

# Canada Watch

## UPDATING YOU

On Canada's most immediate issues (page 3)

## SPOTLIGHT

Laying foundations for disagreeing well (page 2)

## EFC RESOURCES

New survey tool to study Evangelicals (page 4)

## Protecting religion while combating hate

A federal bill addressing anti-religious threats and violence has been amended to remove an important protection for minority religious groups. The EFC believes this protection should not be removed – and asks concerned Canadians to contact their MPs.

Bill C-9, the *Combating Hate Act*, was introduced in September. It proposes changes to the *Criminal Code* requested by the Jewish community as a response to the alarming rise in antisemitism in Canada.

"We understand the danger when groups are targeted on the basis of religious belief," says EFC President David Guretzki. "At a time of growing concern about intolerance toward religious groups, Parliament's duty to

ensure the protection of faith communities is especially critical."

Bill C-9 creates new offences such as obstructing access to religious and community sites, committing an offence motivated by hate, and promoting hatred using terrorist symbols.

The EFC supports the intent of the bill to protect religious sites, but has expressed concerns – notably with the bill's definition of hatred, which is looser than the definition developed by the courts and currently in use.

A major concern arose when the bill was being studied. The Bloc Québécois MP on the committee successfully advocated for the bill to also remove an existing protection for religious expression – the good faith religious belief defence from the hate speech

provisions in the *Criminal Code*.

This defence is an important protection for minority religious groups whose beliefs may not be shared by the general public. It helps to ensure the hate provisions aren't used to silence or suppress religious beliefs that others may find objectionable or offensive.

If a person is found to have wilfully promoted hatred, there are four defences that can be invoked. The first defence is truth. The second is if "in good faith" a person expressed an opinion based on a religious subject or based on a belief in a religious text.

Back in its 1990 *Keegstra* decision, the Supreme Court found the defences, including the good faith religious belief defence, to be integral to the

...continued on page 2



## What you can do

- Ask your MP (find them at [OurCommons.ca/Members](https://OurCommons.ca/Members)) to bring back the good faith religious belief defence, strengthen the definition of hatred in Bill C-9, and address increasing anti-religious threats and violence.
- Pray that as Christians in Canada we would honour God and love our neighbour in all of our interactions, including on Bill C-9.

...continued from page 1

constitutionality of the wilful promotion of hatred offence.

The religious belief defence has rarely been invoked, and never successfully. The courts have interpreted it narrowly and carefully. They have clearly stated this defence doesn't allow someone to intentionally embed hateful communication within religious language, like a Trojan Horse.

"This protection for expressing beliefs based on religious texts isn't being overused or abused," says Julia Beazley, EFC Director of Public Policy. "There is no identified problem with the defence."

The proposal to remove the defence comes at a time when minority religious beliefs on marriage, sexuality and gender are increasingly marginalized and described as hateful.

"In this context, what does it communicate to minority religious communities to remove this important safeguard from the *Criminal Code's* hate speech provisions?" asks Beazley.

The committee will continue to study Bill C-9 and vote on changes to it, including its definition of hatred, when the House of Commons resumes at the end of January.

The EFC was also concerned the bill would have removed the requirement that the attorney general consent when hate crimes charges are laid. Fortunately, the committee has voted to amend the bill to keep that requirement.

The House of Commons is able to remove or reject changes made in committee.

Though rarely used, the EFC believes the religious belief defence is an important protection for minority religious groups. In a written submission to the committee and communications with MPs, we've asked for it to be maintained.

We encourage concerned Canadians to contact their MPs. Find more information and sample MP communications at [TheEFC.ca/C-9](http://TheEFC.ca/C-9).

(+)



## DISAGREEING WELL: Exploring Self, God and Others

# Laying foundations for disagreeing well

In a world marked by polarization, EFC associates have created a new global consulting process to help small groups engage with the dynamics of conflict, disagreement and relational distancing.

The program, called Disagreeing Well: Exploring Self, God and Others, is offered by the Peace and Reconciliation Network, a commission of the World Evangelical Alliance. Joel Zantingh of Guelph, Ont., the network's Canadian regional coordinator, helped develop the program with Bethany Serengheu, its European regional coordinator.

The program ([DisagreeingWell.co](http://DisagreeingWell.co)) is rooted in spiritual reflection and practical skill-building. It's an experience of analysis, mapping, expert coaching, ongoing work and tailored skill-building that culminates in a collaborative impact event.

It introduces transformative practices such as the Paper Body of Christ (experiencing how all believers are part of the Body), Kintsugi meditation (reflecting on how all are broken and healed), sitting in circles that honour every voice, and learning to listen to the Spirit and others with empathy.

Five groups across Europe and Canada piloted the process, to refine it for diverse cultures and contexts. Participants were challenged to ask questions that foster self-awareness and compassion rather than division.

"I came expecting tools for conflict. I left with a renewed sense of Christ's presence in our differences," noted one participant. Another wrote, "This process gave me courage to listen without fear – and to see disagreement as an opportunity for growth."

Communities discovered how disagreement need not lead to stalemate or separation – it can open doors to deeper understanding. Within the Body of Christ, this journey points us toward unity in Him.

This new program is the result of supporters who believed love triumphs over division and donated to develop a program to equip leaders to model a better way – one that reflects Jesus' heart. To help expand this work, go to [TheEFC.ca/Donate](http://TheEFC.ca/Donate) and enter "WEAPRN-F4DW" in the comments.



## A note from EFC President David Guretzki

In a previous *Canada Watch* we mentioned Bill C-218, but I want to underscore the urgency of this moment. Unless Parliament acts, Canada will expand medical assistance in dying (MAiD) in March 2027 to include those whose only underlying medical condition is mental illness. Mental illness

can make life feel unbearably painful, but death is not compassion. With appropriate, comprehensive care, people who suffer deeply can find hope again – if our society chooses to invest in care rather than the easier and cheaper path of assisted death. If you believe life is a sacred gift from God, please pray and act. A House of Commons vote is expected in March. Visit [TheEFC.ca/C218](http://TheEFC.ca/C218) to learn how to contact your MP and encourage them to support Bill C-218. Thank you for being a faithful partner. Your prayers and financial support make timely advocacy possible.

## Sacred Assembly celebrated in January

**A** vision for healing in Canada that includes a spiritual reckoning and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples was sparked in 1995 – and is still inspiring action in 2026.

The latest action is called Commemorating 1995 Sacred Assembly, a Winnipeg event held January 23–25 (just when this newsletter is being mailed out).

EFC President David Guretzki, former president Bruce Clemenger and several members of the EFC Seven Commitments Working Group planned to participate (see details at [Commemorating1995sa.ca](http://Commemorating1995sa.ca)).

The 2026 gathering builds on the hope and healing that began in 1995, when faith leaders and elected officials gathered from across Canada for an event called The Sacred Assembly.

Clemenger and other EFC leaders were a part of that historic event and helped to edit its Reconciliation Proclamation, a seed that led to the establishment of National Indigenous Peoples Day (every June 21) and other healing work that continues today (read it at [TheEFC.ca/ReconciliationProclamation](http://TheEFC.ca/ReconciliationProclamation)).

The late Elijah Harper, an Oji-Cree politician, activist and Christian leader, cast the vision for the original Sacred Assembly. He is most notably known for single-handedly blocking the Meech Lake Accord in 1987, but his lesser-known contributions and advocacy for Indigenous rights still impact us today.

The 1995 Sacred Assembly and its Reconciliation Proclamation helped to shape the EFC itself, informing the EFC's current seven commitments towards right-relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people ([TheEFC.ca/SevenCommitments](http://TheEFC.ca/SevenCommitments)).



**A VISION FOR HEALING IN CANADA**



## Updating you on Canada's most immediate issues

■ **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. Bill C-218 which will stop this expansion had one hour of debate in December and another is slated for late February. MPs will vote in early March on whether the bill will proceed to be studied or be defeated. 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](http://TheEFC.ca/C-218).

■ **Religious belief defence:** The EFC has written to the Prime Minister, urging him to keep the religious belief defence in the *Criminal Code*, and has also asked for that in a written submission to the Justice Committee on the new hate crimes bill. But the Committee voted on Dec. 9 to remove the defence. The EFC continues to explain to government and the public why the defence is important and should be maintained. See sample communications you can use with an MP at [TheEFC.ca/C9](http://TheEFC.ca/C9).

■ **Religious freedom court case:** In February the EFC will be in a Quebec  
*...continued on back*

...continued from page 3

court as part of a coalition arguing in support of religious freedom. A provincial cabinet minister cancelled a rental agreement with Harvest Ministries, stating that the group's pro-life beliefs were contrary to the "fundamental principles" of the state. The coalition will argue religious groups should have equal access to public spaces and not be denied because of their beliefs.

■ **Quebec worship case:** The EFC is part of a coalition applying for intervenor status in a case involving the municipal regulation of Christian worship activities. The municipality of Montreal determined that a music and prayer event did not qualify as "worship" under a by-law and fined the church. This case has broad implications for charities and religious freedom across Canada.

■ **Conscience protection in court:** This spring the EFC will be in a BC court as an intervener in support of conscience protection and the ability of faith-based institutions to offer care consistent with their religious beliefs. The EFC will focus on the ability of Christian institutions to provide services without being compelled to compromise their beliefs. This case will determine whether faith-based facilities are able to be MAID-free spaces.

## New survey tool to study Evangelicals

**H**ave you ever come across a news story about Evangelicals and thought, *That doesn't sound like the people in my church? Or wondered, There seems to be so many new congregations popping up – is the evangelical population growing or shrinking?*

Statistics are stories packed into numbers, and they shape how we and our neighbours relate to Christianity. They shape public policy, laws and general openness to the Good News. How we get our numbers is important.

In December the EFC cohosted a consultation on creating a better set of polling questions to identify evangelical Christians. Our partner is the Canadian Institute for Empirical Church Research, based at Wycliffe College.

Following three months of online discussion, we gathered 25 Canadian scholars and church leaders in Toronto to consider how to build a better tool.

We asked questions like, "How can we better identify evangelical populations among Indigenous, French-speaking and recently arrived Canadians?"

We live in a suspicious culture that sees statistics and stories more as instruments of power than truth. It's crucial that a new polling tool is the result of the deliberation of many people, not just one organization. We want it to be used by Christians and non-Christians alike.

There is still work to do refining and testing the proposed new polling questions with a variety of evangelical congregations, then comparing the results with an older polling method.

Thanks to the major donors who support the EFC's Centre for Research on Church and Faith and our research partners, by the end of 2026 we will have a more accurate, cost-effective way to study our movement.



UPDATES ON ALL THE ISSUES are always available on our website [www.TheEFC.ca](http://www.TheEFC.ca)

 [Facebook.com/TheEFC](https://www.facebook.com/TheEFC)

 [X.com/TheEFC](https://www.x.com/TheEFC)

 [TheEFC.ca/Podcasts](https://www.TheEFC.ca/Podcasts)

 [Instagram.com/evangelical\\_fellowshipofcanada](https://www.instagram.com/evangelical_fellowshipofcanada)

 [LinkedIn.com/company/The-Evangelical-Fellowship-of-Canada](https://www.linkedin.com/company/The-Evangelical-Fellowship-of-Canada)

 **EFC** The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

275 Slater Street, Suite 810, Ottawa, ON K1P 5H9  
Toll Free: 1.866.302.3362 • Email: [EFC@TheEFC.ca](mailto:EFC@TheEFC.ca)  
[www.TheEFC.ca](http://www.TheEFC.ca)



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