

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.

Meeting an MP: What to expect

MPs tell us that the most effective communication they receive is clear, heartfelt, succinct and personal. It can seem intimidating to call your MP, but they are simply members of your community. MPs come from every walk of life and may not actually be experts on the topic that concerns you. They should be treated with respect and courtesy, but there's no need for fear or nervousness. The difference between us and MPs is that they have been elected. That office they now occupy means they also have a responsibility to listen to their constituents.

A phone call to an MP's office, either to the Parliament Hill office or to a local constituency office, will be answered by a staff member who works for the MP. The staff will ask for your contact information and the reason you would like to meet or speak with the MP.

MPs spend much of their time between September and June in Ottawa, when the House of Commons is in session. Some will be able to be back in their riding offices on Fridays or on weekends. Every month there is at least one break week which the MPs will be able to spend in their ridings. Cabinet ministers have more commitments and may have less time to spend in their constituency offices.

MPs tend to have very busy schedules, and your MP may only have a short window of time available for a meeting. Many meetings may only be 20 or 30 minutes long. For a well-prepared visitor, that is plenty of time to share your concerns, make your case and request action.

MPs care about what their constituents think, even if they don't agree with you.

If you know others who share your concerns, several of you can arrange to meet with your MP at the same time.

Meeting an MP: Tips for effectiveness

Make good use of your time. Exchange pleasantries and give a brief introduction of yourself, but then focus on the reason you asked for the meeting. Time passes quickly so spend a few minutes mentally (or on paper) mapping out your goals for your meeting.

Be prepared for the meeting.

- Identify **one** issue you would like to raise with your MP, the reasons it's important and the action you would like the MP to take.
- Bring some notes or background information to remind you of your points.
- It's also helpful to have one or two pages (at most) of information to leave with the MP about the issue or action you would like them to take.

Use a respectful and reasonable tone. Think about how your MP may understand your concern and how your requested action may fit within the MP's priorities. Treat your MP as you would like to be treated.

Thank your MP and their assistant for taking the time to meet with you. Consider sending a follow-up email or note to thank them for their time again and to remind them of the action you requested.

As a quick memory aid, consider the acronym T.E.A.M.

- Thanks for willingness to meet
- Explain the issue and why you're concerned

- Ask for specific action
- Make sure to follow up

Other effective ways to communicate with an MP

You can confirm who your MP is and find their contact information at www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/constituencies/FindMP

In general, the time and effort you put into making contact lets an MP know how important the issue is to you. Easy, less personal ways of communicating such as postcards or group petitions tend to have less impact on an individual MP but can be helpful in drawing attention to an issue.

Many Canadians may not realize they can interact with their Senators as well as their MPs. The Senate is often called a place of “sober second thought.” After a bill has passed the House of Commons, Senators are still able to recommend changes when the bill is in the Senate. Senators are also able to introduce legislation as private member’s bills. They are appointed and represent a province, rather than a particular constituency. You can search for Senators by province at sencanada.ca/en/senators-list/

Petitions: Sign a petition as an easy and quick way to voice your opinion, but complement it with your own letter, email or call. It’s possible to create an electronic petition on the parliamentary website for people to sign online. There are guidelines for writing a petition in order for it to be presented in the House of Commons for response from the government. Read more at petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Home/Index.

Form letters: Sending a form letter is also a quick and easy way to let your MP or Senator know that you care about a policy issue. Consider engaging more effectively with either representative by using some of the language from a form letter to write your own letter, which will have more of an impact.

Personal emails and mailed letters: The content of a personal letter may be similar to an email, but a letter sent by post has a greater impact. It is a less common way to communicate and takes more effort, which shows that the issue is important to the letter writer. Because parliamentary offices are often flooded with email and other correspondence, it’s a good idea to make a follow up call to confirm they’ve received your email or letter.

In your email or letter:

1. Mention that you live in the riding.
2. Recognize and thank your MP or Senator for their service to the constituency (even if you don’t agree with all of their actions).

3. Explain the issue and your concerns.
4. Ask for specific action and for a reply. You can also ask your MP to raise this issue with other MPs in caucus.

Letters to MPs can be sent postage-free to:

[MP's name], MP
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Are you wondering about the proper greeting for an MP? It's the same as for any other person. In a letter or email to an MP, just write "Dear Mr. [Last name]" or "Dear Ms. [Last name]."

A letter to the Prime Minister is addressed to "The Right Honourable [name]" and the greeting is "Dear Prime Minister." A letter to a Cabinet Minister is addressed to "The Honourable [name]" and the greeting is "Dear Minister."

Letters to Senators can be sent postage-free to:

The Honourable [Senator's name], Senator
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4

The greeting to a Senator is "Dear Senator."

For more information on how to address elected officials in letters or in person, see:
www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/protocol-guidelines-special-event/styles-address.html

When writing to the Prime Minister or a Cabinet Minister, it is often a good idea to copy the other party leaders or the critics from the other parties. Also, copy your local MP.

Here's a sample letter

[date]

[first name, last name], MP
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ms./Mr.[MP's last name],

Thank you for your work on behalf of our community.

I live in your riding and I'm writing to you because I'm very concerned about violent and sexually degrading pornography on the Internet.

These images are now easily accessible, affordable and anonymous online. They are sexually violent and cruel to an extent unimagined in the past, and children are being exposed to them at younger and younger ages.

Youth exposed to violent and sexually degrading images are more likely to accept sexual harassment and violence and to engage in riskier sexual activity. The consequences are devastating.

I am asking you to take steps to address the harms of pornography. Canada urgently needs to study the public health impact of these images being so easily accessible online and viewed by children and teens. I believe this is becoming a public health crisis.

Please let me know what actions you plan to take and how you will raise this important issue in Parliament.

Sincerely,
[your name]
[your address]

Phone calls: While it may seem intimidating to call an MP's office, it is a very quick and effective way to communicate. It typically only takes a few minutes to call and let the staff know you have specific concerns or request action on an issue. Talk about one issue or topic in a call. Be specific about what action you'd like the MP to take.

Here is a sample phone conversation: *Hi, my name is [first name, last name]. I live in this riding and I'm really concerned about conscience protection for healthcare workers. Do you know our MP's position on this? I'd like our MP to support a bill to put in place conscience protection. Could you or the MP call me back to let me know what steps the MP will take on this? Thanks, I appreciate your time.*

Meetings: It's great if you can have a face-to-face meeting with your MP. This is probably the single most effective way to share information and concerns, and request action. (See the section above: Meeting an MP: Tips for Effectiveness.)

How a bill becomes law – and what you can do

A bill is a proposed law that must be approved in both the House of Commons and the Senate (the two Chambers of Parliament) and by the Governor General in order to become law. A bill can introduce a new law or change (amend) an existing one and can begin in either the House of Commons or the Senate.

Here is a brief description of the journey a bill takes to become a law, including the “on-ramps for action” that citizens can take at strategic points during the bill’s progression into law. Understanding the process can help us take effective action. Parliament has posted a 2-minute video of the process at www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O8syj77goQ and a longer explanation at www.ourcommons.ca/About/Compendium/LegislativeProcess/c_g_legislativeprocess-e.htm.

Step 1: First reading

The bill is introduced and given a number, without debate, changes or voting. (Bills that start in the House of Commons are noted with a C, bills that start in the Senate are noted with an S.)

A government bill is introduced by a Cabinet minister and has the support of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. A private member’s bill is brought forward by a single MP or Senator. House of Commons government bills are given a number between 2 and 199, private members’ bills are numbered starting at 200. This step is called “first reading.”

What you can do:

- Ask a Cabinet Minister, an MP or a Senator to develop legislation in a particular area.
- Check on the status of bills at www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo

Step 2: Second reading

At second reading, the general principles of the bill are debated, but not the specific details. At the end of the time allocated for the debate, there is a vote on whether to approve the bill in principle.

What you can do:

- Phone or write to MPs or Senators to ask them to support or oppose a bill. Your letter or phone call can make a difference. (See: Other Effective Ways to Communicate with an MP.)

Step 3: Committee stage

If the bill passes second reading, a committee will study it in depth and may recommend changes. The committee may hold public hearings to hear from witnesses in person or may receive written submissions on the bill. The committee sends the bill back to the House of Commons or Senate Chamber, with or without recommendations for specific changes.

What you can do:

- A committee will often ask stakeholders and experts to give their opinion and recommend changes to the committee as it studies a bill.

Step 4: Report stage

The bill, with any changes made by the committee, is considered by the House of Commons at report stage. Other changes may be proposed and debated at this stage. The Senate only considers a bill at report stage if the committee has recommended changes or recommended that the bill not be studied further.

Step 5: Third reading

The bill goes back to the House of Commons or Senate Chamber for a final debate and vote. This is called “third reading.”

What you can do:

- Phone or write to MPs or Senators to ask them to support or oppose a bill. Your letter or phone call can make a difference.

Step 6: Other chamber

If the bill passes third reading, it is sent to the other chamber and goes through the same process of debates, committee review and votes. For example, a bill that begins in the House of Commons then goes to the Senate, and Senate bills then go to the House of Commons.

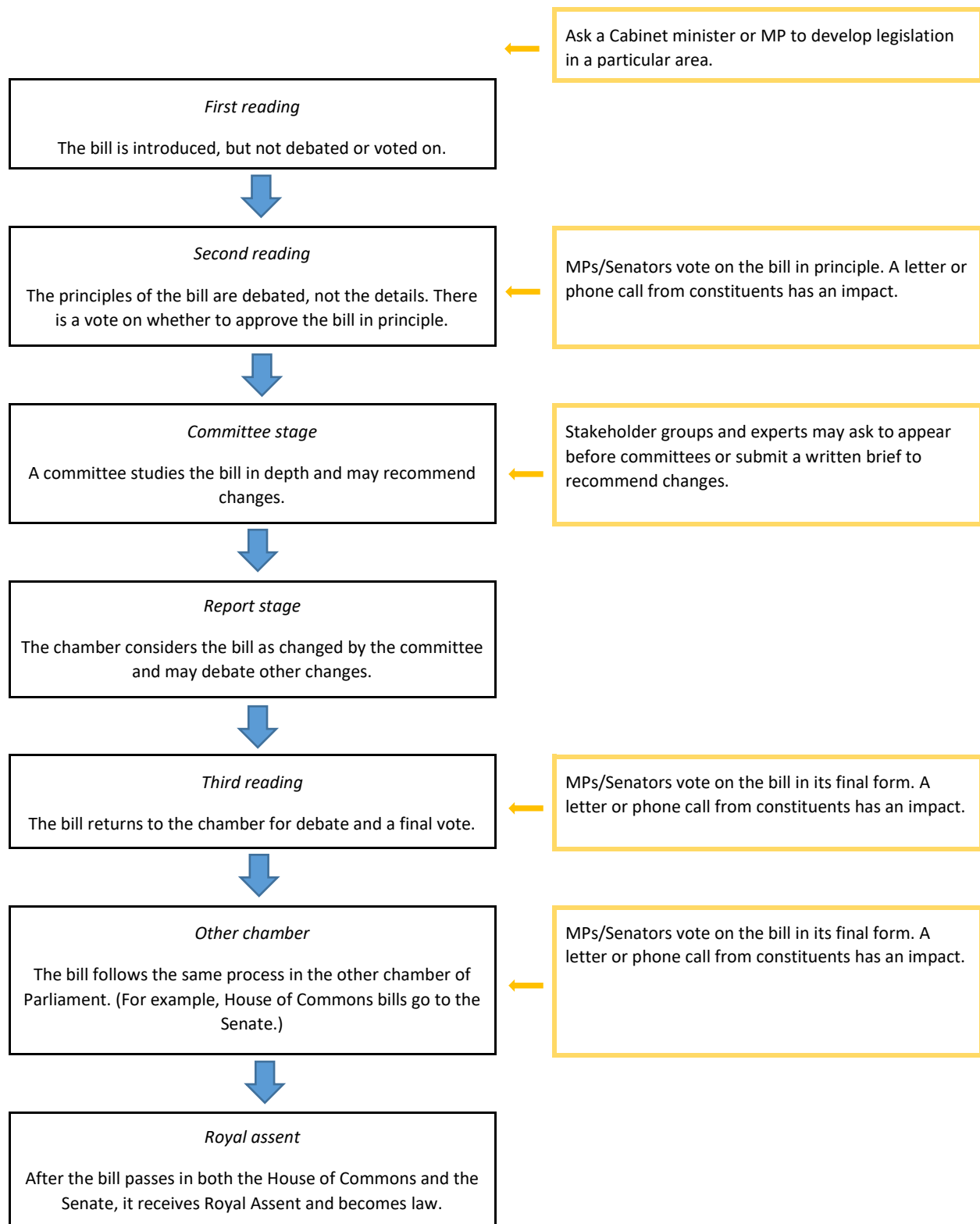
What you can do:

- Can communicate support, requests or concerns as the bill goes through the same steps in the other chamber of Parliament.

Step 7: Royal assent

After the bill has been passed in both the House of Commons and the Senate, it receives royal assent by the Governor General and becomes law.

Here’s a rough diagram that sums up the seven steps and how you can participate.



You can also get a better, one-page version of this diagram at www.TheEFC.ca/Election2019.

Where to find out about bills, federal and provincial

Check the status of federal bills at www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo.

Find out about bills – and your elected representative’s contact information – on your provincial or territorial legislature’s website.

British Columbia: www.leg.bc.ca

Alberta: www.assembly.ab.ca

Saskatchewan: www.legassembly.sk.ca

Manitoba: www.gov.mb.ca/legislature

Ontario: www.ola.org

Quebec: www.assnat.qc.ca/en/index.html

New Brunswick: www.gnb.ca/legis

Nova Scotia: www.nslegislature.ca

Prince Edward Island: www.assembly.pe.ca

Newfoundland: www.assembly.nl.ca

Yukon: www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca

Northwest Territories:

www.assembly.gov.nt.ca

Nunavut: www.assembly.nu.ca

Why I rushed home and finally called my MP

By Karen Stiller, reprinted with permission from www.FaithToday.ca/Blog

One day recently, I rushed home from work and called my Member of Parliament. It wasn’t nearly as difficult or stressful as I feared. To be honest, I don’t even know why I thought it would be. What was I so worried about?

Sometimes I host EFC webinars, and the one I had just completed was on euthanasia and physician-assisted death in Canada. During the webinar, we talked about what ordinary Canadians could do to stop the runaway train that appeared, at times, to be assisted death in Canada. *Contact your MP*. That was the most immediate and effective thing we could do at that moment. I pledged during the webinar to contact my MP that very afternoon.

Then, all the way home I tried to squirm out of it. I guess I’d gotten lazy. I write about things and speak to others who do things about things. I fume and fret and wring my hands. But I hadn’t actually been doing anything about a lot of things. Until that day.

I looked up the number, called and spoke with a very polite woman who wrote down my every word. She was pleasant. I was pleasant. I told her I was especially worried about the mature minor recommendations and the lack of protection for those struggling with mental health issues. I told her I would like my MP to fight for the strictest possible version of assisted suicide and euthanasia in Canada. Then, I gave her my name and number in case my MP wants to call back.

It was that simple. I will follow it up with a letter. In fact, I’m going to write that letter right now.

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