



## **BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE COVID-19 RESPONSE PAPER BY THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP OF ZIMBABWE (EFZ)- 12 MARCH 2021**

The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe through its National Executive Committee established a COVID-19 Response Taskforce with a view to provide credible information around COVID-19 related matters to its members in response to enquiries on the position of the Fellowship regarding COVID-19 and Government responses. The major outcome of this Taskforce report is to provide information, knowledge, and objective analysis of the current COVID-19 context to assist Church Leaders and their Churches to make individual and informed decisions on the scientific, medical, and ethical integrity of the COVID-19 drug(s) and vaccine(s) development processes, the potential benefits and risks therefrom and the acceptability of the developed vaccines or drugs for use for vaccination. Further, the paper makes recommendations to Government of Zimbabwe, the Churches and other key stakeholders vis sustainable responses and interventions in fighting the pandemic. **The report holds no brief nor prejudice for a decision or position and will leave that to church leaders and their denominations** as in any unfolding and recently developed situation, there are pros and cons to any perspective that can be offered.

### **Vaccines And Vaccinations**

The history of mankind includes experience with pandemics to which vaccines were developed and some currently in use, thereby helping in saving lives and economies. The COVID-19 vaccines have been (and are being) developed in record time thanks to huge developments in science and technology, availability of populations to include in the vaccine development process as well as global political and financial support.

Basic human rights and freedoms are provided and safeguarded in many constitutions of the world and in the Zimbabwean constitution in particular. This right of choice and conscience must be safeguarded and guaranteed in the face of policy positions taken by the State, Government, policymakers, and political players regarding vaccines and vaccinations during this period. Rights and freedoms should be viewed as a whole than exclusive i.e. right to life, health, freedom to access information, share information and associate and assemble contribute to the integrity of the whole person.

The deficit of adequate and constant information on the unfolding developments and engagements around COVID-19 has resulted in an infodemic outbreak of very strong alternative views, opinions and theories relating to COVID-19, the new world order, the 666 mark of the beast, and the end of the world.

Several therapeutic drugs have been developed as an alternative to vaccines and vaccination. This can be a welcome option to those who are uncomfortable or unwilling for a variety of reasons to be vaccinated, and members of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the church at large, need to be aware of these options available to them, over and above vaccines and vaccinations. Awareness raising is key.

While there is agreement that no one vaccine is a silver bullet, any decision to procure and administer a vaccine ought to be based on affordability, availability, viable temperature storage, and distribution.

Governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens from fake or dangerous vaccines hence they ought to be more transparent in their decision making processes. Presently there is limited data to prove efficacy of current vaccines to stop or limit the spread of new variants- there are still too many unknowns hence ethical and moral imperatives must be at the center of Government policy responses.

Although they have had some success in flattening the curve, lockdowns as a control method have not provided a sustainable platform for combating COVID-19. They have had more negative impacts on the socio-economic wellbeing of families and small businesses who survive from hand-to-mouth. A realistic plan is critical going forward if peace and health dividend is to be achieved.

The Legislature must be alive to serve their representative, legislative and oversight functions during this crisis. Public consultations, engagements and involvement is no longer a luxury but a necessity if people are to decide to be vaccinated or not, or if herd immunity is to be achieved. The National COVID-19 Taskforce must be representative and inclusive of all key stakeholders to assist Government responses.

For the Church and other stakeholders to make meaningful decisions and contributions in the fight against COVID-19, there needs to be improved and increased access to correct and constantly updated information and collaboration between government and its social partners including and in particular, the church, business, and other community entities.

### **The Psycho-Social Responsibility of the Church**

The Church is one of the only institutions that has survived time and pandemics, found everywhere in communities as an entity trusted, established by Divine Order and able to meet the spiritual, social, economic, political and emotional needs of people-groups. Through her values, philosophy, institutions and resources, the Church has and

continues to be an essential part of the human society, and the nation. The Church addresses and deals with individuals and societies in intrinsic and foundational issues of spirituality, morality, emotional and mental health and social stability, addressing what Governments, money and power cannot.

The Coronavirus pandemic has severely challenged the Church in its provision of spiritual ministry and psychosocial support to its members and to the community as a result of the ban in gatherings and ease of movement. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have a hitherto undefined and underestimated toll on individual, family, community, social and national mental and physical health. The Church must find adaptive and innovative ways to develop clearer and better ways to provide spiritual ministry and psycho-social support to its members and to the community without putting its key ministers, its members and the community in harm's way. While the use of digital technology has been embraced by the Church it is often prohibitive in costs and limited in network availability especially to the poor.

The role and responsibility of the Church in providing psychosocial support must be recognized by the Government and other key stakeholders. The Church must be allowed to provide the necessary support to ensure that the mental and physical health of the citizens of the country is supported and undergirded from a non-governmental position. It is therefore recommended that segments of the Church which include pastors, elders and deacons be considered providers of essential services requiring commensurate freedom and support to render such services.

## **COVID 19 and Eschatology**

COVID-19, being the most serious global health crisis of our time has served to heighten misguided, fear-inducing interpretation of Scripture. We offer the following guidance to Christians regarding the association COVID-19 with Biblical Eschatology (end time teaching):

Firstly, there can be no doubt that in Jesus' teaching<sup>1</sup> His Second Coming will be preceded by such occurrences as nation rising against nation, famines, earthquakes, and pestilences (disease outbreaks). This is affirmed by Apostle John<sup>2</sup> in terms of this clear Biblical teaching and the world-wide existential experience typified by COVID-19, we are nearer to the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour than ever before in world history. Secondly, when we interpret the book of Revelations in its proper context, we can dismiss the fear of the vaccine as being the "mark of the beast – the 666". Thirdly, the awakening of our consciousness that we are nearer to the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour than ever before in world history must cause us to live today in the light of eternity. COVID-19 has shown how much materialism offers

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 24:7-13, Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:11

<sup>2</sup>Revelation 6:8.

no lasting value. Instead, as Apostle Peter<sup>3</sup> teaches, we must pray, love, and serve for the glory of God as we anticipate the consummation of Christ's rule.

This is an Executive Summary of a more comprehensive document which readers are advised to go to for a full and comprehensive overview. The need for a more comprehensive and inclusive forum for dialogue on national challenges like COVID-19 is underlined by this current experience.

Based on the information and knowledge presented in this document, **each church leader and denomination must draw their own conclusions and make independent and informed decisions** on whether to accept vaccination or not and which vaccine or drug would be preferable for them if they do.

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<sup>3</sup>1 Peter 4:7-11