

 **Covenant Presbyterian Church** 
2009 Crescent Drive, Cedar Falls, IA 50613
cedarfallsopc.org

Statement on Medical Freedom and Religious Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates¹
The Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church
October 20, 2021

As a Christian congregation belonging to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (or “OPC” - see opc.org), we believe that the Bible alone, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the primary and supreme rule when it comes to theology and ethics. This Word is final when it comes to our commitment to proclaim salvation for sinners by divine grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. It also governs how we are to think and live. However, to help us summarize what God’s holy Word teaches, we also appeal to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, which are secondary standards of the OPC. All of our members are called to trust and obey Scripture, as set forth in these standards. And we appeal to them to establish the creedal basis of any of our members’ requests to be granted religious exemptions from COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Especially at stake are two issues, liberty of conscience and limits upon what the government and other organizations may rightly require.

Liberty of Conscience

It is neither right nor safe to go against conscience. “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin,” writes the Apostle Paul in Romans 14:23. In other words, one must be convinced in his own conscience that a given action is the right, or at least a permissible, thing to do. The abundance of controversy surrounding COVID-19 and the efforts to mitigate or prevent its spread and the promotion of vaccines to help in this effort make liberty of conscience extra relevant. We believe in love for neighbor, and that the application of the Sixth Commandment includes the duty to give oneself to “all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others,” as stated in Westminster Larger Catechism answer #135. The catechism goes on to cite ways in which this is to be done, providing a sample but not exhaustive listing. It is quite evident that reasonable people can come to different conclusions with regard to how best to protect human life in the midst of the current adverse public health situation. For example, some may gather information, do research, ask doctors and other health experts, calculate benefits versus risks, and come to the conclusion that receiving one of the vaccines is an optimal way forward for them. However, others may also do their due diligence but come to the conclusion that they shouldn’t - and can’t, therefore, in good conscience - receive the vaccine. The reasons for this hesitancy and resistance include but are not limited to: 1) the vaccines’ varying connections to cell lines using aborted fetal tissue, which all by itself may make it off-limits for those of pro-life convictions, such as biblical Christians; 2) the lack of

¹ We acknowledge that we are not the only church or Christian organization to put forth a statement like this, and we appreciate other models we could draw from, such as Apologia Church, Mesa, AZ, along with the helpful input we have received from congregation members and fellow presbyters.

long-term safety information with regard to the vaccines, giving rise to the possibility of dangerous side-effects and negative impacts upon pre-existing medical conditions; 3) the perception that much of the push for the vaccines may be coming not simply from legitimate health concerns but a controlling political agenda.

How we treat our bodies, including the medical procedures we undergo, is a matter of religious conscience, for we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). To object on the grounds of conscience would carry little weight if it was in reference to a clear moral directive from Scripture that Christians (and, often, others) have historically shared, and to which they have sought to adhere. However, it cannot be argued that there is a clearly established Christian moral position that compels every individual to take the same action with respect to COVID-19 vaccines. As followers of Christ, we must respect the convictions of our brothers and sisters on this matter, regardless of whether or not we agree with those convictions. In short, though, it is the responsibility and the right of every Christian to act in this matter so as not to go against her conscience.

Limits Upon Government and Other Subordinate Authorities

Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), chapter 20, paragraph 2, stresses that “God alone is Lord of the conscience,” which raises another concern, for this means that no human or human institution ought to bind the conscience of others in ways that go contrary to or beyond what Scripture, God’s written Word, teaches, commands, or forbids. The Confession more explicitly applies this principle to public worship, but it extends to every area of life. We as Christians acknowledge, respect, and appreciate the institution of human government, believing the “civil magistrate” to be divinely ordained (Romans 13; WCF, chapter 23, paragraph 1). However, since the government is established by God, it is itself under his absolute authority. As a result, the governing authorities’ sphere is limited, as WCF, chapter 23, paragraph 3, spells out. And, as chapter 23, paragraph 4 points out, while Christians and all citizens are called to pray for and honor magistrates, and submit to their “*lawful* commands” - and this is our default mode - it can at times be necessary to disobey their commands if they are not clearly lawful (Acts 5:29). In this case, we believe the government is guilty of egregious overreach by insisting on COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Moreover, we see a need for even non-governmental entities, such as private businesses and schools, to be cautious, mindful of their own very limited domain, and stop short of imposing similar coercive measures upon their employees and students.

Therefore, we believe it is critical to support and speak out for people in general (Christian and non-Christian alike) but for our members in particular who in their consciences believe they ought not to receive any of the COVID-19 vaccines. It is good and proper for them to take this stance. We also speak out against these mandates. In the name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, we call upon the government, its agencies, and all employers and schools, to cease and desist from ordering and implementing them, and to instead allow for and ensure medical freedom. In addition, we humbly but boldly ask the government, its agencies, and all employers and schools to respect these deeply held religious convictions and to honor our religious liberty by granting religious exemption as requested [see attached form].

Date: _____

To Whom It May Concern:

The Session (body of elders) of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Cedar Falls, IA is writing on behalf of _____, to confirm that his/her sincerely held religious beliefs prevent him/her from receiving a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination. Our church affirms the right of congregants to take religious exemption against mandatory vaccination by governmental authorities and/or other employers and schools. We as a Session have also issued a statement upholding this right in accordance with Scripture and our doctrinal standards.

Consequently, the application of _____ for religious exemption is not merely a matter of personal opinion or taste, but of *bona fide*, good faith, religious conviction with the support of his/her church. We appreciate your understanding in this matter.

Yours Truly,

