

Canada Watch

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Harvest Ministries case challenges religious freedom

Many churches, especially those just starting out, rent spaces for their gatherings. Faith-based organizations also rent larger venues for special events. Finding the right space can be challenging.

This winter, the EFC will be in a Quebec court as part of a coalition arguing in support of religious freedom. Specifically, we will argue that religious groups should have equal access to public spaces and not be denied access because of their beliefs.

The case relates to Harvest Ministries International, a Christian group that had signed a rental agreement to hold a 10-day revival event in a government-owned convention centre in Quebec City. But just a few weeks before the

event was to begin, the provincial minister of tourism cancelled their rental contract.

Harvest Ministries' website expresses pro-life views, and the minister of tourism felt that was sufficient grounds to cancel the rental agreement. She deemed Harvest Ministries' pro-life beliefs to be contrary to the "fundamental principles" of the state.

"If the court finds the minister's action to be justified, this will have a profound impact on religious organizations," says Bruce Clemenger, EFC senior ambassador and president emeritus, who coordinates legal interventions for the EFC.

The EFC will intervene in this case with the Canadian Centre for Christian Charities and *Réseau Évangélique du*



Québec. We will defend collective religious freedom and freedom of expression.

"This case challenges our ability to gather as communities in public spaces to learn, serve or worship," says Clemenger, "and this challenge cannot go unanswered."

Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees the right to freedom of religion and conscience, as well as freedom of thought, belief, opinion, expression and freedom of assembly. These are the cornerstones of a free and democratic society.

In the first Supreme Court decision to deal with freedom of religion under the *Charter* (in 1985), Chief Justice Dickson wrote, "Freedom of religion

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What you can do

- Please pray for the court hearing on the Harvest Ministries case. Pray for the legal counsel representing the EFC and for religious freedom in Canada.
- Please pray for the EFC and consider one-time or monthly support for the EFC. Your partnership makes this work possible.

We are deeply grateful for the ways you support the work of the EFC as we speak into the pressing issues of the day.



**Centre for Ministry Partnership
and Innovation**

Convening and collaborating to support
the evangelical church in Canada



**Centre for Research on
Church and Faith**

Connecting research with ministry



**Centre for Faith and
Public Life**

Faithful witness through thoughtful,
constructive engagement in public life

is the right to entertain such religious beliefs as a person chooses, the right to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear of hindrance or reprisal, and the right to manifest belief by worship and practice or by teaching and dissemination."

However, freedoms in the *Charter* are not absolute and can be restricted if doing so is justifiable in a free and democratic society. Courts interpret what laws mean and how the freedoms and protections will be understood and applied, and whether a restriction on freedom is justified. The understanding of law and the application of the *Charter* builds with each new case.

This is why it's so important for the EFC to make legal arguments when key cases are heard. If an argument isn't made in a particular case, it won't be considered in the decision.

To be an intervener means to make legal arguments as "a friend of the court." This allows us to introduce arguments that aren't being made by either of the two sides in a case.

The EFC usually intervenes in cases that deal with issues of religious freedom, sanctity of life, human dignity or care for those who are vulnerable. It is an integral part of our work to seek justice, to pursue the good of our country and to love our neighbour.

Thanks to your support and partnership, the EFC is a respected and experienced intervener with more than 30 interventions before the Supreme Court of Canada and nearly 40 before other courts. Even when decisions are not in our favour, arguments made by the EFC are often reflected in the written decisions, which set precedent for future cases.

Thank you for your
support and partnership!



Women's research launches audio documentary

As the Women in the Canadian Evangelical Church research partnership is completing its research, the partners considered creative and helpful ways to share the findings with their donors and other interested audiences.

The group (TheEFC.ca/Women-in-Church) wanted to convey not only numbers, statistics and analysis, but also the heart, the posture and the "why" behind the research in the first place.

On a topic with varied theological perspectives and church practices, the partners decided a podcast would be an engaging way to invite listeners into the research. But it's not just any podcast.

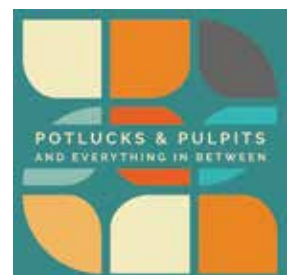
Instead of a standard interview format, *Potlucks, Pulpits and Everything in Between: The Podcast* is an audio documentary. It follows producer and co-host Murray Stiller, a globetrotting media professor from Surrey, B.C., founder of Toolkit Media and Education, as he meets the EFC's Lindsay Callaway and other researchers, learns about the research and explores historical and contextual aspects of women's church experiences in Canada, women's unique stories, and various responses and reactions to the findings.

Typically, most donors only see the end result of a research project – a report, a presentation, a conference. But research is a journey. And the process of research is just as instructive and beneficial as the final product.

The podcast tells the story behind the research and the story of the research. Episode one is now available, and three additional episodes will be released leading up to the final research report.

Listen now at TheEFC.ca/Potlucks-and-Pulpits.

**"THE PODCAST TELLS THE STORY
BEHIND THE RESEARCH AND
THE STORY OF THE RESEARCH."**





A note from EFC President David Guretzki

There are no spiritual islands when it comes to the Church. Though waters and mountains may separate some of us, there is only one Church and one Faith and one Lord (Ephesians 4). If we don't recognize and partner with brothers and sisters around the globe, we will be theologically and

spiritually in deficit. I've learned that in six years of serving on the International Council of the World Evangelical Alliance. I and other EFC staff recently joined Christians from 124 countries at a WEA general assembly in South Korea – a spiritually rejuvenating and uplifting gathering. We heard how the gospel is moving in the nations, and that energizes and inspires our work in Canada. (Please pray for me as I begin a second six-year term on the International Council, serving initially on its executive committee as vice-chair.) Thank you for your ongoing support of this work in God's service.

Study of social media and youth includes survey for youth workers

Recently a whole host of negative social and mental outcomes have been laid at the feet of social media. Schools around the world are banning phones to keep out social media. How is social media affecting the faith formation of our youth, and how are those ministering to our youth using it in their ministries?

On these last two questions, so far all we have in Canada are anecdotes.

To get better answers, the EFC along with 11 EFC affiliate ministries have partnered on a three-year, mixed-methods study called #influencing_faith. The EFC's Centre for Research on Church and Faith has been designated to interview ministry experts, youth ministry workers and youth.

This research partnership is collecting survey responses for youth ministry workers, both paid and volunteer, at TheEFC.ca/IFS until April. If you work with youth, please take the survey. If you know someone who does, please let them know about it. (A companion youth survey starts in February 2026.)

The Centre for Research on Church and Faith works with the EFC's denominational affiliates to provide them with anonymized custom reports that aggregate survey responses from their specific community. This helps EFC affiliates make data-driven ministry decisions.

Your support of the EFC helps make this study possible – thank you! – and you'll be able to read the full public report in September 2026.



Updating you on Canada's most immediate issues

■ **Charitable status:** The finance minister has confirmed the government "is not considering amending the Income Tax Act to remove the advancement of religion as a qualifying charitable purpose, nor is it actively developing policy on this issue." A finance department email to the EFC echoed this message. TheEFC.ca/CharitableStatus

■ **New bill on hate crimes:** The government has introduced Bill C-9 in response to rising antisemitism (TheEFC.ca/C9). It would add new offences to protect access to religious services, among other things. The EFC is preparing a written submission and will recommend a more careful definition of hatred.

The Bloc Québécois intends to introduce an amendment to remove the good faith religious belief defence. This defence is one of four available to someone who is found to have wilfully promoted hatred. It has rarely been invoked but provides an important protection for religious belief in the *Criminal Code*. The EFC is asking for this defence to be maintained.

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■ **Protecting children online:** The EFC is co-sponsoring a webinar series with Defend Dignity and Ally Global on risks children and youth face online. Register or watch at **DefendDignity.ca**.

The EFC supports a senator's bill to hold pornography platforms accountable for making pornographic materials available to minors online. Bill S-209 is working its way through the Senate.

The government plans to introduce legislation this fall to protect children from online luring and extortion, and to address deep-fake nude images created and distributed without consent. Several parliamentary committees also plan to study online child sexual exploitation and AI.

■ **Bill to stop MAiD for mental illness:** People suffering from mental illness as their sole medical condition will become eligible for medical assistance in dying (MAiD) in March 2027 unless a bill is passed to prevent it. Debate on Bill C-218, which would stop this expansion, should begin in December. This bill will need widespread public support, so please contact your MP. A short phone call can make a difference. See **TheEFC.ca/C-218**.

More EFC operations shift to Ottawa

The EFC has been consolidating its staff and administration in its Ottawa offices over the past five years, and that reached a tipping point in September, when the Toronto office closed.

EFC staff have been based in Toronto-area offices including Markham, Richmond Hill and Scarborough since the first paid staff, Brian Stiller, was hired in 1983.

The first Ottawa branch office, focusing on public policy and government relations, was opened by Bruce Clemenger in 1996.

The office consolidation is good financial stewardship, allowing us to use the donations and resources God has provided us with most impactfully.

The EFC's hub of operations is now at 275 Slater Street in Ottawa, a short walk from Parliament Hill. Supporters travelling through Ottawa who would like to stop by and greet staff are welcome. Many Ottawa staff are hybrid workers who switch between office days and work-at-home days, but there's always someone in the office each day in Suite 810.

The EFC continues to lease space for a Toronto media studio at 10 Huntingdale Boulevard in Scarborough, which comes with occasional shared access to meeting rooms and guest suites for travelling staff. EFC staff also include a distributed workforce in home offices from Kelowna, B.C., Airdrie, Alta., Guelph, Ont., various locations across the Greater Toronto-Hamilton area, Moncton, N.B., and beyond.

Thank you for your encouragement as we keep working to make the best use of every gift entrusted to us by God and His people.

Supporter visits are welcome at the EFC's Ottawa office building.



UPDATES ON ALL THE ISSUES are always available on our website **www.TheEFC.ca**



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The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (*Alliance évangélique du Canada*) is the national association "uniting Evangelicals to bless Canada in the name of Jesus." Since 1964 the EFC has provided a national forum for Evangelicals, fostered ministry partnerships, conducted research on religious and social trends and provided a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



SANCTITY OF LIFE



CHURCH & MISSION



FAMILY & COMMUNITY



CARE FOR THE VULNERABLE