


WATCH TOWER
Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania
200 Watchtower Drive, Patterson, NY 12563-9205, U.S.A.
ECA:ECB September 20, 2021

GHISLAIN MESSE



Dear Brother Messe:

Thank you for your letter postmarked July 19, 2021, in which you share some observations regarding the comments on vaccination in recent Governing Body updates on JW Broadcasting®. You feel that the comments in these updates are urging the brothers and sisters to get vaccinated. In this regard, we are pleased to provide the following comments.

As has been stated in announcements to the congregations and in the videos *2021 Governing Body Update #4* and *#6*, the matter of vaccination is a personal decision for each individual to make. (Galatians 6:5) As you acknowledge in your letter, our publications emphasize this principle when they deal with health-care matters. One example you cite, from the February 8, 1987, issue of *Awake!*, states: “[This magazine] does not recommend any one type of medicine or therapy over another and does not offer medical advice. Its aim is simply to present facts and to leave it to the reader to make judgments and decisions.” You feel that comments made in the recent Governing Body updates are in conflict with this principle. However, the comments made in these programs did not recommend any particular vaccine. Rather, they provided important factors and wise counsel to consider in our personal decision-making process. For example, in the video *2021 Governing Body Update #6*, after listing three factors to consider regarding vaccination, Brother Herd stated: “We each must weigh such factors when making our own personal decision. Continue to take reasonable precautions in accord with local conditions, especially if you have health problems or you’re up in years. Stay in touch with direction coming from the local health authorities, and be careful.”

Why have the updates mentioned statistics regarding how many in the Bethel family have chosen to be vaccinated? Just before making the statement about the Bethel family, *Update #4* mentioned the point that Jehovah’s Witnesses are not opposed to vaccination. Thus, one reason this update mentioned that many in the Bethel family have chosen to be vaccinated was to emphasize the point that we do not have a religious objection to vaccination. (See also “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses Opposed to Vaccination?” on jw.org.) Also, *Update #6* stated that “New York State regulations now allow *vaccinated persons* to engage in a greater number of activities.” So prior to showing the worldwide brotherhood that the Bethel family had resumed certain activities, such as having meals together and gathering together in person for worship, it was important to make clear that the majority of United States Bethel family members have been vaccinated and thus are in compliance with local laws as they engage in such activities.

Additionally, as you can no doubt appreciate, many have inquired about the welfare of the Bethel family. Throughout the pandemic, in various announcements to all congregations, the Governing Body has requested the brotherhood to pray for the worldwide Bethel family. Of course, this would include praying for their physical well-being so that the spiritual food could continue to be distributed during the pandemic. In response to this loving interest, the Governing Body appropriately wanted to keep the brotherhood informed of the things taking place at Bethel. This is similar to when the apostle Paul learned that fellow Christians wanted to know how he and those with him were doing under unfavorable circumstances. In response to such interest, Paul arranged to tell the brothers “all the things happening” and ‘all the news about him.’ (Colossians 4:7-9) At times he even included details about his welfare in his inspired letters, which were read and circu-

lated among congregations throughout the brotherhood. (2 Corinthians 1:8-11; 6:11; 7:5-7; Philippians 2:25-28; 4:10, 18; Colossians 4:16) In line with this pattern, the Governing Body, by means of the above-mentioned update programs, was able to provide the worldwide brotherhood with an accurate and encouraging report of the things happening at Bethel during the pandemic. Stating that many at Bethel had chosen to be vaccinated in accord with their wishes was a way of letting the brotherhood know about the welfare of the Bethel family.

Of course, there are ongoing research and concerns about the virus, its variants, and the long-term safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines. This can make it a challenge to decide personally whether or not to get vaccinated. Therefore, each one of us is encouraged to act in harmony with Proverbs 14:15 when choosing medical treatments. This would involve searching for reliable information rather than believing “every word.” After obtaining such information, each Christian has the responsibility to analyze his or her findings in the light of Bible principles and, thereafter, make an informed decision.

What is said above is not meant to dissuade you from any personal decision you may have made regarding COVID-19 vaccination. We encourage you to “keep asking” Jehovah for wisdom to guide you. (James 1:5) Then fully rely on his Word and the spiritual food and practical guidance we receive from “the faithful and discreet slave.” When we do this, we demonstrate that we are ‘fully leaning’ on Jehovah and thus putting ourselves in line for his protection and blessing.—Isaiah 26:3.

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