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The EFC seeks intervener status in medical student case

The EFC is seeking intervener status in an upcoming case in Manitoba about a medical student who was suspended from his school because of his personal pro-life views on abortion.

Rafael Zaki is a Coptic Christian who attended the University of Manitoba Max Rady School of Medicine prior to his expulsion in August 2019 on grounds of non-academic misconduct. The misconduct charges stemmed from Zaki expressing his views (via Facebook posts) on abortion and the ownership of firearms.

In an affidavit filed to the Court of Queen's Bench in Manitoba after his expulsion, Zaki wrote: "Being a Coptic Christian is the very essence of my being, and I cannot be separated from my faith."

He also pointed out in his appeal, which subsequently failed, that the University's own policies do not permit it to regulate or restrict social media content posted by students, unless "matters regarding the University are a significant focus of the communication," which they were not in Zaki's case. He was sharing his own opinions against abortion.

Zaki was asked to apologize for the posts, which he did numerous times, but the problem for the university appears to be that Zaki did not actually change his opinions on these issues, which were defined as "misogynistic and hostile to women" and had a "negative impact on the learning and work environment."

Zaki has commented about his own case. "The University breached my rights



when it expelled me as a student from the College of Medicine when I would not change my core beliefs." The Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship commented on the case in an open letter to the university: "It has long been accepted that evaluations of a person's professional conduct are to be based on that person's behaviour, not on his or her beliefs... By expelling students because of their beliefs, the University of Manitoba appears to be prepared to reject this long-standing democratic freedom."

It is very disturbing that a medical school would expel a student for being pro-life, even after he voluntarily removed the statements from his personal social media and met

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How you can help

- Donate to the work of the EFC for cases like the Rafael Zaki intervention, the outcome of which impacts the religious freedom of pro-life Canadians or anyone holding an opinion that differs from the mainstream.
- Share this issue of *Canada Watch* with others who might be concerned about religious freedom in Canada.
- Visit www.TheEFC.ca for updates often, and sign up there for our weekly email the *EFC Update*.

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repeated requests for apologies. The issue for the school seems to be that he would not repudiate his deeply held, faith-informed personal opinions. The EFC is getting ready to appear before the courts as an intervener if granted that status, along with our partner in this case, the Coptic Church in Canada.

Last August, Zaki and his attorney filed a Notice of Application for Judicial Review at the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench. He was denied his request to keep studying while the case continues.

The EFC will be asking the court to consider if merely holding certain views on issues can become grounds for barring citizens from attending university. We will present the very serious and harmful implications to our society if what citizens think about abortion and issues like it make some of us ineligible for certain positions or institutions, whether they be a workplace or a place of study.

Meanwhile, the EFC team is also working on Bill C-6, the bill to ban conversion therapy in Canada, requesting amendments to the bill to safeguard religious freedom and expression by clarifying the definition of conversion therapy in the bill.

We are also working on Bill C-7, the expansion of medical assistance in dying, arguing for protections for vulnerable Canadians. And our work continues on pornography, religious freedom and other issues. Please see On Parliament Hill in this newsletter and visit our website anytime for more detailed updates on some of these issues.



EFC research team tackles two questions in early 2021

1 WHAT DO PARENTS OR OTHER ADULTS IN THE HOME NEED TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S FAITH IN CANADA TODAY?

That is the question being asked by the research team of the EFC-led Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study. We are asking parents and church leaders about faith formation efforts in the home. We hope to learn about the needs of families by asking parents and ministry leaders to reflect on different aspects of home and faith life in order to understand what encourages and what hinders faith development in children.

So far for this project we have surveyed different approaches to spiritual formation and faith transmission, and historic and economic movements that have impacted family structure and function. After receiving input and approval from the 17 EFC affiliates who form this research partnership, we have begun a round of interviews with family ministry experts.

2 WHAT DO SMALL CHURCHES AND PASTORS NEED TO FUNCTION AND FLOURISH IN CANADA?

The EFC's research team has also completed the first round of interviews with small church ministry experts for the Canadian Evangelical Small Church Study to learn about challenges and opportunities in the small church. The findings from these interviews with ministry experts will inform the next round of interviews with small church pastors set to begin after receiving approval from the Tyndale Research Ethics Board.

Those two projects are the major endeavours underway for the for the EFC's research team. Our method for collecting data is developmental. We start with a literature review, then interviews with ministry experts, followed by interviews with our primary demographic, and finally a nationwide survey. Each successive cycle builds on the findings of the previous one, informing our approach to the next phase and strengthening our ability to understand the results.

We look forward to hearing from Canadian pastors and parents as our research continues, praying that Canadian churches and families will be blessed and strengthened by these efforts. See also www.TheEFC.ca/CEFFFS and www.TheEFC.ca/CESCS.

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Message from the chair of the EFC board

Welcome to the new year. As chair of the EFC board, I want to update you on Bruce J. Clemenger, EFC president. As you are likely aware, Bruce was hospitalized early in the new year with Covid-19. As of this printing of *Canada Watch*, I am happy to share that Bruce is showing clear signs of recovery. He and his family have expressed their gratitude for the outflowing of prayers for his health and the support provided to his family during an extremely challenging time. I also wanted to assure you, as a quick read of this *Canada Watch* will demonstrate, that the EFC in 2021 continues to grow in impact as an organization speaking biblical principles into the issues that are shaping the heart of our country. You are an essential part of that work, and I thank you. – Rev. William Fietje

Partnership and ministry innovation portfolio expands



Joel Gordon is the EFC's new Director, Partnership and Ministry Innovation. He shares with us his vision for his new role and the evangelical Church in Canada.

What will be your main activities in your new role?

Along with partnership building and ministry resource development, I will facilitate meetings with national leaders, listen to their challenges and needs, and work with them and EFC staff to produce helpful resources.

I'll also be speaking. Last year, I had the opportunity to speak at a church gathering of seniors and I shared about a new research partnership that we are developing around family faith formation, which is exploring what is helping and hindering parents and ministry leaders in discipling children. It was exciting to see the response to that. [Joel can be invited to speak at www.TheEFC.ca/Speakers.]

When leaders express a desire to start a new network or partnership, I will help to convene, facilitate or launch these new initiatives.

What are you looking forward to the most as you set out?

I'm most looking forward to building relationships with two groups of Christian leaders across Canada. The first are current affiliates. I will be actively listening to them, praying with these leaders and collaboratively responding to various needs facing the Church in Canada today. The other group are leaders who are not yet part of mainstream evangelical circles.

Building relationships with both groups of leaders will significantly advance our ministry efforts by making our research more representative of Evangelicals in Canada and opening doors for the gospel to reach more Canadians.

What is the most important thing you'd like EFC donors to know as we begin 2021?

I'm filled with deep gratitude for the many donors who continue to listen to God's leading by giving and praying on an ongoing basis – this is an important way we express God's will for us in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Be assured that we pray for you too.



Updating you on Canada's most immediate issues

■ **Religious Freedom:** The Supreme Court of Canada heard a case in December about whether ecclesiastical decisions about church membership are outside the scope of judicial review. A decision in the case of *Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Canada St Mary Cathedral v. Teshome Aga*, known as the Aga case, is expected this year. The EFC argued that *Charter* protection includes the communal dimension of religious freedom and that church membership is an ecclesiastical decision based on theology and doctrine. www.TheEFC.ca/Aga

■ **Euthanasia:** The bill to expand MAID to persons who aren't dying has passed in the House of Commons and is being debated in the Senate. The EFC asked parliamentary committees not to remove key protections such as a 10-day reflection period and the requirement that a person's death be reasonably foreseeable. Find more information and a sample letter to ask Senators to make changes to the bill, at www.TheEFC.ca/C7.

■ **Conversion Therapy:** A bill to ban conversion therapy in the *Criminal Code*

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For updates on issues the EFC is currently involved in visit www.TheEFC.ca

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is moving through the House of Commons. Coercive and involuntary efforts to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity have no place in our communities. However, the definition of conversion therapy in Bill C-6 is broad and could impact freedom of religion and expression. EFC staff have met with MPs as part of a faith-based coalition to ask for amendments to the bill. A parliamentary committee studying the bill has instead recommended changes to broaden the bill's impact further. This is a key time to ask MPs to make the definition more precise. Visit www.TheEFC.ca/C6 for a sample letter to MPs.

■ **Pornography:** The EFC was one of 40 signatories to letters asking Visa and Mastercard not to process payments for Pornhub because of the illegal content it hosts. Both companies have suspended their ties with the pornography site while they investigate. The EFC is asking for federal action to hold pornography sites accountable to verify age and consent of those in the videos they host on their sites, and to establish age verification to confirm viewers are adults. New resources, including an action kit for contacting MPs, are available at www.TheEFC.ca/Pornography.

Heart and hands

Dave Auyeung is the director of information technology for the EFC.



My job is a variety of different activities every day. There are the regular IT kinds of things people know about like fixing computers and resolving hardware and software issues for a team of staff. The other aspect I really enjoy is the more creative side like the *Faith Today* podcast, webinars or working on the website to make sure the information we present is clear and compelling.

Technology requires strategy as well, and I enjoy helping to move the EFC forward in our use of technology to help further our mission.

I appreciate the fact that when people donate to the EFC, their donations are clearly going to the work that we do, and the work I do every day is part of that.



Join us in Prayer in 2021

The EFC is welcoming you into prayer in 2021 in an even more intentional way, with the EFC Prayer Card, enclosed with this *Canada Watch*.

We asked our teams to spend some time considering the year to come and asked them for their prayer requests, which we've presented for you month-by-month. We'd love for you to keep the prayer card handy, maybe in your Bible or on your fridge, and pray with us through the various issues and developments we anticipate occupying much of the EFC's attention this year.

For February-March, for example, our Ottawa office is asking for prayer for the EFC's engagement with MPs and senators on issues such as euthanasia, religious freedom and sexual exploitation – specifically for wisdom and good relationships to be developed and a biblical perspective to be heard.

As always, we'd like to pray for you, if you have a request that we can pray for. Please contact us at prayer@theefc.ca or toll-free 1-866-302-3362.

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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.

