



United Church of God an International Association

eNews from Ministerial and Member Services

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Personal From the President...

A Critical Time for Love, Understanding and Action

The facts are plain. A fresh surge of coronavirus infections—driven by the Delta variant—has created a new set of challenges for much of the world. Its impact has been felt keenly within the Church of God community. Many of you know that *Beyond Today* TV host Gary Petty and his wife, Kim, both came down recently with the virus, as did a number of members in the Tennessee congregations they serve. Mr. Petty's case grew severe, and he had to be hospitalized.

Thankfully, he is scheduled to be released soon, but will require time to fully recover at home. As he told me by phone, his personal experience with COVID-19 confirms that it is “a bad disease.” None of us want to experience it. Other groups within the Church of God community report several cases—mild and severe alike—among members and ministers. This virus respects no human.

There are some issues that we need to consider over the coming weeks. I believe that God helped us all get through a successful camp season for our church youth. With the exception of one camp where there were many who came down with the virus, we mostly were spared. In addition to God's amazing protection, no small measure of thanks goes to the intensive planning and execution of safety measures.

What I am about to write about is a delicate and solemn subject, but one that we must face head on, especially as we near the Fall Festival season. I write here of the issue of COVID-19 precautions and safety measures, and yes, that includes the available vaccines.

As well documented in our doctrinal study paper (streaming.ucg.org/files/papers/UCG-papers-Divine-Healing.pdf), the United Church of God believes in and teaches divine healing. The paper rightly states that “We will never understand in this life every step in the process which leads to the healing of our illnesses. We must rely on the clear scriptural statements for our doctrine . . . We believe that divine healing is a promise from God and we claim that promise through faith.”

We also understand and positively teach that seeking medical treatment—including the administration of vaccines—represents a personal choice. We positively teach that it is *not* a sin to seek such services.

During this year and a half of pandemic, we have all faced various trials and tests. We have watched and personally experienced the intense polarization of America and the politicization of virtually the entire spectrum of COVID-19 issues. When it comes to our members, our relationships, and our choices, what are we to do?

Our direction is crystal clear! We read it every Passover evening, and it should be front and center in our everyday lives. Here's what our Savior and coming King Jesus Christ proclaims to each one of us: "A new commandment I give to you, that *you love one another; as I have loved you*, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35, emphasis added throughout).

In the Church, the issue is not about vaccines or whether or not someone wears a mask or takes other precautions. The issue is about *attitude*. With respect to our spiritual assembly, make no mistake, we *are* our brother's keeper. We *are* to show love and respect. We *are* to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31).

The apostle Paul makes it clear. From across the ages, he directs us to be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do *nothing* from selfish ambition or conceit, but *in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also *to the interests of others*. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:2-5, English Standard Version).

If you believe that you should take (or already have) one of the COVID-19 vaccines, that is *not* a breach of faith. That is a personal choice. If you are opposed to vaccines, the Church recognizes that also is a personal choice. The Church also understands that there may be consequences for either action, but still supports individual choice.

We acknowledge that much has been written, published, broadcast, or posted about vaccines. Vaccines do not offer or create some kind of invisible science fiction "force field." Pathogens—disease-causing organisms—exist everywhere around us. God gave our bodies complex immune systems to protect us. When we fall ill from infection from one of these pathogens, our body produces specific antibodies and other new defenses to both recover from and help prevent future illnesses. A vaccine triggers a response in our immune systems to develop new antibodies and other defenses to prevent or minimize future infection, particularly in potentially lethal illnesses like COVID-19.

Based on personal research and choice, some in the church elect to be vaccinated. Others elect not to do so. Whatever the reason or the choice, the understanding and application of loving one another and being our brother's keeper hold fast. Creating division, unnecessary trauma, or unsafe conditions are not the answer.

Apart from those who are licensed physicians or other medical professionals within the United Church of God, we recognize that we are not medical experts. As a spiritual assembly, we do not offer medical advice or diagnostic suggestions.

But here is an important point: Since we arrange and oversee the meeting together of many thousands of members in public areas on a continuing basis, we *do* hold a *very strong interest in positive public health and public safety*. Even outside of COVID-19 issues, we must regularly plan for and attend to many issues in the realm of public health. Many biblical

passages direct us to be good stewards, which includes creating safe places for worship and fellowship.

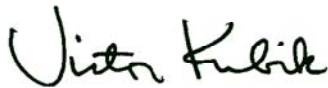
We are but weeks away from the Festival season. In America, two of our Feast sites are in Florida, currently the state with the highest number of new COVID-19 infections and related hospitalizations. Some cities—like New York City—have already adopted a vaccine mandate and are now requiring proof of vaccination to enter restaurants, gyms, and other gathering places. Unless the surge abates, we may face changes in how we conduct the Feast. For example, we may need to suspend in-person meetings in favor of off-site webcasting if COVID-19 case(s) are widespread at or near a site, but almost a certainty if that infection is confirmed among attendees (hence the extreme need for everyone to take precautions).

We are carefully monitoring the developing situations around all of our Feast sites and all of our church congregations.

My message and my request are this: please pray fervently for God’s protection, God’s wisdom, and God’s direction. As Paul directs us, “Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, New Living Translation). Be tolerant and supportive of each other, including the posting of messages on social media. Please pray for our older members and those with various conditions, as they may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection.

In summary, now is a critical time. Now is the time to really show *love* for one another. Now is the time for *understanding*, of appreciating the spiritual and physical challenges that we face. Now is the time for *action*, of taking precautions and promoting safety for all, even if it is inconvenient. Let us come together, let us speak together, let us worship together “with *all humility and gentleness*, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of *peace*” (Ephesians 4:2-3 ESV).

In Christ’s service,



Victor Kubik

From Ministerial and Member Services

Death of Lou Fakhoury



Lou Fakhoury

Louis G. Fakhoury, age 90, an elder serving in the Nashville, Tennessee, congregation, died peacefully in his sleep, surrounded by family and nursing staff, on July 13 at a care facility in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

Lou was born in Brooklyn, New York, at the beginning of the Great Depression. In the 1950s he, along with his entire family, moved to the Southern California area. It was there that he and his wife, Vivian, were called into the Church.

Lou had served as a Corporal in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany. After the army, he obtained a B.A. and Master's Degree in Public Administration, and eventually became Deputy Director of the Los Angeles County Probation Department.

Lou is survived by his son Roger (wife Toni), his daughter-in-law, Barbara and his grandchildren Christian, Kyle and Reagen, as well as his brother Lee Cory and sister Lorraine (husband Ludwig Kiramidjian). His wife Vivian, second son Gary, and granddaughter Hannah predeceased him. A private memorial service celebrating his life was held in Hendersonville, Tennessee, on July 19.

Inside United Podcast



Aaron Dean—Second Visit to China

Aaron Dean tells stories of his second visit to China and the unexpected outcomes that came from revealing the gospel to the leadership in that region.

ucg.org/inside-united-podcast/inside-united-podcast-214-aaron-dean-second-visit-to-china

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