

  
**WATCH TOWER**  
Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania  
200 Watchtower Drive, Patterson, NY 12563-9205, U.S.A.  
ECA:ECH February 9, 2022

GHISLAIN MESSE



Dear Brother Messe:

In your letter dated December 19, 2021, you thank us for our letter dated ECA:ECB September 20, 2021, wherein we explained that whether or not to get vaccinated is a personal decision for each Christian. However, you feel that the Governing Body updates and announcements to the congregations are attempting to force brothers and sisters to get vaccinated. You say that, as a result of this, elders are indicating that getting vaccinated is a matter of obedience to the Governing Body, brothers and sisters are openly criticizing those who are not vaccinated, and many have gotten vaccinated against their wishes. After reviewing your letter, we are pleased to provide the following comments.

Are Jehovah's Witnesses who decide not to receive a COVID-19 vaccine to be considered disobedient to Jehovah and his organization? No. As explained in our previous letter, vaccination is a personal decision for each Christian. The Governing Body does not force us to get vaccinated or to make any other health-care decision. So why do Governing Body updates and announcements to the congregations mention vaccination as something for us to think about? All the information in the updates, including comments about vaccination, is provided out of the Governing Body's love and concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of the worldwide brotherhood. In view of the millions around the world who have died because of the virus, it is not an exaggeration to say that our safety during the pandemic is a life-and-death matter, as mentioned in the video *2021 Governing Body Update #8*. While it is true that there are many things in the world that pose a threat to our health and life, the fact remains that at present the pandemic continues to be a global threat affecting various aspects of everyday life, and vaccination provides a measure of protection from this threat.

Moreover, in many areas, government restrictions are reduced or removed depending on whether individuals or a large percentage of communities have been vaccinated. This, in turn, has a direct bearing on how we carry out our most important Kingdom work. Therefore, it is to be expected that the Governing Body will show a keen interest in vaccination and any other developments that may allow our work to continue to the fullest extent possible, while taking into consideration all the Bible principles involved, including those involving health and safety. As these developments unfold, we can expect to hear more about how they will affect the work at world headquarters, at branch offices, and in congregation territories.

An additional reason why the Governing Body updates and announcements have mentioned vaccination is brought out in the [jw.org](http://jw.org) article "Are Jehovah's Witnesses Opposed to Vaccination?" It says: "Since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Jehovah's Witnesses have continued to publish reminders . . . encouraging adherence to local safety guidelines. These include the importance of physical distancing and of following regulations on public gatherings, quarantining, hand washing, and the wearing of face coverings as well as other practical measures required or recommended by the authorities." (Romans 13:1, 2) As the pandemic continues, the list of other practical measures recommended by authorities has grown to include getting vaccinated, if possible. Please note though that it is the *public health officials as authorized by the superior authorities* who are recommending vaccination. The organization is simply encouraging the brotherhood to adhere to the local safety guidelines "required or recommended by the authorities." It is not new for Jehovah's organization to encourage and even recommend that others follow the recommendations of public health of-

ficials. (For example, see the jw.org article “Jehovah’s Witnesses Respond to Ebola Outbreak.”) It is very similar to the encouragement the organization gives to follow the recommendations of local authorities to evacuate or take other measures in the face of natural disasters. (See page 16 of the article “Heeding the Warnings Made a Difference” in the June 2006 issue of *Awake!*.) Moreover, doing so is also a way in which the organization shows proper regard for the superior authorities.

Nevertheless, as the aforementioned jw.org article says: “We view vaccination as a personal decision for each Christian to make.” This has been highlighted repeatedly throughout the pandemic, as shown in the following quotes from Governing Body updates.

*2021 Governing Body Update #4:* “Jehovah’s Witnesses are not against vaccination. We view it as a personal decision for each Christian to make.”

*2021 Governing Body Update #6:* “Of course, the decision to be vaccinated is a personal one. What factors might a Christian consider in making the decision? . . . We each must weigh such factors when making our own personal decision.”

*2021 Governing Body Update #8:* “We share this information with you so you can carefully consider it when making your personal decision regarding vaccination.”

*2021 Governing Body Update #10:* “One sister and her husband watched the Governing Body updates and made their personal decision to get vaccinated.”

Recognizing that the decisions individuals will reach may differ, the Governing Body also arranged for the November 2021 announcement that was to be read to all congregations to include the following comments: “As a reminder, each *family head* must prayerfully consider how best to care for the physical and emotional needs of his family during this pandemic. . . . Whatever decisions you make, we are confident that you will reflect reasonableness as well as a high regard for the sanctity of life. Also, please show respect for the decisions that others make in such personal matters, recognizing that ‘each one will carry his own load.’” (Galatians 6:5) This announcement indicates that the prayerful decisions individuals make regarding how to care for their physical needs will differ within the congregation. Therefore, no one should feel pressured to make a certain decision regarding vaccination or other matters related to addressing one’s physical and emotional needs during the pandemic. Instead, the different decisions should be respected. As each one in the congregation endeavors to apply the reminder given in this announcement, this will contribute to the unity of the congregation.

It seems you feel that the comments from the organization about vaccination are the reason that some in the congregation criticize those who choose not to be vaccinated. However, after objectively considering the comments in this letter, you would likely agree that nothing stated in the Governing Body updates provides a basis for those who are vaccinated to look down on or speak negatively about those who are unvaccinated or vice versa. Frankly, such negative reactions well illustrate what can happen if we do not adequately prepare our minds and hearts to “pay more than the usual attention” to the Bible-based guidance provided by the faithful slave in such updates. (Hebrews 2:1; Ezra 7:10) As we were kindly reminded in the video *2021 Governing Body Update #7:* “We have to be careful. All of us are exposed to worldly thinking on television, on the Internet, at work, or at school. There are many websites that promote conspiracy theories. If we’re not careful, we could become emotionally involved in these debates. We could allow ourselves to be guided by ‘the voice of strangers’ instead of listening to Jehovah’s channel, ‘the faithful and discreet slave.’ As we face the end of this system of things, this will become more and more essential to our safety and spirituality.” — John 10:5; Matthew 24:45.

As indicated by this quote, constant exposure to worldly thinking, especially regarding emotionally charged issues, can impede our ability to “listen and get the sense” of what is being conveyed by the slave.

(Matthew 15:10; Mark 7:14) For some, it can prevent them from hearing the updates as loving, trustworthy guidance from Jehovah. For others, it can lead them to drawing a conclusion not presented in the updates and using their own reasonings as a basis for viewing others negatively. Neither response is appropriate and both work against the unity we are striving to maintain. (Ephesians 4:3) Therefore, in addition to cautioning us about what we allow ourselves to be exposed to, *2021 Update #7* went on to say: “Don’t allow yourself to become emotionally involved with the causes of this world, whatever they may be.” Such counsel is more important than ever in view of the many issues that are fiercely debated and highly divisive in the world today. While individual Christians may appropriately make different personal decisions in a number of areas, such as whether or not to get vaccinated, when the aforementioned counsel is applied, such differences should pose no threat to our precious unity.

As Jehovah’s people, we are not immune to the difficulties associated with this pandemic and life in these last days. (Psalm 34:19; 2 Timothy 3:1) These difficulties can test our faith and our endurance. Thus, we warmly encourage you to continue trusting in Jehovah and looking to his organization for reliable insight, instruction, and advice.—Psalm 32:8; 46:1.

We trust this information will be helpful to you. Please accept our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

*Watch Tower B. & J. Society*  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

bc: France