

# Handout 1

## Canadian Christian Political Organizations

*This article is adapted from A Welcomed Ally by Mark Penninga for this lesson. Original is available at <https://arpacanada.ca/news/2008/03/31/a-welcomed-ally/> or by contacting [info@arpacanada.ca](mailto:info@arpacanada.ca).*

Christians care about what is going on in politics because our civil governments make decisions which impact almost every aspect of our lives. The Bible also calls us to be a voice for justice and righteousness. In a country where abortion is pervasive, child exploitation (through pornography, etc.) is rampant, and many women are trafficked for sexual slavery, Christians need to speak up and promote justice and love.

Organizing political action usually increases its effectiveness. A number of Christian political organizations exist in Canada. Each has their own unique approach and niche in the political landscape. It is helpful to know which organizations exist so that we can benefit from the work that is already being done.

Politics impacts everything we do, from what kinds of light bulbs we can buy to what we read on our cereal boxes. Given the impact politics has on our daily lives, it's worth asking how much Christians are doing to positively influence society through politics. Which Christian organizations are already involved in Canadian politics? How successful are they?

### Political Parties

The Christian Heritage Party is the only Christian party in Canada. It attempts to promote the Christian worldview directly through democracy. Like all parties, Christian parties aim to be elected into public office. The electoral system in Canada has resulted in the CHP never having a candidate elected into office.

**Pros:** If they are successful (which is the case in the Netherlands and other countries), they can have a great deal of influence because they are part of the law-making process.

**Cons:** However, if they don't get elected, they have difficulty making a significant contribution apart from presenting a Christian perspective around election time.

## Think Tanks

Think tanks are academic organizations that develop research and studies with the goal of getting this into the hands of policy makers. They focus their research on topics that are in keeping with their organizational goals and priorities. Their hope is that government leaders will use their research in creating laws and policies. This is a form of indirect influence.

**Pros:** Politicians look to think tanks which they know share their ideology on a particular issue. They benefit with research to support their position. The think tank benefits by having its ideas influence new laws.

**Cons:** Think tanks also have weaknesses. Their attempt to be academic and professional creates a distance between them and the general public. As a result, they do little to help everyday Christians make a difference in the public square. They are also quite limited in what they can say, given their desire to appear objective and academic.

## Grassroots mobilization

Have you ever received an email from a group calling you to respond to something that is going on in Parliament, such as the definition of marriage, or a bill to increase the age of consent? Chances are the email

came from an organization that is promoting grassroots mobilization. The two main organizations in Canada that are doing this are the Canada Family Action Coalition (CFAC) and My Canada. Like almost all Christian political organizations, these are actually very small organizations with only one or two employees. They rely on regular Canadians to get their message out to our civil governments. The primary method of action that these groups use is the Internet – through email “action notices” or “1 click technology” that allows individuals to send an email to many government officials at the click of their mouse.

**Pros:** Grassroots mobilization is very important because it is in keeping with the Biblical mandate for all Christians to be a light in our world. The work is not left up to a few professional lobbyists in Ottawa. Furthermore, since we live in a democracy, the people still have an important influence in the public policy process. Giving citizens a voice is an important part of promoting democracy.

**Cons:** Grassroots mobilization organizations are often reactive rather than proactive. Emails flood Parliament when something bad is happening, but little is being done to promote positive action before changes are already happening. Furthermore, internet-based lobbying only has limited value. Few things are more effective than meeting with a government official face to face, or at least giving them a phone call.

## Issue-based advocates

Recognizing that Canada is promoting many harmful things, such as abortion and the breakdown of the family, some groups exist to make a difference on those specific issues. Campaign Life Coalition is a primarily Catholic organization that has been

promoting the pro-life cause in Parliament. Groups like this have also sprung up in response to the changing definition of marriage (such as Defend Marriage Canada) but they have died out about as quickly as they came up. Many Reformed Christians are also familiar with the ECP Centre (Equipping Christians for the Public Square) which is now defunct. Although their name suggests that they may belong in the first category of Christian political groups, they have instead focussed primarily on defending civil liberties.

**Pros:** These organizations focus on one (or a few) issues which means that they are often good at what they do. They can also strategize and be proactive so that they influence the government officials before they make decisions. Furthermore, they are often able to interact more directly with Members of Parliament and hopefully also build a relationship with them.

**Cons:** This approach does not usually encourage much action from everyday people because it is just a few paid employees who do all the work. Some of these groups struggle with having to give the same message for many years and end up becoming distracted from their goal or wearing out their welcome.

## General Christian advocacy groups

Religious groups and denominations realize that government decisions have a big impact on the things that they care deeply about. That explains why organizations such as the Catholic Civil Rights League and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada have offices devoted to political action. These organizations work with a broad variety of

issues and try to provide a religious perspective to government.

**Pros:** These organizations don't try to hide the fact that they are bringing a religious perspective. This results in a more Biblically-based approach. Furthermore, they have a stronger connection to their support-base and are therefore able to encourage grassroots mobilization as well. The EFC in Ottawa is a good example of how effective this type of organization can be. They have nurtured good relationships with MPs and earned a lot of respect for the work they do.

**Cons:** Having a broad mandate can often result in a lack of focus. These groups struggle with having to cover such a wide variety of issues and still be effective.

# Comparing Types of Organizations

- This organizer assists in clearly displaying and organizing information related to different Christian political organizations.
- Additionally, it will help you look for patterns and relationships among the different types of organizations.

Organization / Category	Goal(s) of organization.	Who are they trying to influence to help them achieve this goal?	Types of issues that this organization will address.	Threats to the existence of these organizations.
Political Parties				
Think Tanks				
Grassroots mobilization				
Issue-based advocates				
General Christian advocacy groups				

Handout 2 – Christian Political Organizations

Organization / Category	Is this organization generally reactive or proactive?	What types of activities does this organization normally engage in?	Does this organization try to influence directly or indirectly?	Is this organization highly organized or loosely organized?
Political Parties				
Think Tanks				
Grassroots mobilization				
Issue-based advocates				
General Christian advocacy groups				

# Organization Profile Practice

- Read each of the scenarios presented below.
- Compare the scenario with the information presented in *Handout 1 – Canadian Christian Political Organizations*.
- Beside each scenario, indicate which organization would be best suited to address the problem or situation. There could be more than one answer, but indicate which you think is best.
- Possible organizations are: Political Party, Think Tank, Grassroots mobilization, Issue-based advocacy, General Christian political advocacy

Scenario	Your choice or organization and reason why.
A) You have just turned 18 years old and realize there is a federal or provincial election coming up soon. You aren't very familiar with any of the candidates. Which group could you go to for thoughts on who to vote for?	
B) Your high school civics class final report has been assigned. You think the topic of faith and families would be an interesting one. Who do you go to for some research to help you write this paper?	
C) You'd like to write a letter to your local representative reminding them that you appreciate their hard work while bringing to their attention several issues that are important to you.	
D) You are concerned about the rights of Christians to publicly practice law and medicine in a way that agrees with their religion. Which group can you go to for more information?	
E) You would like to keep your mall-based store closed on Sunday out of respect for the Lord's Day. The management of the mall where your business is located is pressuring you to open on Sunday. You would like to find out more about advocating for your rights as a business owner.	

### Handout 3 – Christian Political Organizations

Scenario	Your choice or organization and reason why.
F) You are trying to organize a petition to present to your local public libraries to install an Internet filter to prevent young people coming across inappropriate content. Who do you go to for help?	
G) There are approximately 30,000 Canadian children in the Canadian child welfare system that are going through childhood without a family and a permanent home. As a Christian, you know the importance of the family unit to society. You would like to learn more about why there is no central information database on the number of Canadian children in government care and awaiting adoption.	
H) A new casino is coming to your small city and you would like to give your perspective to your local municipal government. Who do you go to for help in writing a letter to your MLA/MPP, your MP, or your local city council?	
I) You are concerned about the increasing pressure there is against religious freedom in Canada. You think that when religious freedom is protected, then other freedoms are also more secure. Who do you turn to?	

# Task: Political Organization Review

Your task is to choose an organization from the list and to provide a short presentation to your classmates. Alternatively, you may propose one that has not been listed. Your teacher will provide you with a sample list of organizations that can be chosen.

In order for you to do this assignment effectively, part (A) can likely be done with some Internet research or primary and secondary source reading. Part (B) requires a telephone conversation with someone at the organization, or at minimum an interview conducted by email.

- A. Provide an essential summary of the organization including:
  - a. The organization's name and its classification of one of the four types covered in this lesson.
  - b. The organization's mission and vision with some clarifying discussion.
  - c. A brief summary and a few examples of various issues that this organization is willing to engage with.
  - d. Provide examples and a summary of current efforts of this organization.
- B. Provide an analytical review of the organization's efforts including:
  - a. A list of the organizational successes in the past including reasons why they successful. Consider including:
    - i. Clearly stating the issues and efforts. Who were the different stakeholder groups involved? What were the competing interests?
    - ii. Were there any other solutions attempted to solve the issue previously? If so, what were the outcomes of these attempted solutions? Did any of them help to partially address the issue?
  - b. Choose an effort by this organization that you think of as being their most significant. Significance will be judged based on the following criteria:
    - i. Notice: was the effort noticed as being important at the time? If so, by whom?
    - ii. Breadth: how widely was Canadian society affected at the time? Men, women, children? Provinces or country-wide? All income levels? All job profiles?
    - iii. Depth: how deeply did it affect the different groups it impacted? Was it multi-generational? Did it impact economic life, political life, communities, national life?
    - iv. Length: how long-lasting were the effects of this effort? Was it for a week? A month? Years? A generation?
    - v. Look back: how is the effort remembered today?
- C. Present this information to the class.