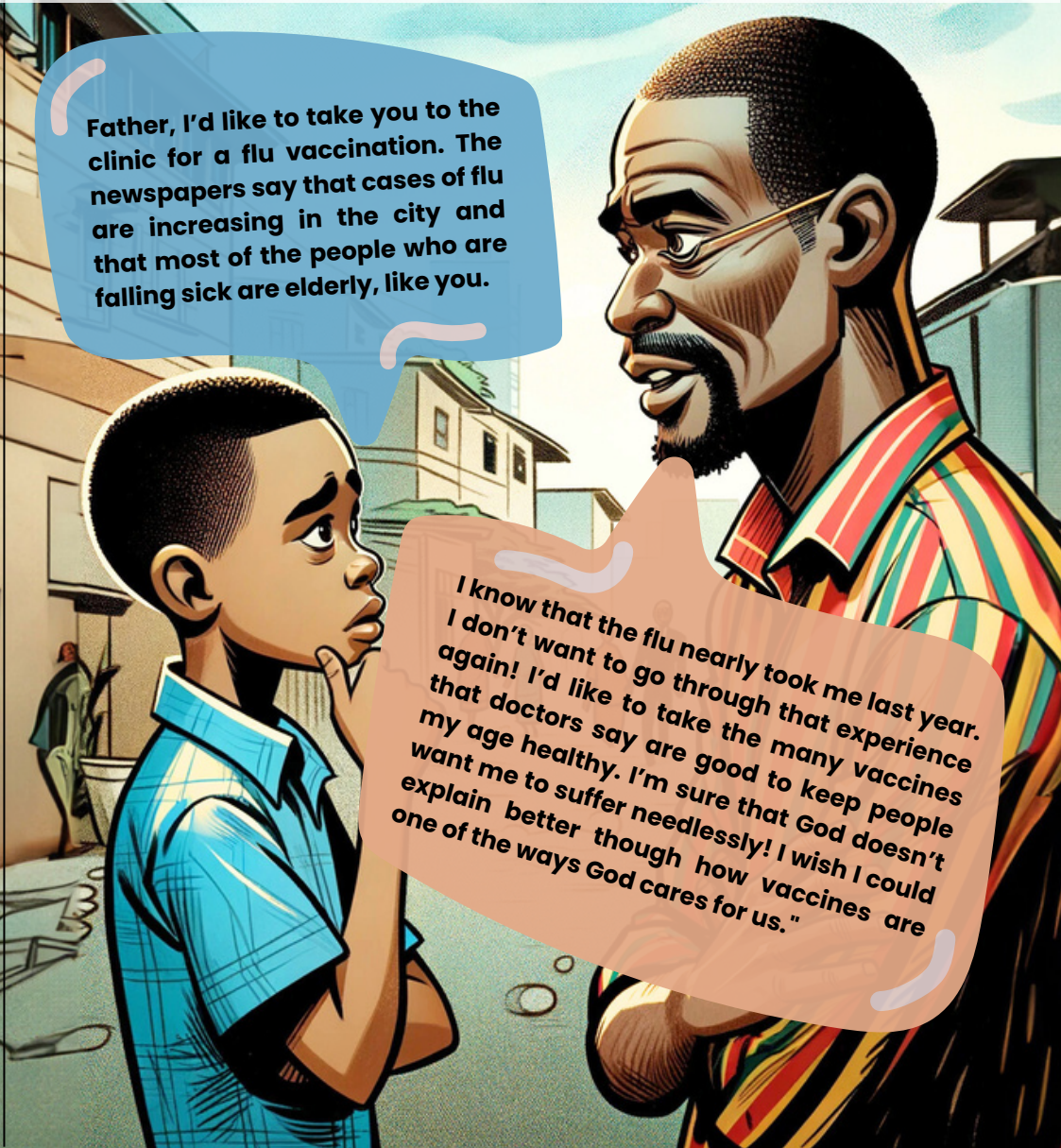
~ Bishop Andby Makururu

Leader, Johane the Fifth of
Africa International Church

Manicaland, Zimbabwe

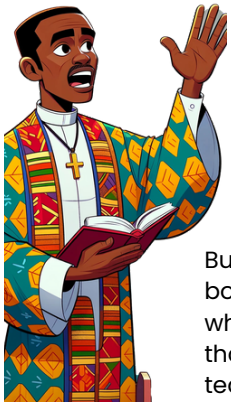
FAITH 'N' SCIENCE

2. Natural Healing and Vaccination



Father, I'd like to take you to the clinic for a flu vaccination. The newspapers say that cases of flu are increasing in the city and that most of the people who are falling sick are elderly, like you.

I know that the flu nearly took me last year. I don't want to go through that experience again! I'd like to take the many vaccines that doctors say are good to keep people my age healthy. I'm sure that God doesn't want me to suffer needlessly! I wish I could explain better though how vaccines are one of the ways God cares for us."



"Vaccines are one of many gifts that God has bestowed on us to lift us from disease, suffering and death. God has blessed us with natural abilities to fight diseases through our immune system. When germs invade us, our immune system creates tiny pieces of proteins called antibodies to fight them. The marvel of creation is that our bodies make different antibodies for different germs! Our bodies also remember these germs and defeat them each time they attack!

But some germs are so deadly that they overcome us. Now if our bodies knew about these germs in advance, we could learn exactly what antibodies to make against them. The beauty of vaccines is that they behave like a very mild form of these deadly germs and teach us what antibodies to make.

We can build resistance to the germ in advance, without falling sick! They work like a powerful switch that turns on our own natural defence systems against germs. The next time the deadly germ attacks us, we are well equipped to make those antibodies and are ready to defeat them! Vaccines are a natural, healthy way to prevent many diseases. Vaccines are God's way of extending his mercy and protection to us all. To me having faith in science is to do God's work. Get vaccinated!"

"Some people are curious about what vaccines are made of. Vaccines contain a tiny part derived from the disease-causing germs, packed in sterile water. So, they are all natural. Now for vaccines to work effectively, they must be carefully preserved from the time they are made to when we take them. To keep the vaccines from sticking to the sides of the vial, a tiny extract is added from fruits or animals. The extracts are so highly purified that they break no religious norms. Some vaccines contain a minute amount of an agent that will enhance their action, such as aluminium. The aluminium is excreted from the body soon afterwards. Besides, the amount is so minute that it is less than that found in breast milk! Vaccine makers take great care to keep the vaccines clean, effective and of high quality. Vaccines are so safe that everyone from babies to the elderly can take them. When everyone, from the young to the old is vaccinated on schedule, the whole family can stay safe from dangerous vaccine preventable infections!"



"Vaccines train our immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause measles, tetanus, flu, COVID-19, and many other serious diseases. They are naturally derived because they are all made from germs that occur in nature. There are various kinds of vaccines. Some, like the Hepatitis B vaccine that protects us from serious liver disease, contain a small piece of a bacteria or virus. Others, like the polio vaccine, are killed or weakened forms of the polio germ. Some vaccines are simply made of the toxin from the germ, like the Tetanus Toxoid vaccine.

Nowadays we recommend vaccination from childhood into the teen years and adulthood, against many killer diseases. The Human Papilloma virus vaccine given to teens, especially girls, can protect against cervical cancer. Older adults, especially those with conditions like diabetes or heart disease can reduce their risk of severe diseases like flu, COVID-19, and pneumonia by vaccination. We also give booster doses of some vaccines to replenish our immunity to some diseases, so that vaccines can protect us from diseases for years or even a lifetime. Taking vaccines across the life span is a safe and effective way to stay healthy!"



"The overwhelming response to vaccination from the highest-ranking religious leaders of all faiths is a strong call to embrace vaccines. In 2021, about 150 faith leaders from around the world including Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, Thabo Makgoba, the Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, and Cardinal Peter Turkson of the Roman Catholic church and the Dalai Lama called upon governments and vaccine makers to produce and distribute enough vaccines to immunise the entire global population against COVID-19, saying there is a "moral obligation" to reach everyone. "Every person is precious. We have a moral obligation to everyone in every country."



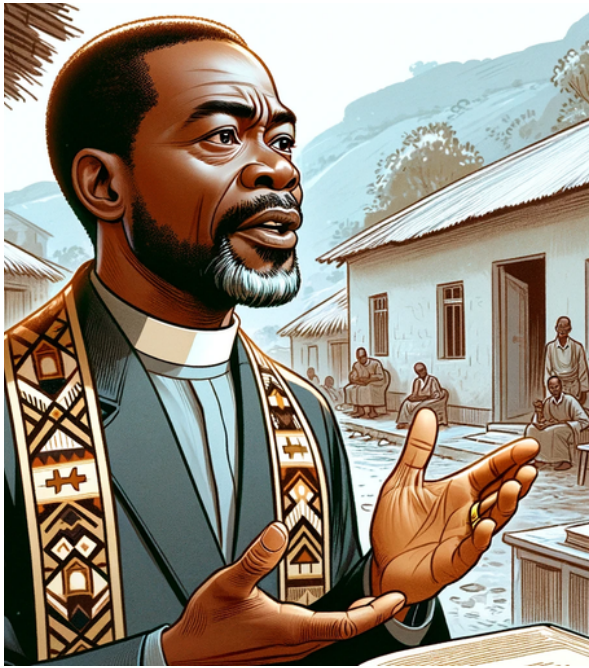
Let us urge our congregations to take the vaccine when it is offered to help in preventing the spread of COVID-19. The vaccines are safe and taking them is how we protect our children, families and communities.

All African Conference of Churches (AACC)
together with the African Council of Religious Leaders
Religions for Peace (ACRL-RfP)
March 2021

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3. Children and COVID-19 vaccines





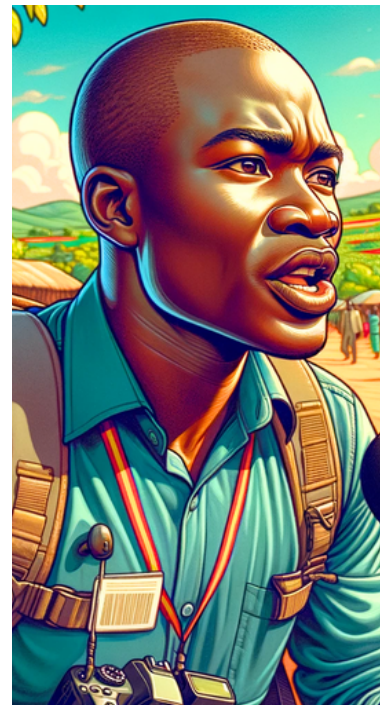
"Children are a blessing from God. We need to give them a healthy start in life. Vaccinating them against diseases that can make them sick or cause major problems like blindness or death, is a good way to achieve that goal. Some of the diseases we can prevent through vaccination are polio and measles, and now COVID-19 too. Let's keep the children safe! Let's make sure that they get all their doses. Having faith in science is like serving God to me. Believe in the power of vaccines!"

"It's great to have all your questions answered about the number of COVID-19 vaccine doses required for your children! Different vaccines have different requirements. Two common ones are Pfizer and Moderna. With the Pfizer vaccine, for optimal protection, we give children between the ages of six months and four years a series of three doses. The second dose is administered three weeks after the initial one. Remember to schedule the child's follow-up appointment for the third dose in eight weeks. For children over the age of five, two doses are sufficient. We give the second dose three weeks after the first one. The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 6 months and older is administered in two doses. The second dose is administered one month after the initial dose. A booster dose is not needed for the Moderna vaccine. If some other COVID-19 vaccine is offered to your child, you should confirm the schedule to complete the series. It's important for you to make sure that your child gets all the doses according to the schedule for that vaccine. Get your children vaccinated! It's free, safe and beneficial for their well-being!"



"It's important to vaccinate children against COVID-19 because there are always some of them who fall dangerously sick with COVID-19. As a result, they may need to be admitted to the hospital or even the intensive care unit. Most children who get infected with the virus experience mild symptoms and only a few of them need intensive care. However, we cannot take that chance!

COVID-19 Vaccines are safe and effective for children aged 6 months or older. Your child may develop a slight fever after getting vaccinated. That's a good sign because it tells us that the body is developing immunity to COVID-19. Typically, the fever goes away in a day or two. Even if your child has already been infected with COVID-19, they should still get vaccinated against the disease because it is possible for them to contract the illness again. COVID-19 vaccination may also help protect your child from developing long COVID, a condition which can cause fatigue, breathlessness or mental fog for months after recovering from the infection. Vaccinating children also helps stop the virus spreading and keeps children in school, protecting their education and well-being."



"WHO has approved the [Pfizer](#) and [Moderna](#) vaccines for children aged 6 months and older and the [COVOVAX](#) vaccine for children aged 12 and older. Many countries in South Asia have approved other COVID-19 vaccines for children, after examining safety and efficacy data for these vaccines.

Vaccines manufactured by Pfizer and Moderna are both available for use in children aged 6 months and older. COVID-19 can be a serious illness for children of all ages, but it is especially dangerous for young children and children with underlying medical conditions. The best way to protect children from COVID-19 is to get them vaccinated. Vaccines have been one of the greatest public health interventions in human history, and the COVID-19 vaccines are no exception. They have saved millions of lives. The safety of each vaccine is carefully checked before it is licensed, and it is monitored on an ongoing basis after licensing."



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FAITH 'N' SCIENCE

4. One Health and Vaccines





"God created animals and people on the same day, and in doing so God highlighted our interdependence as living beings on planet Earth. Currently, rabies kills one person every nine minutes of every day! Thousands of these deaths happen across sub-Saharan Africa. Vaccines protect our animals from diseases and in turn prevent the "spillover" or spread of potentially fatal diseases from animals to humans. In the Bible, Proverbs 12:10 says, 'The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.' Rabies vaccination is a righteous act towards your pet and your fellow brothers and sisters."

"Taking your dog for regular vaccinations each year is part of being a responsible and loving pet owner. Rabies is not only a disease that can affect your dog; it affects us as humans too. Rabies is a fatal infection for our dogs and us but is easily preventable through vaccination. For best protection vaccinate your puppies when they are between 14 to 16 weeks of age. The immunity given by the vaccine wanes over time, so booster shots are essential. We give booster shots of the rabies vaccine at 12 to 16 months of age and every 1 to 3 years based on the type of vaccine to keep your pet healthy. If you are struggling to afford the fees to vaccinate your dog, try connecting with an animal welfare organization in your community. They can help with keeping you informed about rabies outbreaks in your community too. Your investment in your dog's health, not only protects their life, but yours and your family's too!"



"In many communities across Africa, people and animals live close to each other. It is common to see dogs, cats, goats, and chickens roaming inside a rural dwelling. What people may not be aware of is that some diseases, called zoonotic diseases, can be spread between animals and people. According to the World Health Organization, some 60% of emerging infectious diseases that are reported globally are zoonoses. Yet, some of these, such as rabies are 100% preventable through vaccination and other methods. So, keep your pet dogs and yourself safe by ensuring they get their routine vaccination against rabies!"



"Data from The World Health Organization (WHO) states that over 59,000 human rabies-related deaths occur annually in over 150 countries, with most of these countries being in Africa and Asia. Rabies causes approximately 410 human deaths per year in Zimbabwe, and over 300 in Sierra Leone, where the disease is considered endemic. Vaccinating domestic dogs that live in and around communities can prevent the spread of this fatal disease, both between other animals, and humans. The disease spreads through contact with saliva, most commonly due to bites, scratches or direct contact with the infected animal's mouth, eyes or any open wounds. Overall, vaccinating adult dogs and puppies against rabies is the most cost-effective strategy for preventing rabies in humans, says the WHO."

FAITH 'N' SCIENCE

5. Fertility and vaccination

My boss got a health team to come to the factory and vaccinate all the employees against COVID-19 and influenza today.

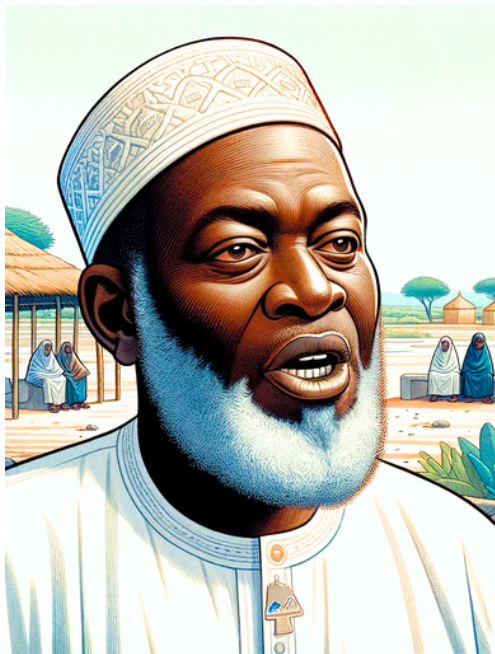
Did you tell the doctor that we are newly married and that we are planning a baby?

Yes! The doctor said that was all the more reason to take the vaccine, so I took it. I think I've done the right thing!

As faith leaders we are the ones close to people and they will feel comfortable in asking us anything. I believe we can deliver messages effectively on public health like encouraging people to continue getting vaccination and not only on COVID-19 but also on other health- related issues.

~ Rev. Innocent Chitanda

Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (UDACIZA)



“Those of childbearing age should get vaccinated to stay healthy! Every human life is a precious creation of Allah and vaccines help us defend ourselves against some deadly diseases. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) when asked whether taking medicine contradicts or reverses the destiny and fate of God Almighty answered that seeking treatment is actually from God’s fate and destiny. Many imams and other Islamic leaders have emphasized that vaccination is harmonious with Islamic principles. Preserving and protecting human life is one of the tenets of the Islamic faith and vaccines preserve life! Get vaccinated and stay healthy for yourself, your spouse and your future family!”

COVID-19 vaccines protect you from illness and do not affect your natural ability to conceive and have a health pregnancy and childbirth! Now some women have noticed temporary changes to their menstrual cycle after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. The menstrual period becomes a few days longer and heavier for some women and shorter for others. This is a sign that our immune system is reacting to the vaccine. After a couple of months, the women resume their normal menstrual cycles. While our immune system learns to make antibodies to fight off a possible future attack of the virus, it also stimulates white blood cells and other proteins as part of a normal inflammatory response, which causes the temporary fluctuation in the menstrual cycle. Remember that even without vaccination it is completely normal to have a variation in the menstrual cycle of up to 8 days, so it’s nothing to worry about! If you get vaccinated in the first three weeks from the start of your period you might have a longer cycle. And if you take your shot in the 14 days before your period, your menstrual cycle might be shorter. You don’t need to schedule your vaccination around your cycle! Get your vaccination against flu and COVID-19 so that you can stay healthy to have safe conception, pregnancy and deliver a health baby!”



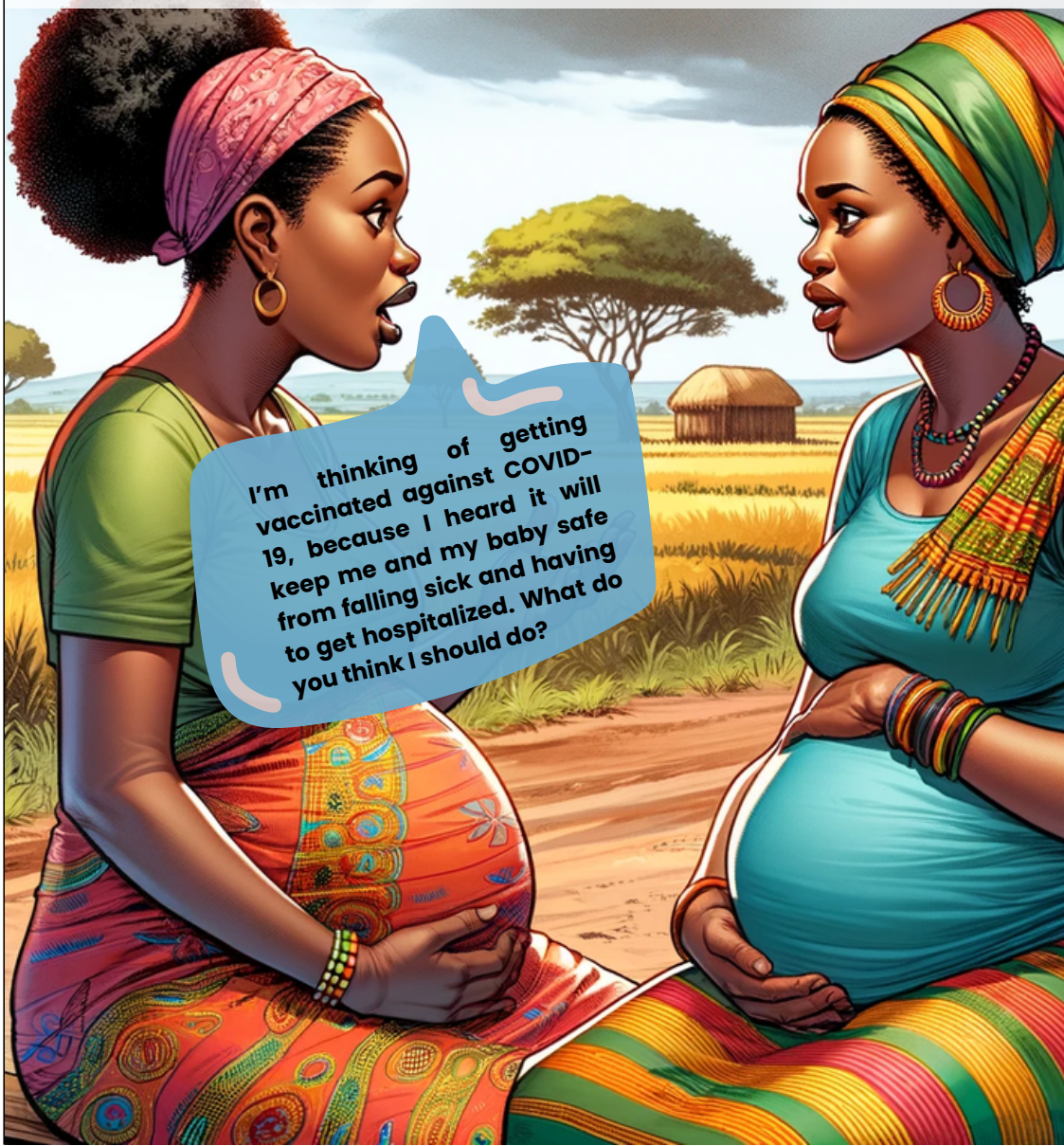
“You certainly made a wise choice to get vaccinated against COVID-19, especially when you are planning to have a baby! Those who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 are at greater risk of illness or hospitalization. Men who fall sick with moderate to severe COVID-19 are seen to have lower sperm counts, lower testosterone levels, and higher rates of impotence. So there’s evidence that COVID-19 illness can temporarily lower male fertility. That’s a good reason to get vaccinated against COVID-19! Get vaccinated and stay healthy!”



“Studies from many countries since the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccines in 2021, show that there is no link to between COVID-19 vaccines or any other vaccines and male or female infertility. Yet, vaccine uptake for adults, particularly those planning to conceive is low in some countries because of fears that vaccination might affect fertility. Islamic faith leaders are seeking to dispel these fears and say that vaccination is a religious obligation. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 1992, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy issued a statement indicating that among the objectives of sharia law is the preservation of life. Accordingly, when not seeking medical treatment may lead to infection or death to others, then seeking medical treatment may be considered a religious obligation.”



6. Pregnancy and vaccination



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"Every life is precious to God and vaccines help preserve the divine gift of human life. In your case, taking the COVID-19 vaccines may save two lives, yours, and your baby's! Science says that vaccines are proven to protect us from some serious infections that make us fall seriously sick or even die. Imitate Jesus' example by "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23). For me, serving God includes having faith in science. Have confidence in vaccines!"

"I see many pregnant women who end up needing intensive hospital care because they have not taken the COVID-19 vaccine. Being pregnant increases your vulnerability to severe illness from COVID-19, particularly if you are in your third trimester, beyond 28 weeks. You may face increased risk of COVID-19 if you have an underlying medical condition like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, or asthma, if you are overweight, aged 35 years or older. Your vaccine appointment is a routine part of your check-ups; get vaccinated for a healthy pregnancy."



"Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 during pregnancy offers protection not only for you, but also for your baby. The antibodies produced by your body in response to the vaccine help safeguard your little one. There is no scientific evidence indicating that receiving the COVID-19 vaccine presents any increased risks to your pregnancy, such as miscarriage, pre-term birth, or other complications. In fact, getting vaccinated can lower your chances of experiencing a stillbirth. Make sure to get vaccinated as it is free, safe, and has numerous health benefits."



"Pregnant women are a high priority group for COVID-19 vaccination, says the WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE (Strategic Advisory Group of Experts)). While there is a high amount of population-level immunity due to many people getting infected or vaccinated, new strains of the virus keep showing up. In SAGE's updated plan, therefore, the following people are named as high priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination: those who are pregnant, older adults, younger adults with major comorbidities like diabetes and heart disease, people whose immunity is weakened, like people living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and transplant recipients, children aged 6 months and older and frontline health workers. SAGE recommends that health-care providers should decide if the person needs another booster either 6 or 12 months after their last dose."

“On whether the vaccine is made from ingredients that acceptable from an Islamic perspective, I just want to say as an Imam I know for sure it is halal. Any Muslim can take this vaccine with no hesitation!”

~ Imam Mohamed Magid

Chairman
Interfaith Peace Corps

FAITH 'N' SCIENCE

7. Vaccination and Islam





"Some people are curious about what vaccines are made of! Vaccines have a tiny part derived from the disease-causing germs, packed in sterile water. So, they are all natural. Now for vaccines to work effectively, they must be carefully preserved from the time they are made to when we take them. To keep the vaccines from sticking to the sides of the vial, a tiny extract is added from fruits or animals. The extracts are so highly purified that they break no religious norms. Some vaccines have a minute amount of some agents like aluminium to enhance their action. The aluminium is excreted from the body and the amount is so minute that it is less than that found in breast milk! Vaccine makers take great care to keep the vaccines clean and effective by scrutinizing them for high quality. Vaccines are so safe that everyone from babies to the elderly can take them. When everyone, from the young to the old is vaccinated on schedule, the whole family can stay safe from dangerous vaccine preventable infections!"

"The protection of life and progeny is one of the maqasid al-shariah (the ultimate aims of Islamic law). Allah, the Exalted, prohibited any failure to protect children. He said "They are losers who foolishly have slain their children without knowledge, and have forbidden that which Allah bestowed upon them, inventing a lie against Allah. They indeed have gone astray and are not guided" (Al-Anaam: 140) Polio vaccines and other vaccines for children protect them from dangerous germs that can kill or cause disability. Get your children vaccinated on schedule!"



"COVID-19 vaccines are necessary for saving lives and so Moslems can take them as it is a darurat (emergency). The Holy al-Quran states: *"He has only forbidden you what dies of itself (carrion) and blood and the flesh of swine, and that which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah. But if one is forced by necessity without wilful disobedience nor transgressing due limits, then there is no sin on them. Truly, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful"* (Q.S. Al-Baqarah 2:173).

Vaccines are Halāl (حَلَال) which means permissible. Like my fellow clerics in several Islamic countries, I too accept vaccines having porcine gelatine. The gelatine in vaccines is Halāl because it has undergone hydrolysis, which is a purifying process under the Islamic legal concept called Istihala or perfect change. Istihalah refers to changing the physicochemical nature of a product from a non-acceptable Haram form to an acceptable Halal form. For example in Sharia law, we apply it to vinegar production from wine. Vaccines are acceptable to Moslems because the impure component is completely purified into a new substance, different from its origin."



"In 2014, The members of the Global Islamic Advisory Group for Polio Eradication, met in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the co-sponsorship of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, Al Azhar Al Sharif, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Islamic Development Bank and declared that : "We express serious concern that the vast majority of children afflicted by polio-paralysis in 2013 were from the Islamic world, and we are distressed at the state of these innocent children who now suffer from life-long disability which could have been prevented." The Islamic leaders also declared that:" We strongly reaffirm the importance of Islamic solidarity in combating polio and our support for global polio eradication efforts; and acknowledge that it fully conforms to Islamic principles and religious rulings." Since the Jeddah declaration, several Islamic countries have put comprehensive immunization programs in place and are making significant progress against protecting children from polio and other vaccine preventable infections."