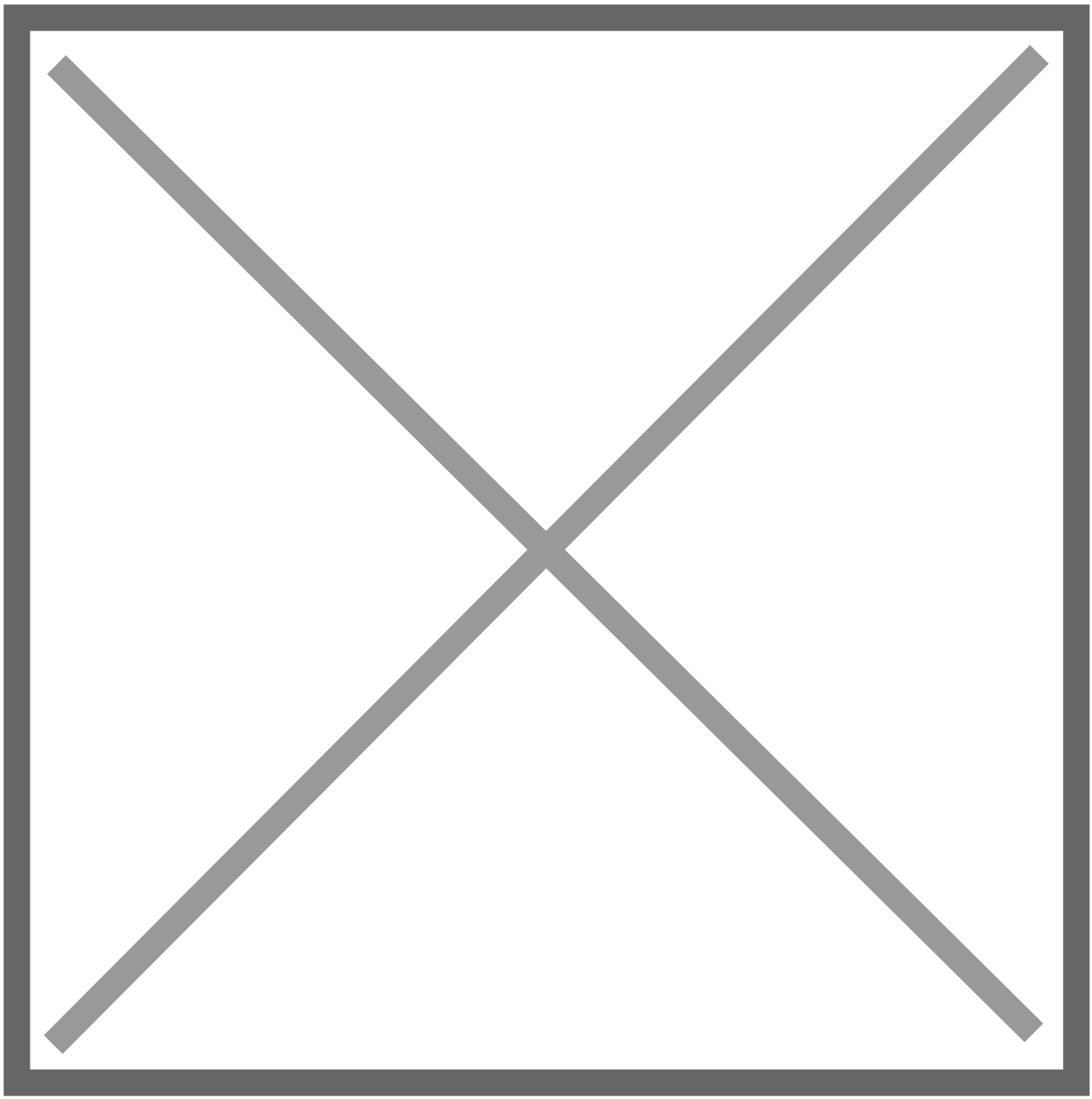
News



A woman receives her COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic in Montreal March 15, 2021. "Since there is currently no choice of COVID-19 vaccines being offered in Canada, Catholics, in good conscience, may receive the vaccine that is available and offered to them," the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops said. (CNS photo/Reuters/Andrej Ivanov)

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A note on COVID-19 vaccines from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops triggered nearly immediate responses from many bishops in Quebec, who felt it was "untimely" and lacked some clarity. Some Catholics also were concerned about the moral permissibility of receiving some of the currently approved COVID-19 vaccines, so the CCCB issued a clarification.

"Catholics are invited to be vaccinated, both in keeping with the dictates of their conscience and in contributing to the common good by promoting the health and safety of others," said the March 11 clarification. "Since there is currently no choice of vaccine being offered (in Canada), Catholics, in good conscience, may receive the vaccine that is available and offered to them."

The bishops' original statement, published March 9, said that "when presented with the choice," Canadians should choose to receive either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine over the AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The CCCB justified its stance by saying that the latter "utilized abortion-derived cell lines in their development, production and confirmatory testing."

"If it is possible in a given area or local region to choose a vaccine, Pfizer and Moderna would be recommended at this stage. However, when a choice is not

provided or it is quite difficult to have recourse to these said vaccines, given the health urgency at hand and other considerations, nothing morally prevents anyone from receiving in good conscience the AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson vaccines or others that may eventually be approved which will have been developed, tested and produced in a similar fashion," the original statement said.

The note echoed a document on vaccines published in 2020 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which distinguished between the morality of those who develop vaccines and those who receive them. Thus, where there is no choice, the doctrinal congregation considered it "morally acceptable" to use vaccines that used cell lines derived from aborted fetuses in the research and production stages.

The CCCB also said that receiving a vaccine is a matter of "individual conscience" and that choosing to do so in the context of a pandemic may constitute an "act of charity which recognizes the need to care for others."

The initial statement from the CCCB came out as the province of Quebec — where almost half of the COVID-19 deaths occurred in Canada over the last year — was organizing commemorative events to honor those who died of the virus.

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In the Archdiocese of Quebec, Cardinal Gerald Lacroix called the CCCB note "untimely." Quebec Auxiliary Bishop Marc Pelchat added that "the one message that should have been conveyed is that vaccination is an act of solidarity and fraternal charity. I unhesitatingly invite the members of the church and all citizens to obtain any available vaccine approved by Health Canada."

The Diocese of Saint-Jean-Longueuil rejected any questioning of the morality of vaccination. The diocesan leadership team, including Bishop Claude Hamelin, said: "We strongly resent and reject any form of discourse that would question the necessity or morality of vaccination, which we consider an act of charity inspired by the Gospel commandment: Love your neighbor."

Archbishop Christian Lépine of Montreal assured Catholics that "given the current public health emergency, believers can, in good conscience, be inoculated with any of the authorized vaccines."

"I will get the vaccine no matter what company it comes from," said Archbishop Luc Cyr of Sherbrooke. An archdiocesan statement said: "The Catholic Church believes in protecting life at all stages. However, in the context of a worldwide pandemic where thousands of people have died from COVID-19, the archbishop of Sherbrooke believes that the vaccine also protects life."

On his personal blog, Archbishop Paul-André Durocher of Gatineau wrote that "there is no moral reason not to get vaccinated."

"The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith pronounced itself in this sense a few months ago. It is mandated by the pope to study this kind of question, and I fully agree with its assessment," he said.