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Our FMCiC Position on Covid19 Guidelines and Regulations for our Churches

Greetings on behalf of the Board of Administration (BOA) and the National Leadership Team (NLT). In this difficult and unique time of ministry we wanted to share our joint perspective on Covid19, vaccines and health protocols for the local church. First, we would like to acknowledge our Pastor's and everyone's call to live and navigate this season with grace and hope.

To Our Pastors

Thank you for the many ways that you have all been endeavouring to adapt to the single most drastic shift in ministry life that we have seen in a long time. You have all been called to focus on many areas that you were not trained for and that you did not anticipate would ever be a part of your job description. We have seen you persevere and grow in serving the mission of the local church. You now face a new challenge, the challenge to lead your communities out the other side of this pandemic. Every leader is confronting the push and pull of those who are pro-vaccine and those who are anti-vaccine or vaccine hesitant. The temptation from each entrenched faction is that you, as a leader, would pick a side. But the call that we believe that rests upon our Christian leaders in a time of division is to be peacemakers. To lead our congregations well in the mission of the Church and the bonds of Christian fellowship. We, the NLT and BOA, are praying through how we may support you in drawing the church back together.

To Our Lay leaders and Members

Thank you for your faithfulness and grace in this difficult season. 1 John 1:1-7 is a great reminder that it is very easy for a community of faith to slip out of being a community that walks and lives in the light of the Gospel. Verse 6 tells us that we can find ourselves verbally expressing fellowship in Him, yet actually find that we are walking in darkness.

The call on everyone, including Pastors, is to seek wisdom and discernment through the scriptures. It is too easy to get drawn into a dark world of anger, opinion and division. There is so much vitriolic and dark alternative media out there that foster mistrust and fear. Bring the state of your heart and mind before the Father in prayer and explore the fruit of such media in your thought life, and in its effects on a witness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must all ensure that we are guided in our words and conduct by the witness and testimony of scripture. Pray for and support those in leadership as they seek to lead in spirit and in truth.

Our Position Statement

The BOA and the NLT encourage all pastors, staff, and parishioners in our churches to comply with public health regulations and guidelines for Covid19, including vaccinations (unless medically exempted). This position is consistent with our role as Christians to love and serve our neighbours, and with all public health departments across the country.

Members of the BOA and NLT are not medical professionals, but we consistently hear from those who are that getting vaccinated against Covid19, in conjunction with other Covid safety measures, is one of the best ways we can protect the people around us. In particular, it increases protection for the

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vulnerable people who we may intentionally or inadvertently come in contact with. Getting vaccinated is not a guarantee that we will not be infected, but the likelihood of infection is significantly reduced and the intensity of disease is greatly weakened making severe illness, hospitalization and death much less common among vaccinated people than among unvaccinated people. Also, a growing body of evidence shows that vaccinated people who become infected have lower transmissibility rates of the virus than unvaccinated people, thereby reducing the risk of infection to those around us.

Our Rationale

The use of Covid19 vaccinations to protect the vulnerable around us accords with the loving missional model that Jesus exemplified. Choosing to protect one another and our neighbours by being vaccinated is an expression of Jesus-centered love. This principle of putting the interests of others ahead of our own is a sound, bible-based position (e.g., Philippians 2:3-4, Matthew 25:40). We believe this is a good opportunity for the Christian church to show the “Good Samaritan principle” to our neighbours.

People are asking legitimate questions and raising concerns regarding the Covid19 vaccines. We are confident that our recommendation to use the vaccines as a means of protecting ourselves and those around us is based on reliable information sources, including the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Health Canada. The PHAC and Health Canada have specific mandates to ensure the health and safety of Canadians by developing policy and recommendations based on the most recent and reliable scientific data, and to adjust those recommendations when new data is received. The vast majority of Canadian epidemiologists and other disease control professionals confirm that the scientific data increasingly show a high degree of effectiveness of these vaccines and that they are our strongest, most reliable tool for slowing the spread of this virus. Some risks and side effects have been identified, but these are manageable through discussions with your health care provider.

We have been made aware that the speed of vaccine approval is a concern to some, but we understand that evaluators and regulators at public health agencies have rigorously scrutinized the development process and found no issues of non-compliance with regulations. That’s why, for example, some of our vaccines were not approved by Health Canada until some weeks or months after approval in other countries. Health Canada regulators did not rely on the assessment by other jurisdictions, but conducted their own independent assessment to ensure the safety of these products for Canadians. The vaccines were developed using well understood and proven molecular techniques. By diverting enormous resources toward development of Covid19 vaccines, the industry was able to construct and test these vaccines in a much shorter time period than normally expected for vaccine development.

Some have raised concerns that the vaccines are made from, or contain, aborted human fetal tissues or cells. None of the vaccines approved in Canada contain human fetal tissues or cells. In the course of vaccine development research and testing, as is the case for most current molecular biology research, laboratory tests were made on stem cell lines. These are stem cell cultures, stem cells grown in the laboratory, that did originate from an aborted fetus in Europe in the mid 1970s. Over the past 50 years, those stem cell cultures have been grown through thousands of generations so that there is no trace left of the original fetal material.

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One of the best resources we have seen for answering questions on safety and effectiveness of Covid19 vaccines from Christian professionals and biblical perspectives, can be found here www.christiansandthevaccine.com.

Concluding Comments

We understand that everyone in leadership has been going through profound challenges to lead in these past two years. So many outside issues have pressed in on leaders and parishioners alike. We pray that the issues and distractions of the present day do not replace the command to seek first the kingdom and His righteousness. The mission of the church is not to create factions or stand against government regulations, but rather it is to invite our neighbours to experience the grace and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To that end we must all ensure that our search for answers and direction come from prayerful consideration and a focus on the Word more than on alternative media. The BOA and the NLT believe that there are significant theological, compassionate, and scientific reasons supporting our position to encourage all pastors, staff, and eligible people in our congregations to be vaccinated against Covid19.

We have encountered the question *“Is there room for me in the FMCiC if I am not vaccinated?”* The short answer is “absolutely”. We are appealing for Jesus-centred peace and grace: that those who are vaccinated would extend grace to those who are not, and those who are not extend grace to those who are. What that looks like in the Church nursery, small group, Sunday morning (i.e. who can serve and who can’t) remains to be seen, but why can’t we, people of peace, figure it out graciously? Wouldn’t it be a wonderful thing for people who are not yet in Church, to see how we the Church deal with our differences in such a way that these same people would want to be a part of us? That is our hope and our responsibility.

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