

SPIRITUAL LIFE HIGHLIGHTS

Weekly lessons provide insight into the life of Moses

NORTHEASTERN OREGON — On Sunday, Jan. 30, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Baker 1st and 2nd Wards will hold ward conferences, and in the other wards members of the congregations will speak.

Since this is a fifth Sunday, the Ward Bishoprics will be coordinating the lesson for the second hour.

The “Come, Follow Me” lesson for the week of Jan. 31 will be based on Genesis 6-11 and Moses 8. The history of Noah, and the Tower of Babel, are covered by the chapters in Genesis while Moses 8 provides greater insight into the life of Moses and his rela-

SUBMISSIONS

Churches and faith-based groups are encouraged to submit Highlights for the Spiritual Life page by 4 p.m. Tuesday for publication Thursday. Submit by email to news@lagrandeobserver.com (with Highlights in the subject line).

tionship with God.

A special broadcast for the youth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that was to be held this week has been rescheduled to March, due to the exposure of multiple participants to COVID-19.

Congregants will try to ‘Stump the Pastor’

LA GRANDE — The First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will attempt to “Stump the Pastor” on Jan. 30, the fifth

Sunday of the month. This will be the second time congregants will have the opportunity to ask Pastor Archie Hook questions they have about Bible passages or how a Bible passage may relate to life today. Worship begins at 10 a.m. Masks are required while in the building.

Junior confirmation classes continue

LA GRANDE — During the Epiphany Season (from the 12th day after Christmas until Ash

Wednesday), Faith Lutheran Church’s Bible readings focus on Jesus revealing himself. On Sunday, Jan. 30, the reading at the 10 a.m. service will be Luke 4:31-32, which tells us that Jesus “was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at His teaching, for His Word possessed authority.” We continue to receive his word and be directed by its authority.

After the Divine Service will be a junior confirmation class and a meeting of SHINE Preschool’s board.

Join worship service in person or online

LA GRANDE — Zion Lutheran Church will offer in-person and online worship

on Sunday, Jan. 30, at 9 a.m. Masks and social distancing are required. The service will be livestreamed to YouTube. The link for that stream will be posted on Zion’s Facebook page and website on Saturday, Jan. 29.

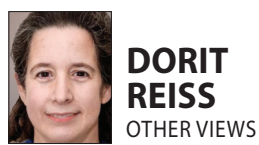
Recorded service may be viewed at any time

LA GRANDE — St. Peter’s Episcopal Church will meet for a service of Morning Prayer on Sunday, Jan. 30, at 11 a.m. Masks and social distancing are required.

The service will be streamed live and recorded for viewing at a later time. The link will be posted to the church’s Facebook page on Saturday, Jan. 29.

— *The Observer*

Who deserves a religious exemption from vaccine mandates?



DORIT REISS
OTHER VIEWS

As states and companies implement vaccine mandates, some anti-vax workers have an answer: I can’t, it’s against my religion.

In the past decade, battles over when religious exemptions should be granted — for various kinds of laws — have been fought in legislatures, in executive offices and in the courts. Plaintiffs have sought relief from laws prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ couples, from requirements to cover contraceptives for employees and from pandemic-related restrictions on public gatherings.

But on the vaccine question, there is an added twist: Policymakers, employers and courts have to decide whether a person is being honest in claiming that religion is the reason they object to the vaccines. That’s because so many people are using religion as a cover for something else (such as distrust of vaccines because of something they read on the internet).

We know that Americans game religious exemptions, because they tell us. It’s easy to find people online, for example, coaching others on how to pretend that freedom of worship is the real issue. Writes one such person, on Facebook: “RULE #4 in writing a religious exemption: Do not mention covid-19 (sic), side effects, or scientific data! Do not mention the Vaccine is under E-U-A,” or emergency-use authorization. Religious leaders have offered to sign letters requesting exemptions for anyone who wants one — for pay-



Oregon Health Authority/Contributed Photo, File

Cars line up in a barn at the Union County Fairgrounds, La Grande, during a COVID-19 vaccination clinic on Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021. After moving clinics to the fairgrounds to make more room and expedite the waiting process, the Center for Human Development administered more than 500 vaccinations during two clinics in November.

ment, or free. This is not a new phenomenon, nor one limited to the coronavirus vaccines. (For a hearing on vaccine mandates in Massachusetts, a parent wrote to lawmakers that she made use of a religious exemption in 2020 for the flu vaccine, “not because it goes against my religion, but because I do not believe that it is necessary to put additional chemicals into my child’s body.”) But the political battles over coronavirus vaccination have driven more people to seek ways around the laws.

Religious freedom has an important place in our Constitution and history. That said, we have always limited it to protect other important values, such as health and safety. But the line has been tricky to draw — and the Supreme Court has begun to change its mind about what the Constitution requires. All of this puts institutions

trying to enforce mandates in a tough spot.

Does the law require a religious exemption to vaccine mandates? Until very recently, the answer was “no” for states and “maybe” for employers. In a landmark 1990 case, Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon v. Smith, the court ruled that states do not have to provide a religious exemption from a generally applicable law that is neutral on its face with respect to religion. Courts have consistently found that vaccine mandates do not require a religious exemption, and several states — California, Connecticut, Maine, New York, West Virginia and Mississippi — do not offer one.

But in the past year, the Supreme Court has indicated that it intends to strengthen protections for religious liberty —

although the full contours of the change are unclear. In *Tandon v. Newsom*, for instance, it blocked California from enforcing coronavirus restrictions on private gatherings, including at-home religious services, while the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit considers an appeal. In *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, which gave the court a chance to overturn *Smith* — and to say believers should be exempt from some generally applicable laws — it declined to do so. Still, in a decision that struck some observers as hair-splitting, the court said the city had an obligation to grant an exemption from anti-discrimination laws to a Catholic adoption agency that declined to license same-sex couples to be foster parents. Justice John G. Roberts Jr., writing for the majority, noted that the law allowed exemp-

tions at the “sole discretion” of the city’s Department of Human Services commissioner; if a city has an exemptions policy, Roberts wrote, it cannot refuse them to religious organizations without meeting a very high bar. It’s not clear yet how the recent subtle shifts in doctrine will affect court cases related to religious exemptions for vaccine mandates.

For private employers, the law is clearer: Under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, employers have to accommodate workers with religious objections to vaccine mandates — unless providing an exemption places an “undue burden” on the business in question. Private employers thus can refuse to give exemptions if the burden is too high — but should expect to be challenged in court when they do.

This murky terrain is fertile ground for lawsuits. There have been at least a dozen recently related to religious exemptions.

Faced with all of these issues, states and employers have four options. First — and worst — they can offer religious exemptions and not police them.

Second, states and employers can choose not to provide religious exemptions and accept that they can be sued over it.

Third, these entities can offer religious exemptions and police them.

Finally, employers can offer an open “personal” exemption, not limited to religion — thereby avoiding the challenge of deciding what counts as a religious view — but attach significant strings to it.

Granting religious exemptions will always be an inexact science. But employers and states should still do their best to guard against outright deceit: After all, religious citizens will be among the first to agree that you should not take the Lord’s name in vain.

Dorit Reiss is a professor of law at the University of California Hastings College of Law. Her expertise is in administrative and government law, health care law and policy, international law, and vaccine law and policy. Her recent focus has been on vaccines, examining the constitutional framework for vaccine mandates and the legal remedies for non-vaccinations.

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lgdisciples@gmail.com

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10:00 a.m. Worship Service

CHURCH Service DIRECTORY

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Services This Week