



***On Values and Vaccines
A Conversation with Nadine Fetherston***

Co-Coordinator of the Family & Life Sectors at the Marriage, Family and Life Service of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface, Nadine Fetherston was recently vaccinated for COVID-19. A health care worker, spouse and mom, she recounts her experience, and shares how, informed by science, ethics and her faith, she chose to get vaccinated.



Interview by Daniel Bahuaud, Communications Coordinator at the Archdiocese of St. Boniface

On January 14, you went to the Vaccination Centre at the Winnipeg Convention Centre...

It was a very positive experience. The process to book and receive the vaccine was incredibly smooth and well organized. I made the appointments for both the first shot and the second shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on the phone at the same time. I received the first shot at the RBC Convention Centre in Winnipeg and was impressed by how efficient the process was. There was staff directing people in the parkade and in the building ensuring appropriate social distancing, checking documents, answering questions, cleaning, and maintaining security.

I was amazed by the punctuality of the appointments which were right to the minute! The nurse that administered my shot took the time to answer any questions or concerns that I had before giving the shot. Following administration of the vaccine, I was directed to a monitoring area that was staffed by paramedics in case anyone there had any problems, such as an allergic reaction. Everyone who is vaccinated is required to wait in the monitoring area for a minimum of 15 minutes if you have no known allergies or longer if you have known allergies. Parking was also validated. My only side effect was having a sore arm!

Were you relieved?

Absolutely. But I didn't make the decision to get vaccinated lightly. I spent a lot of time doing research beforehand. And I prayed. As a Catholic, I wanted first and foremost to make sure that the vaccine was ethical, and that by taking it I was not going to violate any moral principles. And then of course, it's a new vaccine, which was developed pretty quickly. So it didn't undergo long-term clinical trials. What kind of reactions or side effects would I have? And how long would I be immunized for COVID-19 before having to get a booster shot? The risks had to be assessed.

What did you conclude?

Well, for one thing, that I wasn't a guinea pig! The American Centre for Disease Control and Prevention notes: "Clinical trials of all vaccines must first show they are safe and effective before any vaccine can be authorized or approved for use, including COVID-19 vaccines. The known and potential benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine must outweigh the known and potential risks of the vaccine for use under

what is known as an Emergency Use Authorization." ([Click here for the CDC webpage on coronavirus vaccines](#))

Health Canada has also authorized the distribution of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines. Clearly, these vaccines are safe, and 95% effective, according to the results of the first trials. And unless you have had a severe allergic reaction after the first sting, have low immunity, are a child under 16, or are pregnant, then you can get vaccinated.

You received your second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on February 4th ...

Yes. And I'm happy to report that I ended up with just a sore arm. The second dose is known to cause more side effects than the first. Some of my colleagues had to take a couple of days off. Still, it's all good. The more Manitobans get vaccinated, the less COVID-19 can infect or even kill vulnerable people. But like I said, however, I wanted to make sure my conscience could rest easy with my choice of getting vaccinated. The Catholic Church advocates vaccination, like most Christian denominations, as well as Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. But a problem for Catholics is that the development of certain vaccines and some of the tests they are given to get approved use cell lines from either tissues of aborted fetuses or destroyed human embryos. At the beginning of my research, I did not know anything about the vaccines that Canada had chosen. I had no idea whether the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines were morally acceptable.

Fortunately, thanks to a presentation by Katarina Lee, the ethicist at St. Boniface Hospital, I discovered that the these two vaccines being used in Canada right

now don't pose any kind of problems from a Catholic bioethics standpoint. ([Click here to access a video of Katarina Lee's November 5, 2020 online conference on vaccines, given for Life's Vision Manitoba](#)).

What if a vaccine offered wasn't morally blameless?

There are grey areas. Ideally, if a new vaccine were available in Canada, I would choose the one that isn't a problem. If, in a given country or region, the state does not give us the choice of the type of vaccine to be taken, the Vatican recognizes that it could still be used for the common good, even if it's a less than ideal situation.

There were other factors to consider...

Archbishop Gagnon, the president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, notes that "the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one's own health, but that of others." I work in health care. I'm a diagnostic medical sonographer in a Winnipeg hospital, which means I use ultrasound to scan patients for diagnostic tests and procedures. So I have to stay close to patients for somewhat long stretches of time. If I refused to get vaccinated, I could put vulnerable people at greater risk. It's a serious responsibility.

I also had discussions with my husband and my parents, who are in their seventies. Everyone, including my children, didn't want to have to worry about me. They were relieved to know that I was going to be better protected from COVID-19. And that I was also going to protect them as well. Not to mention my

patients and society in general. We all need to do our part and getting vaccinated and continuing to wear a mask will help protect both ourselves and others.