

# CanadaWatch

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## Cautions around conversion therapy

In the weeks before Christmas and as the new year began, the EFC received many calls and emails from Canadians concerned about the issue of conversion therapy, and specifically Bill S-202. We were not surprised. It is an important issue we have been tracking with for some time.

The topic of conversion therapy is arising across the country at all levels of government. Cities and provinces are passing laws and bylaws to ban the practice. The federal government has signaled its intention to make changes to criminal law to prevent conversion therapy.

Often, the topic of conversion therapy is brought up in the context of abusive and coercive treatment in the past. The harmful history of conversion therapy includes practices like electric shock therapy and psychotropic drugs. Thankfully, these practices are no longer used in Canada.

Conversion therapy is usually understood to be medical or therapeutic treatment intended to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. However, one of the EFC's primary concerns is that in current public discussions, conversion therapy is being described far more broadly, often including faith-based settings and activities like pastoral care and informal support groups. Therefore, the EFC has concerns about the religious freedom implications of these laws and policies and their possible impact on pastoral counselling and religious teaching.

Bill S-202, a private member's bill in the Senate, would make it a criminal offence to advertise for conversion therapy or to receive a financial benefit for providing conversion therapy to youth under 18. Conversion therapy is defined in the bill as "any practice,



treatment or service designed to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity or to eliminate or reduce sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between persons of the same sex."

While Bill S-202 would not impact churches directly, its definition of conversion therapy is broad, including any practice designed to reduce same-sex attraction or behaviour. If the federal government uses that same broad definition in future legislation, this could be problematic for faith communities.

Very importantly, there appears to be no distinction made between therapy aimed at changing a person's sexual orientation or identity and counselling

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### How you can be involved:

- Pray for Christian witness reflecting the love and grace of God. Pray for wisdom as we engage on a difficult and sensitive issue.
- Relate. Take the opportunity now to send a message of congratulations to your MP on their recent election. Be positive and pleasant. Building a relationship now will make future communications more effective.
- Engage. Watch for EFC resources and sample letters when a bill is introduced in the House of Commons and on Bill S-202.

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that helps a person work through questions regarding their orientation or identity.

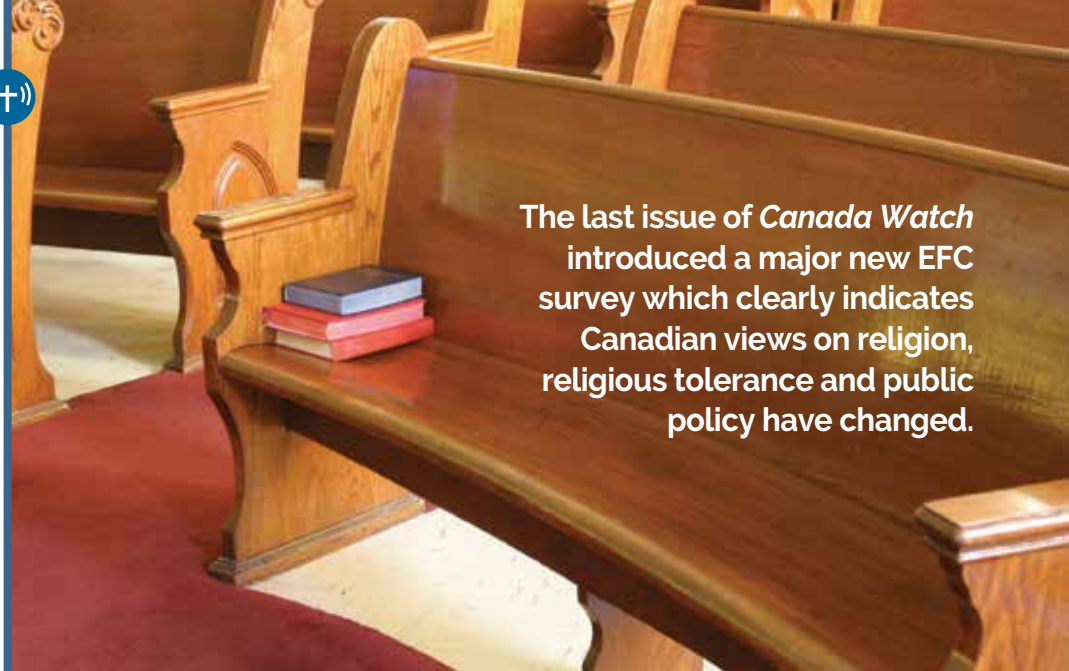
It is not clear exactly what impact Bill S-202 will have on medical and therapeutic treatment of children and youth with gender dysphoria. The bill allows "surgical sex change or any related service." Most recent bans happening across Canada allow for "gender confirming" care only. This limits some beliefs and expressions related to gender identity, but not others, compromising the ability of therapists to treat children and youth with gender dysphoria according to their professional assessment of the patient's circumstances and best interests.

Let us be clear. Coercion is always wrong. Therapy that hurts and harms has no place in secular practice, and certainly not within the walls of any church. Mistakes have been made both within and outside of churches. As always, we seek to honour God and love our neighbour.

Many of these conversion therapy laws and policies may prevent persons who are working through questions regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity from being able to access support to live according to their beliefs and wishes.

A second reading debate on Bill S-202 will resume in the Senate in early February 2020. If the bill passes, it goes to the House of Commons for more debate, study and votes. The EFC will make a submission to that committee.

We will be watching and working with our affiliates to respond in a measured, compassionate way.



The last issue of *Canada Watch* introduced a major new EFC survey which clearly indicates Canadian views on religion, religious tolerance and public policy have changed.

## EFC research sheds light on religious landscape

**M**ore analysis from the EFC's 2019 religion survey is now available in several places, including nine pages in the Jan/Feb issue of EFC magazine *Faith Today*. At [www.FaithToday.ca/Podcasts](http://www.FaithToday.ca/Podcasts) you can also listen to a podcast interview with the chief researchers: the EFC's Rick Hiemstra and Dr. Sam Reimer from Crandall University.

Here are some more findings from that survey. This kind of distinctly Canadian research is a unique gift the EFC and its partners offer the Canadian Church. Thank you for how your gifts make this work possible.

**32%** of evangelical affiliates strongly agree they're part of a small group that regularly meets for spiritual purposes such as prayer or Bible study. (All Christians: 9%)

**55%** of evangelical affiliates say they've read the Bible at least a few times a week over the last year. (All Canadians: 8%)

**78%** of evangelical affiliates say they've prayed at least a few times a week over the last year, privately outside of meals and religious services. (All Canadians: 26%)

**75%** of evangelical affiliates strongly agree the Bible is the word of God, reliable and trustworthy. (All Canadians: 15%)

**46%** of evangelical affiliates strongly agree they regularly take at least one day a week to rest from activities related to how they earn a living. (All Canadians: 31%)

**65%** of evangelical affiliates would be very willing to accept the invitation of a friend to church. (All Canadians: 20%)

**67%** of evangelical affiliates strongly agree their religious faith is very important in their day-to-day life. (All Canadians: 17%)

Thank you for how your gifts make this work possible.

To learn more visit, [www.TheEFC.ca](http://www.TheEFC.ca)



SOURCE: EFC/Maru survey from August 2019 of 5,011 Canadian adults. [www.TheEFC.ca/2019CFT](http://www.TheEFC.ca/2019CFT)



## Message from the President, Bruce J. Clemenger

Canada has indeed changed. The EFC's recent survey of over 5,000 Canadians shows how dramatic the shift has been over the past few decades. Perhaps you have sensed our society is moving away from the Church and Christian beliefs. You are correct.

While 67 per cent of Canadians joined weekly religious services in 1946, now only 11 per cent attend weekly and 59 per cent never attend. Even 20 years ago most would attend at least once or twice a year, for Easter or Christmas services or a funeral. Not anymore. And for younger generations, many have never been inside a church.

This trend is reflected in attitudes about God and religion in general. Now 39% believe that the concept of God is an old superstition and another 9% don't know, and 50% per cent claim no religion (from 40 per cent in 2013 – a huge shift in only five years).

There is however still a sizable number of Canadians who agree that God is loving and forgiving (54 per cent) and that Jesus was the Son of God (45 per cent). But the accelerated trend is away from Christian practices and belief to surrogates.

This may be unfamiliar territory for Canada, but not for Christianity. New Testament letters to churches in gentile societies were about engaging with people for whom the Good News was new news. The apostle Peter speaks of being prepared to give reasons for the hope within us, and while the reasons we give will sound strange to more and more Canadians, the reasons and our experience will not necessarily be rejected.

When we take positions on issues, we will need to take the time to articulate the scriptural principles we advocate, and with humility and grace show how these principles will affirm the dignity of all and promote a truly good and just society. And there are significant issues before us.

While the context is shifting, our calling is the same. At the EFC, we are grateful for your prayers and support.

## Searching for conference candidates

As friends of the EFC you help make our mission possible. Now, we'd like to tap into your expertise and networks for a special purpose.

We are pleased to be co-hosts with Lausanne Canada of *Our Common Calling: Following Jesus into the World*, an upcoming forum in Toronto, October 26–28. The Canadian Council of Christian Charities and Future Fit are also partnering in this endeavour.

We are seeking Christian leaders and influencers from various ministry and marketplace sectors to consider the Church's calling in Canada today and in the future.

The forum will draw Christians from across Canada's multiple regions and ethnic communities – across age and gender. We are looking for candidates to attend who have a sense of the changing demographics, societal pressures and declining church membership challenges most churches

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To learn more visit, [www.OurCommonCalling.ca](http://www.OurCommonCalling.ca)



## Updating you on Canada's most immediate issues

■ **Medical assistance in dying:** Canada may soon lose a critical safeguard from its medical assistance in dying (MAID) law – the restriction that limits eligibility to patients whose death is “reasonably foreseeable.” The *Truchon* court decision last September struck down this safeguard in Quebec, and the prime minister has now instructed the federal justice minister to respond. The EFC shares the concern expressed by disabilities groups that removing this safeguard would make many Canadians more vulnerable to pressure to end their lives. The EFC is preparing for any federal legislation that would expand eligibility for MAID. The EFC is also getting ready for the five-year review of the MAID law in June. [www.TheEFC.ca/MAID](http://www.TheEFC.ca/MAID)

■ **Conversion therapy bans:** See main story on page 1. [www.TheEFC.ca/S-202](http://www.TheEFC.ca/S-202)

■ **Prostitution:** Pro-prostitution groups are pushing the federal government to decriminalize prostitution when it holds its five-year review of Canada's prostitution laws. The current laws are based on the view that prostitution is inherently violent and exploits women and children, and so those laws target sex buyers and pimps in order to end the demand for paid sexual services. The EFC is preparing

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resources to support the existing laws.

[www.TheEFC.ca/Prostitution](http://www.TheEFC.ca/Prostitution)

■ **Religious freedom:** EFC President Bruce Clemenger wrote a letter of congratulations to the prime minister after the federal election and highlighted the importance of religious freedom. Clemenger wrote, "We believe that a commitment to work with people of diverse faiths for the public good, as well as a deep respect for freedom of religion and conscience and the integrity of communities of faith, are all essential components of a free and open society. All freedoms thrive when freedom of religion is respected and protected." [www.TheEFC.ca/Letters](http://www.TheEFC.ca/Letters)

■ **Conscience protection:** The EFC supports efforts to put in place conscience protection for health care workers whose deeply held beliefs prevent them from participating in medical assistance in dying. The EFC supported Bill 207 in Alberta, which would give broad conscience protection to health care workers in the province. [www.TheEFC.ca/Conscience](http://www.TheEFC.ca/Conscience)

■ **Pornography:** The EFC's free study guide on pornography has been updated and re-released as *How Porn Harms: What the Church Needs to Know*. More than 10,000 copies of the booklet have been distributed under its previous title, *Battling Pornography: A Guide for Canadians*. [www.TheEFC.ca/HowPornHarms](http://www.TheEFC.ca/HowPornHarms)

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are facing, but who also have a practical hope for the future of the Church.

We want to consider together innovative and creative responses to those challenges from a wide variety of voices. A key emphasis will be on future-focused collaboration, listening prayerfully to God and one another as we seek new and effective ways of following Jesus into the world.

Do you know someone who should attend? Please visit [OurCommonCalling.ca](http://OurCommonCalling.ca), click on the Nominations page and then use the form provided to nominate leaders in your circle who would be a good fit.

Beginning February 1, 2020, the forum selection committee will send out invitations to the most representative group possible, for the most effective gathering possible. We so appreciate your participation in the work of the EFC, and we believe that within your circles of influence lie many candidates who could be perfectly suited for this unique opportunity next October. Thank you.

## Heart and hands

*In this Canada Watch feature, we are asking members of the EFC team to share with you an insight about their work and how they experience first-hand the impact of your generosity on the Church and the public square in Canada.*

*Blake Weller is a donor relations representative in the EFC's administration and finance department.*

I am blessed to be part of the donor care team at The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Since the EFC is a non-profit ministry, our donors are vital to the EFC's continued work. Our donors and friends understand how important it is to uphold the rights and freedoms we now enjoy. Part of my job includes seeing each donation that arrives by mail. Quite often, the gift has a note of appreciation and encouragement for our staff.




When donors phone in they also express the same appreciation and encouragement. Some of our donors have very real problems in their lives and wish to share that problem with someone. Often, I am that person, and this is a very small way I can minister to them. Some of these concerns come by way of prayer requests which I share with our staff in our weekly Thursday devotions time. Sometimes it seems right to just pray on the phone with the person who has called. I love my job and I consider it a ministry and a privilege to get to know, even just a little bit, the people who make the mission of the EFC possible.

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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.

