

FBC STATEMENT ON THE USE OF THE RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION TO MANDATORY VACCINATION

This document serves as a position statement on the use of religious exemptions, specifically the “Religious Exemption for Mandatory Covid-19 Vaccination for Use in the Workplace, Government Entities, the Armed Services, or Others who Feel Themselves Positioned to Judge as Experts in the Religious Sincerity of Others” (henceforth “the Exemption”) as authored by Pastor Jordan Hall and published by the Fellowship Baptist Church of Sidney, MT.

Occasion for Writing

A number of FBC members who are employed at an entity which has mandated COVID-19 vaccinations for its employees have claimed religious exemption from receiving the vaccination and submitted in response to their employer’s mandate a signed copy of the Exemption. Those members have been further required by their employer to restate the reasoning behind their religious exemption “in their own words”. The requirement that employees restate the Exemption “in their own words” is itself an overreach and infringement upon the employees’ free exercise of religion, as enshrined in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.¹ These employees have already gone over-and-above the requirement of simply stating their sincerely held religious beliefs by providing the employer with a signed statement of corroboration from their personal religious leader (pastor). Any further scrutiny into the matter is unwarranted and inappropriate.

Hebrews 13:17 – our Holy Book – says, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Pastors Hall, Richter, and Snodgrass of FBC Sidney (est. 1980) have issued a strong prohibition against taking the vaccine under coercion, for the reason of coercion, on the grounds of Holy Scripture, that acting against one’s conscience – no matter the issue - is sin. Therefore, FBC Sidney forbids the vaccination for anyone who feels it is contrary to their conscience (on any grounds), as – for them – sin.

We are repulsed that businesses are requiring an explanation or defense of the personal religious conscience, denounce it strongly, and forbid such an undergoing. We strongly denounce such inquisitions as religious harassment.

Response of FBC

The Fellowship Baptist Church of Sidney recognizes that there likely exist insincere people who, in order to avoid receiving a mandatory vaccine which they distrust, would download the Exemption from FBC’s website, sign their name to it, and submit it to their employers without sincerely holding to the theological assertions of the Exemption (or even closely reading it). Nevertheless, the actions of such insincere people do not give employers the right to impose further requirements on employees who have submitted the Exemption in good faith.

The Exemption itself was written by FBC’s pastor. This man, in cooperation with his fellow elders, is biblically tasked with the shepherding of his congregation. This activity includes, but is not limited to, drafting doctrinal statements on behalf of the congregation. Being the under-shepherd of the Lord Jesus Christ, being guided by the Holy Spirit, and having spent a lifetime studying theological matters, the

1. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Section 12: Religious Discrimination. Retrieved 11/16/2021 from https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/section-12-religious-discrimination#_ftnref224

pastor authored and carefully worded the Exemption for use by the church members who are under his care and who sincerely hold to the religious assertions therein. Just as a client is not expected to have the expertise to restate his attorney's legal defense, a layperson is under no burden to restate "in his own words" the (often intricate) doctrinal statements of his pastor or church. Church members are not required to restate "in their own words" the text of Holy Scripture, the words of their pastor's sermons, and their church's doctrinal assertions in order to exercise their sincerely-held religious beliefs. The onerous requirement put upon them to do so is akin to a Jim Crow era poll test. FBC's members have the right to claim a religious exemption and have provided one authored by their pastor and approved by their church.

Having sincerely presented the Exemption to their employers, church members and attenders have fulfilled reasonable requirements to claim religious exemption from mandatory vaccination. No further action is required on their part, up to and including restating The Exemption in "their own words."

1. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Section 12: Religious Discrimination. Retrieved 11/16/2021 from https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/section-12-religious-discrimination#_ftnref224