

Why get involved with social issues?

Every person can make a difference for the better in their communities. History shows us that cultural and societal changes large and small almost always begin with one person, or a small group of like-minded people, moved by their beliefs and convictions to make the world a more compassionate, just and loving place.

And not just rich, famous or powerful people – think of Viola Desmond (now on our \$10 bill), Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu (later known as Mother Teresa) or the unidentified man who stood in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

We engage in our community, with government officials, businesses or community leaders, as part of our Christian witness.

- Laws and public policies impact how we live our lives.
- They shape the care and protection offered to our neighbours, including the most vulnerable among us.
- They can impact the extent to which our deeply held beliefs and practices are protected.

Organizationally the EFC engages at a national, structural level as we interact with MPs, in court cases and with proposed laws and public policy issues of all kinds.

Our concerns are best heard when we work together, with both the EFC and concerned individuals interacting with elected officials.

There are many action steps available to Canadian citizens: simple and effective ways to engage with public policy or community issues. That is what this set of resources is all about.

I know an issue is important in my riding if five of my constituents contact me by a letter or a phone call. That is what a Member of Parliament shared with a member of our EFC team.

That MP referred specifically to personal, heartfelt communication as opposed to a form letter or petition. That confirmed for us what we suspected: Even as EFC staff track what is happening in Parliament, inform people and communicate with parliamentarians, this work is most effective when MPs hear the same messages from their constituents.

A particularly effective way to engage in your community is to develop positive relationships before there is a problem or concern. Take the initiative to make contact with your elected officials and the organizations in your community. Attend a summer barbecue, for example, or

congratulate a new MP on being elected. Join local groups in serving your community. A community leader's perception of Christians or church-attenders will be more positive when you serve alongside them to meet neighbourhood needs.

Not just what we do, but how we do it

Thinking through the “how” of engagement can be just as important as the “what” of engagement. Christian citizens about to engage in the work of advocacy, even just sending one letter or making a single phone call to an MP, will strengthen their impact and witness by spending a few moments thinking about the tone they wish to take.

*We want to consciously adopt a posture of collaboration
and love for neighbour.*

At the EFC, our goal is to work thoughtfully, respectfully and collaboratively. We often cooperate with others who share similar goals, although they may not share the same motivations or beliefs. We seek constructive change, and often that means incremental change. Patience is required.

Biblical teaching and principles can relate to all areas of life, in our families, in our churches, in public policy and in the courts, as we work out our faith personally and communally. The EFC addresses issues of national importance and usually focuses on policy at a federal level, but individuals may use the ideas and principles in this kit to engage municipally and provincially, as well.

In case you're wondering: Church involvement

In an EFC webinar in June 2019, we were asked, “Can a church refer to bills by name or number and explain what is contained in a bill? Can a pastor encourage the congregation to write or phone their MPs regarding their opinion on a bill?” (Watch at www.TheEFC.ca/webinars.)

A charity can engage on a policy issue, as long as it aligns with their charitable objectives, in a way that is non-partisan and doesn't identify their position with any one political party.

Until recently, CRA guidelines allowed charities to use a limited portion of their resources to call for a change in the law or to ask people to contact their elected official. Today, as long as a charity's policy dialogue and development activities are carried out in furtherance of their charitable purposes, the *Income Tax Act* places no limits on the amount of policy dialogue and development in which a charity can engage.

For more information on charities engaging on policy issues, see the January 2019 CRA guidance on its website: www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/policies-guidance/public-policy-dialogue-development-activities.html#toc5.

Pray for elected officials

As people of faith, we know that prayer matters. We are invited to share our petitions with God, and this includes praying for our leaders. At the EFC we pray about our interactions on public policy issues and we pray for individual politicians, and we encourage you to do the same.

You can pray:

- for God's blessing on elected officials and that they would know they are loved by God
- for the families of elected officials and candidates, remembering that the divorce rates among MPs are twice the national average (2013 *Maclean's* article, www.macleans.ca/news/canada/why-are-divorce-rates-so-high-for-mps/)
- for wisdom, strength and courage for elected officials. They often work long hours and have to make difficult decisions under pressure
- for them to make good decisions that will uphold justice and seek the good of our country
- specifically for the good you are trying to accomplish.

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