

Local

V Project's Interfaith Summit addresses religious and ethical questions about COVID-19 vaccination

On Tuesday, February 16, local leaders from multiple faiths came together, along with a panel of health experts, to answer difficult questions about the COVID-19 vaccine for the common good of our communities. The summit's goal was to present accurate information and to address concerns about the vaccine within our broader community.

Stephen Rothschild, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo represented the Jewish community. Other participating religious leaders and organizations included Imam Ahmad Deeb from the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo, Rev. Monsignor William Kubacki from the Toledo Catholic Diocese, Dr. Calvin Sweeney from Tabernacle Church, Pastor Ben Snyder from CedarCreek Church, Pandit Anant Dixit from the Hindu Temple of Toledo, and Bishop Pat McKinstry from the Worship Center.

The panel of medical professionals included Wood County Health Commissioner Ben Robison, Dr. Anthony Armstrong from Mercy Health, and Dr. Komal Masood, infectious disease expert

at FQHC and ProMedica. Giving opening remarks were Sean Savage, founder of the V Project, and Wade Kapszukiewicz, Mayor of Toledo.

The first question was addressed to faith leaders: is the vaccine ethical from a religious perspective? Every faith leader confirmed that the vaccine is prepared ethically and is acceptable to take in each of their respective faiths. In his remarks, Stephen Rothschild indicated that in Judaism, "we have the obligation to take care of our own health, and when we have the opportunity to care for and protect others from illness or disease, the obligation is to do so." Stemming from this Jewish value, the rabbinical leadership of all the major denominations of Judaism have supported getting the vaccine.

The medical professionals were also asked several questions. They assured the audience that the vaccine is safe to take regardless of racial or ethnic background. Dr. Armstrong, an African-American physician, spoke about the legitimate doubts that many African-Americans may have about the vaccine given the past mistreatment of their community

by the public health system. A prominent example was the infamous 40-year Tuskegee Experiment, which promised sharecroppers infected with syphilis free health care but provided no care, despite an effective treatment being available since 1940. Dr. Armstrong assured the African-American community and others that the vaccine is safe to take.

The V Project is an area-wide initiative to educate, motivate, and vaccinate the entire Northwest Ohio corridor, with the goal of dramatically reducing spread of COVID-19 in our community. It includes industry, government, non-profit, healthcare, education, and religious leaders. The newly-formed organization works together to amplify the Toledo Lucas County Health Department's message on the importance of getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

In addition to the Jewish Federation, Chabad House of Toledo, Congregation B'nai Israel, Congregation Etz Chayim, and Temple Shomer Emunim have supported the V Project and are part of its faith-based committee. Elsa Leveton from Congregation Etz

Chayim, who watched the livestream of the summit, commented that "It's wonderful how all the religious leaders joined together. I think it provides so much hope for the future – for not just the vaccine, but for our community and our world to come together."

If you would like to watch the recording of the Interfaith Summit, please visit www.VProject.org/InterfaithSummit.

If you need help signing up for the vaccine, dial 2-1-1 on any phone to reach United Way's 2-1-1 service. United Way's community resource advisors will be assisting individuals who have a disability, no access to technology or are experiencing technical issues in completing the Lucas County Health Department online "COVID-19 vaccine pre-registration" form, which notifies submitters of when they can receive a vaccination. United Way 2-1-1 is also available to those in Ottawa and Wood counties. Additional help is available from Jewish Family Service at 419-885-2561 or you can contact Shari Bernstein at sharib@jewishtoledo.org.