

THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND DIOCESE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OUTSIDE OF RUSSIA

20 CHELMSFORD AVENUE, P.O. BOX 38, CROYDON N.S.W. 2132

TEL.: (02) 9747 5892 OR (02) 9747 2301 FAX: (02) 9747 5109

E-MAIL: ANZDIOCESE@IINET.NET.AU WEBSITE: WWW.ROCOR.ORG.AU ABN: 41 201 553 691



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To the Honourable Gladys Berejiklian and the Honourable Daniel Andrews,

As the Bishop of the faithful entrusted in me, I am compelled by my conscience to address by way of open letter a significant concern for my flock and all those who fall under the New South Wales and Victorian state jurisdictions. My serious concern is about the untenable proposal of a vaccination passport to be introduced into the public life of New South Wales and Victoria (to date), a measure, if introduced will impact destructively not only on Church life, but on the Australian life we have known and loved.

Churches have a responsibility to minister to all. We cannot accept polarization of the faithful. The Church, fallible in the flesh, but strong in the Spirit, sees its purpose in calling the world to unity and diversity, in respect and love for all. The essential Gospel message of respect for free will and its expression in civil life is the historical foundation of the Western democratic state, including Australia. To admit only one group of people based on the vaccination criterion goes against the very nature of the Church, which embraces all.

Vaccine passports will create an unethical two-tiered society and we strongly condemn this proposed measure. The Church CANNOT enforce such discriminatory measures in our parishes and refuse entry to anybody who seeks to attend without the proposed vaccine passport, or any other certificate, as this would lead to discriminatory outcomes and would violate the Church's teachings and canons.

In our multicultural and multi-faith society, these proposed measures, which are divisive, coercive and discriminatory, echo the trials experienced by many before they fled persecution and now call Australia home.

We pray and implore that you – our elected leaders – are made aware of the terrible consequences of such an unethical measure. History is the best teacher on where such courses of action have led to in the past.



+Bp. George

**Bishop George
Auxiliary Bishop of the
Australian & New Zealand Diocese of the
Russian Orthodox Church Outside**