



EFC

The Evangelical
Fellowship of Canada

**Submission to the
Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector**

April 2019

Introduction

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) welcomes the opportunity to participate in this study of the Canadian charitable sector. The EFC is the national association of evangelical Christians in Canada. Our affiliates include 45 denominations, more than 65 ministry organizations and 35 post-secondary institutions. Established in 1964, the EFC provides a national forum for Canada's four million Evangelicals and a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society.

The charitable sector is a critical area of Canadian life, and we applaud your initiative and comprehensive examination. We also appreciate your goals of looking at the impact of the charitable sector and recommending ways the government can help the sector overcome challenges.

Of the more than 86,000 registered charities in Canada in March 2017, approximately 33,000 were religious charities, or roughly 38% of the charitable sector.¹ It is estimated that there are 24,000 Christian congregations in Canada.

The thousands of churches and faith-based organizations across Canada that are religious charities benefit their participants, their communities and Canadian society as a whole. Religious charities foster vibrant social networks, spark local volunteerism, and foster community resiliency. Religiously-motivated action has provided significant benefit to Canada in the past and in the present, through means such as refugee sponsorship, the alleviation of poverty, care for individuals experiencing homelessness, and the provision of health care, long-term care for seniors, palliative care, and more.

Holistic ministry and the advancement of religion

A church may be a registered charity under the charitable head of *advancement of religion*. This church would likely hold worship services and preach Christian doctrine, which are examples of purposes under the charitable head of advancement of religion. But this church is likely to do much more, carrying out activities that flow from religious teaching.

Beliefs and practice are an integral whole. For example, Christian teaching emphasizes that followers of Christ are to live in a way that demonstrates love for one's neighbour, particularly those who are vulnerable. This teaching leads to actions and activities that seek the good of Canadian society. This helps to orient Christian individuals and their communities outwardly, first toward God and then toward neighbour, in tangible, self-giving ways.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities-media-kit/charities-program-facts-figures.html>

As the EFC stated in a 2008 submission:

For the Evangelical individually and the Christian charity, more specifically, the expression of faith is inextricably bound together: worship, service of the poor, proselytising, teaching. One manifestation of belief cannot be excised from another.

Evangelicals, like other Christians, are compelled by their beliefs to minister to the whole person, not simply the spiritual aspect of the individual – thus service includes feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, caring for the spiritual needs of the person – teaching and preaching. This holistic ministry rejects the notion that evangelism should focus solely on the conversion of the mind, as well as the notion that service and good works are sufficient.²

The impetus to reach out in compassionate ways and to care for those who are vulnerable is evident in many religious traditions. As Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith leaders stated in a 2016 *Interfaith Statement on Palliative Care*, “Our traditions instruct that there is meaning and purpose in supporting people at the end of life. Visiting those who are sick, and caring for those who are dying, are core tenets of our respective faiths and reflect our shared values as Canadians.”³

Canada has a history of religiously-motivated action that reaches out to care for the vulnerable. Religious communities and individuals have played key roles in providing medical care, starting hospitals, establishing the Children’s Aid Society, and much more. Many social services for those who are poor and homeless that are now funded and directed by government were begun by Christian groups.

Religious communities provide more than doctrine to motivate charitable activities. As the brief to this committee by the Canadian Council of Christian Charities points out, religious communities are a unique combination of teaching, reinforcing relationships and opportunities to engage.

How do religious charities benefit Canadian society?

The outworking of belief and doctrine can be seen in the lives of religious service attendees, both within the congregation and in the wider community, as well as in the collective action of congregations and faith-based organizations. Following is a summary of some of the ways religion and religious communities can benefit individuals, their congregations, wider communities and Canadian society. (We note that this is only a brief summary. A

² The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, *Advancing Religion as a Charitable Object: Christian Service and Presentation of Biblical Perspectives in the Public Square as Integral Components of Evangelicals’ Expression of Faith*, October 2008.

³ <https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Communications/Official-statements/October-2016/Interfaith-Statement-on-Palliative-Care>

comprehensive description of benefits is provided in the Canadian Council of Christian Churches brief to this committee.)

Religion provides people with an **ethical framework for living**. Statistics Canada data confirms that weekly attenders of religious services are among the most likely to volunteer⁴ and to donate to charities and non-profits,⁵ including non-religious charities.

As Martin Turcotte, Senior Analyst, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, told this committee on May 28, 2018:

Only a sliver of the 24 million people who make charitable donations play a vital role for the sector. In our lingo, we call them “primary donors.” They are defined as the 10 per cent of donors who give the most money during the year. In 2013, that meant individuals who gave \$1,150 or more to charitable organizations. This group is important because it accounts for such a large share of the total amount donated. Even though these people represent just 10 per cent of all donors, their contributions make up 66 per cent, or two-thirds, of the total amount of donations made during the year.

...Demographically speaking, what distinguishes primary donors is that they are older and, as I said earlier, they tend to be religiously active. Here are some numbers. In 2013, the proportion of primary donors who were religiously active on a weekly basis was 54 per cent, versus just 14 per cent for the rest of donors.

Religious communities foster **personal resilience**. Religion teaches us that we are not alone. It helps to provide a purpose for living and hope for the future.

Religion also helps to build **resilient communities** which provide support for one another. Congregations foster social cohesion, as adherents who join together in worship provide a supportive community for one another. This is evident in activities like visitation of seniors and others who are unable to leave their homes. Religious communities also provide practical and emotional support for people undergoing life transitions, such as meals for new parents or for those who have lost a loved one.

Some religious groups provide **direct services** to those who are vulnerable in their community and beyond, for example through refugee sponsorship, collecting and distributing pantry items, offering language classes for newcomers to Canada and running summer camps for children in low-income families.

Religious leaders and their communities can also act as spiritual first responders to community tragedies. As a recent example, Toronto faith communities offered spaces for prayer and

⁴ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2015003-eng.htm#a11>

⁵ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-542-x/2009001/chap/ch1-eng.htm#a5>

grieving together after the van attack along Yonge Street in April 2018. Notably, these spaces were offered to anyone, regardless of religious affiliation.

At their best, religious communities offer comprehensive help – pastoral, social, physical – even though their focus is on worship and advancement of religion, and their actions flow from those beliefs.

Increasing anti-religious sentiment in Canada

The belief that religion is irrelevant to contemporary life is increasingly common. Even more troubling, the growth of ideological secularism⁶ in Canada has been accompanied by a fear of religion and a belief that religion should be privatized and kept out of the public square. Religious Canadians perceive increasing discrimination against themselves, their beliefs and their institutions.

Ignorance of what religions actually believe and practice tends to increase false stereotypes of those religions. Ignorance and stereotypes lead to discrimination.

An increasing anti-religious climate in Canadian society may prompt some to overlook the benefits that religion offers in Canadian society. We note the brief to the committee by the British Columbia Humanist Association which includes a recommendation to remove the advancement of religion as a charitable purpose. As we outlined briefly above, religious communities' existence and ministry benefits Canadian society in ways far beyond the religious adherents themselves.

A significant way to address anti-religious sentiment would be to collect data and report on the role of religious attending individuals and religious charities in Canada. The positive contributions of religion to charitable activity and Canadian life could help mitigate an anti-religious bias.

Data collection

Statistics Canada collects helpful information through the General Social Survey. We note that in the past, reports on giving and volunteering provided more information and statistics on the contribution of frequent religious service attenders. In more recent reports, Statistics Canada has very little reporting on this, although the survey data has been collected.

This is a key area in which religious Canadians are involved. As the Statistics Canada Senior Analyst Martin Turcotte told this committee last May, religious service attendance is a significant demographic feature of primary donors. For religious factors to be minimally addressed in reports on giving and volunteering leaves religion substantially invisible in an area in which it is a key factor.

⁶ We note the distinction between practical secularism and ideological secularism. Canada is practically secular in that the State does not preference one religion over another. Ideological secularism, however, insists that religion should have no voice or place in the public sphere.

Statistics Canada also asks questions about religious affiliation in the General Social Survey. This would be another aspect of religious participation that could be included in Statistics Canada's reports on giving and volunteering.

Recommendations

- Recognize the relevance and benefits of religion to the charitable sector. Study its impact. Do not treat religion as irrelevant to or separable from public life.
- Encourage the government intentionally to make room for religious Canadians to participate in public life.
- Encourage reporting on the impact of religion and the social participation of those who are active in religious communities, for example, giving, volunteering and social participation by frequent attenders of religious services.
- Retain the advancement of religion as a charitable head.

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