



Religious Leaders Embrace COVID-19 Vaccination



Madzibaba Eckrone Madyirapanze, a leader of the Johane Masowe sect during a ward meeting in Ward 8, Mbire District.

It is usually believed that some religious sects, especially the Apostolic sect, preach against modern medicine but it is not always the case. Following some health education on COVID -19, some members are now taking the COVID-19 vaccines. One good example is that of Johanne Masowe sect in Ward 8, Mbire District. “Citing religion to avoid vaccination is a time-honored tradition,” said Madzibaba Eckrone Madyirapanze, a leader of the Johane Masowe sect during a ward meeting in Ward 8, Mbire District.

“People often look to their faith leaders for guidance on big decisions such as who to marry, how many kids to have, and whether to change jobs or not. These days, another big question is should I get a COVID-19 vaccine? It is our duty as leaders to encourage our followers to get vaccinated by including the message in sermons, holding COVID-19 information sessions, and helping the congregants to book for vaccination appointments. If possible, we need to vaccinate congregants on church grounds to achieve wide coverage of COVID-19 vaccination and reduce the severity of future outbreaks,” he said.

There is need to bring together key stakeholders including religious leaders, faith-based organizations, traditional leaders, and health experts for dialogue to develop messaging around faith and COVID-19 vaccination. There is also a need to reflect on legal, ethical, and religious issues at the intersection of faith and COVID-19 vaccination. Trusted messengers including faith leaders play important roles in bolstering support for the vaccine. The voices of community leaders are especially critical in communities, where there is a long history of medical racism that continues into the present day. Secular and religious ethics also contribute to ongoing debates on vaccine equity.

“I was cynic when I first heard about the vaccines in 2021. What made me change my mind were the LGDA COVID-19 sensitization programmes which had a great impact on the community’s behavior change which has led to 1087 individuals getting vaccinated within a month in Mbire District and also the ever-rising statistics on COVID 19 cases. This fact led some local religious leaders to actively advocate for members to receive COVID-19 vaccines. We will do everything we can to encourage people to obtain all the vaccine doses so we can resume normal life.” Said Madzibaba Eckrone

Madzibaba Eckrone went on to describe how a faith community’s actions can impact the wider population. “There are fewer congregants for the virus to latch onto and this makes it possible for the virus to find its way outside that group. If you have one set of people not interested in getting vaccinated, you’re more likely to see outbreaks in that group of people and the community at large,” he added. “The reason is we do spend time and space together with other community members who are not our congregants, so people who don’t get vaccinated still go for grocery shopping, socializing and their kids go to school mixing and mingling with others. Not getting vaccinated is their choice, but that choice is going to impact a lot of people beyond their immediate community. We encourage people to adhere to all safety health guidelines, social distancing, exercising and personal hygiene.”