

God's Church at a Crossroads

On the heels of sobering CDC guidelines that touch upon worship, vaccines, and the pandemic, I wanted to share some information and encouragement.

The new CDC guidelines deem church attendance unsafe for anyone unvaccinated. Families will be torn as vaccinated members may be allowed to travel and function in society and the unvaccinated not. Some colleges will require their students to vaccinate before returning for school and many students will be faced with difficult decisions. Last week at our Bible study, one of our participants related that she was no longer allowed to use the amenities at her home owner's association in northern California because they now required vaccination passports.

We in the church are being conditioned to view our brothers and sisters with increasing levels of distrust. Many who have enjoyed good standing with the official church are now, due to the vaccine issue, at risk of being considered inconsiderate and misdirected troublemakers, stirring up the pot of controversy and conspiracy.

Advent Health is advising churches to preach vaccinations from the pulpit and to urge members to get vaccinated if they want to worship. One Adventist conference recently sent a memo to its leadership stating that the church's official stance is "provaccine" and that members should be reminded as such. They instructed leadership that since the usual concern against the vaccine is based on health reasons—which for the purposes of exemptions are to be distinguished from religious reasons—in cases where members believe differently than the official church, they should be directed to look elsewhere than to the church for legal counsel.

With counsel such as this, as disappointing as it is, it should not be an overwhelming surprise that there are already Adventist churches that will not allow the unvaccinated to attend.

The other day, I read a post that a friend on Facebook made. In her post, she reminded her readers about the official church's statement on the coronavirus vaccine. She urged her Adventist friends not to get into extremism and fanaticism. The implication was that believing differently than the official church on the subject of vaccines made one extreme and fanatical.

It may come as a surprise to us that during World War II in Germany, the official German Seventh day Adventist church supported Hitler. Because Hitler did not announce himself to be the despot that he was, it made sense to go along with the powers that be; compromise was made after compromise until the church had gone so far as to "out" many of God's people to the Nazi government. The church also supported the Nazi programs, including the eugenics program, the popular science of their day.

I believe that there is enough historical precedence for us to realize that we should not place our church leadership upon a pedestal of infallibility. In Christ's day, it was His

church that rejected Him and in the name of common good, crucified Him. In Nazi Germany, the Adventist church supported the Nazi government because they believed that it was needed for the church to survive. However, this survival came at the loss of principle, faith, and integrity.

We should be careful to study what God would have us do in these difficult decisions. And while we should seek for brotherly love and unity, we should have the courage to follow God, even if it means standing alone.

How will our church survive the controversy? I pray that we not repeat the mistakes of those in God's official church of the past. Let's study, let's pray, and let's determine that whatever side we are on, to seek Jesus humbly and make Him our defense. Let us not avoid speaking the truth, but let us speak it kindly and with the love of God.

Jesus is in control. He knows about this pandemic and He knows about the vaccine. He knows about the societal changes that may soon take place. He has a plan for our lives and He is coming soon. Praise the Lord that we have this hope. Let's use this time to practice trusting Him more and work for the hastening of His return.

Joyce Chou