

## Hope Presbyterian Ministry Team Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination (Version 2.0)

Several questions on the Covid Vaccination have been addressed to the church leadership. Therefore, we felt it would be helpful to share our perspective with you. We recognise that there will be many differing personal views on this matter within our church family as is to be expected in a large group of people.

Our church leadership are not medical practitioners. Therefore, as with any medically related query, we encourage you to engage with the medical practitioners you usually trust for advice. We understand, however, that all medical professionals will advise that no medicine is completely safe for everyone. The COVID-19 vaccine, like all medication, has both benefits and risks.

What we can say to you, as our Hope Church family that is made up of followers of Jesus, is that:

- Firstly, God is sovereign. By the work of his indwelling Holy Spirit (the Spirit of truth) he leads and guides us. So first and foremost, where there is no biblical mandate or clear instruction from the scripture on an issue such as this, we all should commit it to prayer. Our honour and salvation rest on God alone and he is our strong rock and our refuge.
- Secondly, as a church family we all need to recognise that there will be a variety of views on contemporary topics that we grapple with. This breadth of understanding adds a richness and beautiful tapestry of colour to the life of our church. We are all unique individuals, created and loved by God. We welcome consideration of differing views, opinions, and debates as we grow and enrich our understanding through them knowing that each of us will give an account to God.

We see the benefit of healthy and respectful discussions and questions on such matters. We also realise our decisions about them can impact on how we relate to others. However, in all things we are called to demonstrate the characteristics of the 'fruit of the spirit' as we engage with each other *"testing everything that is said, while holding on to what is good"* in these discussions. We also affirm that in all things our bedrock and authority is the word of God.

- Thirdly, we are called to be wise and discerning, always trusting and remaining true to the Lord and his word. This is in everything we do and say.
- Fourthly, given these foundational points, and in the absence of specific scriptural input regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, we believe the decision to be vaccinated or not is a matter of personal conscience. Each individual and

family in our church family needs to make their own decision, deciding on a course of action following reflection, wise advice, prayer, and discernment, and as they feel led by God through the Holy Spirit.

We understand that God gave us free will when we were created, and this is his desire for us. However, with that freedom comes responsibility and accountability and we are told not to cause others to stumble in how we use our freedom.

We reiterate the sense in seeking wise rationale and advice and encourage you to talk to trusted health professionals. We caution against relying on the internet and social media as your sole source of information in this, and indeed for any matter.

As a body of Christ, we believe that God is our foundation, people are our priority, holiness is our pursuit and the message about Jesus Christ is our purpose. So therefore, we are about the work of the gospel. We are about growing the kingdom of God and seeing people pointed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and discipling people to become more like him.

We understand, one of the enemy's tactics is to distract us, individually and as a church, from that mission. If we allow ourselves to be wholly preoccupied with individual contemporary topics, then that takes us away from the centrality of Jesus Christ and his teaching to us. That would not be beneficial, and indeed for our church leadership it would do a disservice to those he has called us to serve and to Jesus Christ.

We leave you with the words that Paul penned in Colossians 3:14-15, inspired and breathed on by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that have stood fast through global pandemics, wars, famines, debates, public controversy, proud and not so proud moments of the Church: *"Above all, clothe yourself with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body, you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful."*

Hope, let us be a people of God who are wise in our decision-making, a family who love each other, and where possible are at peace with one another. Let us be thankful for God's gifts to us, even in these uncertain times.

God bless,

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