

Kent County COVID-19 Church Response Task Force

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Covid-19 Vaccine - Show a lot of Love, Get a Shot of Love, Church Leaders Say

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (March 18, 2021) — Leaders from 50 Kent County congregations volunteered to roll up their sleeves today to show their communities they are walking the talk on the COVID vaccine front, each getting “a shot of love” at West Michigan Vaccination Clinic at DeVos Place, which is a collaborative effort of Kent County, Spectrum Health, Mercy Health and Vaccinate West Michigan.

“Whatever your faith tradition, the principle of *love thy neighbor* is pretty consistent across centuries,” said Pastor Charlie Selmon, Jr. of Wellspring Church. “Getting a vaccine, just like wearing a mask, is about showing love for ourselves, our neighbors, our elders, and our children. It is about protecting the sanctity of human life.”

In a show of solidarity with faith communities, staff from the Kent County Health Department, Spectrum Health, and Mercy Health Saint Mary’s are administering 100 vaccines to faith leaders who are leading volunteer efforts to vaccinate the socially vulnerable in Kent County.

“As a physician, and as someone who has lost loved ones to COVID-19, I urge you to consider getting the vaccine as a way to help us defeat this deadly virus,” wrote TaLawnda Bragg, MD, attending physician at Spectrum Health. In the recent blog post, she said, “I am eager to do whatever I can to help halt the scourge of this virus in our community.”

Until now, access to the vaccine has been limited to essential workers and select, high-risk demographics. With the national supply of vaccines expanding quickly, outreach to the broader community is underway. Starting April 5, the vaccine will be offered to all Michiganders age 16 and older according to Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. In Kent County over 86,885 residents or 16.8% of the population have been vaccinated.

“Over 2.7 million doses of the safe and effective COVID vaccines have been administered in Michigan, and we are well on our way to vaccinating 70% of Michiganders age 16 and up,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. “We will continue to focus our efforts on removing barriers to access for our most vulnerable to exposure and those at highest risk of severe illness due to COVID-19. These vaccines are the way we are going to end this.”

According to Kent County Health Department’s Administrative Health Officer, Dr. Adam London, “faith leaders have been providing essential counseling and care for vulnerable people throughout this pandemic; they are now also helping us as volunteers. Their level of commitment and support for our community has been extraordinary.”

Local faith leaders expect enthusiastic participation at vaccine sites in the weeks ahead.

“We understand in the 21st century that individual health and public health go hand in hand,” said Rev. Khary Bridgewater, Coordinator of the Kent County COVID-19 Church Task Force. “Faith leaders know that we must

protect the individual health of our most vulnerable citizens if we all want to share the blessings of a healthy community."

Faith leaders have committed to continue their volunteer work registering their members and community residents for vaccination. Over the next eight weeks they will expand this work to include canvassing vulnerable neighborhoods across Kent County to register community residents for vaccination at local clinics.

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