



THE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
Missouri Synod

Office of the President  
The Reverend Doctor Matthew C. Harrison  
President of the Synod

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In recent weeks, I have received a number of inquiries from concerned members of the Synod about the COVID-19 vaccines, as they seek to maintain their support for the sanctity of life and for religious freedom. These questions have come not in the interests of politicizing the matter, but out of sincere Christian moral convictions. Having consulted with our district presidents and other agencies of the Synod, I requested that the staff of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, in collaboration with the Office of National Mission's Life Ministry, draft "[The LCMS and COVID-19 Vaccines: Facts and Considerations.](#)" On the basis of this counsel, let me address a few of your most pressing questions.

**1) Are COVID-19 vaccines related to abortion?** The science regarding this is complex. The two vaccines currently approved by the FDA — Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna — were not designed, developed or produced using cell lines derived from aborted human fetal tissue. Other vaccine candidates — including the UK-approved Oxford/AstraZeneca — did use human fetal tissue, however. The Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines did perform laboratory tests using cells derived from abortions (one from 1972 and another from 1985) to confirm the final vaccine quality (as, surprisingly, do many other commonly used medications and vaccines). For more information on how the COVID-19 vaccines relate to abortion, I encourage you to consult the website of the pro-life bioethicists at the Charlotte Lozier Institute and the list they maintain there: [lozierinstitute.org/an-ethics-assessment-of-covid-19-vaccine-programs/](https://lozierinstitute.org/an-ethics-assessment-of-covid-19-vaccine-programs/). According to their assessment, neither the Pfizer/BioNTech nor Moderna vaccines contain any substance derived from aborted human fetal cells.

**2) Does the Synod have a position on the reception of vaccines using human fetal tissue?**

The Synod does not have an official position on such vaccines at this time. Official decisions of this nature come through the Synod acting in convention, and no convention action has yet been taken. However, our church body remains firmly committed to the sanctify of life, and we continually seek to advocate for pro-life positions in the public square.

**3) Can I obtain a religious exemption for the COVID-19 vaccine?** Religious or personal belief exemptions are based on conscientious objection and do not require official support from the denomination. The absence of an official Synod stance does not impact your ability to seek an exemption. Please consult your local lawmakers or public health officials for more information on how to proceed should the need arise.

**4) Should I take the COVID-19 vaccine?** This is a question only you can answer. Some may choose not to take the vaccine because of concerns over its relation to abortion or fear of possible

health complications. Others may take it in spite of such reservations out of concern for their own health or that of their neighbor. Since neither Scripture nor the Synod has explicitly addressed this issue, it remains a matter of Christian freedom where you must choose according to your individual conscience.

**5) How should I talk about the vaccine with others who disagree with my view of it?** In a sensitive issue of this nature, we remember the words of St. James: “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19). Listen carefully and openly to the points of others. Consider them. Share your positions patiently and objectively. Reflect upon your own penchant for error. Forgive others where they sin against you and ask for forgiveness where you wrong them.

In this contentious issue, we must respect the consciences of fellow believers who share our same commitment to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, as well as our life together as a Synod. As St. Paul urges us regarding matters of conscience, “let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (1 Cor. 10:24), and “let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Rom. 14:13). At a time of cultural upheaval, I would encourage you not to allow disagreement even over undoubtedly important matters such as this to take precedence over the faith that unites us in Christ. In all things, we should heed the call to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Please study the document mentioned above. It provides a summary of what we know about the COVID-19 vaccines, their relation to the issue of abortion, and what we can (and cannot) say about these matters from the Synod’s perspective. I hope it proves useful to you as you wrestle with how to bear Christian witness in this world through your love of both God and neighbor.

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20–21).

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Matthew C. Harrison  
President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

PS: “The LCMS and COVID-19 Vaccines: Facts and Considerations” document is available online at [lcms.org/doc/covid19-vaccines-fact-sheet](https://www.lcms.org/doc/covid19-vaccines-fact-sheet).