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Canadian Christians and the Canada Summer Jobs Grant controversy

Canadian churches and ministry organizations from coast to coast have been grappling since Christmas with new requirements for employers applying for grants from the Canada Summer Jobs program. The EFC has heard from over 200 ministries and churches whose programs and services to their communities will be diminished this summer if they cannot hire students using the grants they typically receive.

"Having students means we can run a summer sports camp for area kids. The new requirements mean we will be ineligible for the summer jobs program in the future," said one central Ontario church. A church in western Canada assigns students to work in low-income housing, maintaining the grounds and running children's programs at no cost to the community. Their community greatly benefited

from the cost-free healthy programming offered by the students. "The requirement from the government to endorse its values will not allow us to apply for summer student grants this year," said representatives from the church.

To be eligible to receive the grant, employers were required to attest that both the job and the organization's core mandate respected certain "values" as determined by the federal government. Specifically the guidelines mentioned "individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as well as other rights. These include reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression."



As of the printing date of this *Canada Watch*, the government has not budged on these requirements, and Christian organizations were still trying to determine the best way to respond, even as the deadline to apply for the summer grants rapidly approached. "At this point any modifications made to the application or the failure to attest at all – those applications are not being submitted," said a program officer for the Ontario region, in response to questions put forward by the EFC. "If you can't check off to the actual attestation, it is not being accepted."

The EFC encouraged organizations to let their local MP know how the changes would affect them and still apply for the grant, so that their

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What you can do:

- Even though the deadline to apply for these grants has passed, this issue is still relevant and ongoing. Call or email your Member of Parliament to express your concern, and ask them to seek changes to the policy in the future. If your organization is directly affected by this policy, let your MP and the EFC know (feedback@TheEFC.ca).
- Visit www.TheEFC.ca/SummerJobsGrants for a full list of resources, including a webinar recorded in late January featuring the Canadian Council of Christian Charities.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



SANCTITY OF LIFE



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CARE FOR THE VULNERABLE

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application and its subsequent rejection by the government could be documented. "But if they cannot agree with the government's attestation they would simply not be eligible," confirmed Julia Beazley, the EFC's director of public policy.

The EFC wrote a letter to the Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, saying, in part: "We believe the new Canada Summer Jobs grant guidelines violate the fundamental *Charter of Rights and Freedom* guarantees of freedom of conscience and religion, thought, belief, opinion and expression. Further, it is a form of compelled speech by the government and, as such, is contrary to the guaranteed freedoms in section 2 a and b of the *Charter*."

The EFC joined more than 90 religious leaders who signed an interfaith statement calling on the Government of Canada to "amend the Canada Summer Jobs guidelines and application process so that it does not compel agreement or belief, and allows religious organizations to stay true to their communal identity and beliefs.

A webinar, held on Jan. 25, presented the latest developments and options available as of that date to the Canadian Christian community. It can be viewed online at www.TheEFC.ca/webinars.

Even as the date to apply has passed (it was Feb. 2), the EFC continues to consult with affected organizations and other Christian interfaith groups on the impact of this change to our religious freedom. We will continue to explore options to challenge the attestation.

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Young Adult Transition Research (YATR) will help churches strengthen the faith of the next generations

The EFC, Power to Change—Students, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, The Muskoka Woods Leadership Studio, Youth For Christ and Truth Matters have formed a research partnership to discover how we can help our teens stay connected to church and faith as they move on from high school. This major new Canadian study (www.TheEFC.ca/YATR) builds on the 2011 *Hemorrhaging Faith* study, which found major life transitions were often transitions out of church and faith for Christian young adults.

We asked Rick Hiemstra, the EFC's Director of Research and Media Relations and director of the research project, to tell us about its potential impact.

What will this research provide to parents and churches?

I would like to see people helping young adults to form their identities when they are still in a Christian community or to take seriously the necessity of getting them connected to a Christian community while they are forming their identities.

The idea of identities is important to this study. Can you tell us what you mean?

Many people have up till now assumed identity formation happens in high school. But in the last 20-30 years there has been a delay into adulthood by about six or

seven years. That means young people are solidifying their identity in university and college, not high school. And when you figure out who you are, that's when you make commitments to things like communities, career, marriage and to faith.

And when they are in university or college, they might not be part of a Christian community?

Right. We ship them off to university or college where they often don't have a Christian community around them, so they are not forming a Christian identity. If there is no Christian community there,



Message from the President, Bruce J. Clemenger

The new attestation required by the Canada Summer Jobs grant program placed hundreds of faith-based organizations in Canada in an untenable position: either affirm something they did not believe was true, or not receive the government grants their summer ministries are built upon. We do not yet know the final outcome of this process. What we *can* say is that the resources provided by the EFC, made possible by your gifts and ongoing support, helped churches make their way through this complicated situation. The EFC spoke clearly to this issue opposing the new requirement, was quoted by major media outlets and provided actions steps for those concerned. Thank you for your partnership.

you don't negotiate a role in the community, and that role is your identity. In this phase of Emerging Adulthood, everything is up for grabs and renegotiation.

You're interviewing thousands of Canadian young people. What kinds of questions are you asking?

We ask them about their families and whether churches followed them as they moved. We are asking them about how they got connected to churches or didn't, connected to campus groups or didn't, about influential people in their lives and how they influenced them.

When can we expect to see the research?

So far we have done a literature review, we've completed two sets of interviews and we launched our youth and young adult worker survey in early January, along with the first young adult survey. The youth and young adult worker



survey closes in mid-February. Angus Reid Forum will get us 2,000 responses. We are also interviewing students enrolled in member schools of the Christian Higher Education Canada (CHEC) association. That will be an important part of this work for us.

The important thing is that people need to be negotiating an identity within a Christian community. I think we'll find a CHEC community provides a Christian community in which they can negotiate that. It's a psycho-social identity thing that is all about them forming identity. I think this will be enormously important for CHEC schools because if parents are deeply concerned about their kids staying in the church, then the Christian communities become so important. We're also measuring the impact of Christian camps.



THE GREAT NEWS is that everything we're learning is within the capacity of any church or ministry to address. It's about the reality of how our culture is changing. These changes have been gradual, we may not have noticed. But we notice young people aren't in church. – Rick Hiemstra



Updating you on Canada's most immediate issues

■ **Human Trafficking:** The EFC is researching human trafficking in preparation for the House of Commons Justice Committee study this spring. The EFC plans to make a written submission and ask to appear before the committee. www.TheEFC.ca/HumanTrafficking

■ **Conscience Protection:** The EFC is supporting its partner Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience in raising awareness of the need for conscience protection for health care workers and institutions in Ontario. This awareness campaign will run until the end of March 2018. www.TheEFC.ca/Conscience

■ **Religious freedom:** Many churches and ministries apply to the Canada Summer Jobs program that provides a government grant to hire students for summer work. This year, the program requires organizations to affirm certain ideological positions of the current government. The EFC has worked with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to coordinate an interfaith statement calling on the Prime Minister to change this requirement. It was signed by over 90 religious leaders. We have also written to the

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Employment Minister to explain our concerns and to ask for this requirement to be removed. See the EFC resources on this issue, including a sample letter to MPs, at www.TheEFC.ca/SummerJobsGrants.

Bill C-51, a bill that proposed removing the *Criminal Code* offence of disrupting worship, was amended by the House of Commons justice committee to keep and update the offence of disrupting worship. The amended version of the bill will now be debated and voted on in the Senate. The EFC appeared before the Justice Committee in the fall and submitted a written brief asking for this change. www.TheEFC.ca/c51

■ **Palliative care:** A private member's bill on palliative care supported by the EFC received royal assent on Dec. 12. Bill C-277 is now a law that requires the Minister of Health to establish a palliative care framework, bringing much-needed attention to this important area. www.TheEFC.ca/c277

■ **Euthanasia/assisted suicide:** A court challenge to the law restricting euthanasia and assisted suicide to those whose death is "reasonably foreseeable" has been heard in Quebec. Another similar court challenge has been initiated in BC. The EFC is monitoring these cases. www.TheEFC.ca/Euthanasia

EFC podcasts and webinars are all about connecting and informing

We hope you have tried out a podcast or a webinar. They are short, informal and very informative ways to engage with some of Canada's most pressing issues.



Recent podcasts at www.TheEFC.ca/Podcast:

- How one Canadian Church is grappling with reconciliation issues: An interview with Ken Shigematsu
- Trinity Western University goes to the Supreme Court of Canada: An interview with Janet Epp Buckingham
- *Faith Today* columnist James Beverley interviews Andrew Klavan, author of an award-winning new conversion autobiography.

Recent webinars at www.TheEFC.ca/Webinars:

- The Canada Summer Jobs Grant controversy
- What Canadian churches are learning about sponsoring refugees
- How we can help people recover from pornography addiction.

Please try out these simple bursts of information and inspiration, and share them with your friends and colleagues.

Warm words from donors

We received this touching prayer from an EFC friend. We are thankful to be partnering with you in work and in prayer.

"Lord, thank you for the EFC. Thank you for the work they do in your name. Prosper and bless them according to your good and perfect will, and may they be encouraged and strengthened in their faith as they keep their eyes on Jesus and love Him and keep His commandments. In Jesus' name, Amen."

FT The Faith Today blog posts exclusive new material several times per week, following up on important issues raised in Canada's Christian magazine. Blog.FaithToday.ca

f Join the conversation and like us on Facebook. www.Facebook.com/TheEFC



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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.

