

## Canada at 150: Government Relations Symposium

Conference Highlights

May 07-09, 2017 (Ottawa, ON)

As we gathered in Ottawa for this Symposium, co-sponsored by the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada and the Bishop of the Diocese of Ottawa, we had three goals:

- To **enhance our awareness** of the Federal Government's policy and legislative priorities;
- To **explore practical ways to engage government** to further the mission of the church; and
- To **promote our witness** in the Public Square

We were blessed with informative speakers and panelists and by inquisitive participants that engaged fruitfully in reflection and discussion. We heard a stirring and thought-provoking keynote address by Hugh Segal, former Senator and Master of Massey College, and we were honoured to be received at Rideau Hall by His Excellency the Governor General of Canada, The Right Honourable David Johnston.

Throughout, we were in a prayerful space, from the opening Evensong, throughout the presentations and deliberations around the Cathedral's labyrinth, and to the closing prayer, respectful of the Algonquin territory and mindful of the threatening waters of the Ottawa River and its impact for countless people just across the bridge.

The prepared texts by Mr. Hugh Segal, The Honourable Andrew Leslie, and Ms. Yvonne Jones are being forwarded to participants separately. Herewith follow some general highlights from our time together.

- Keynote address, **The Responsibility to Engage: living our diversity in Canada and the World**, articulated a vision for our country and for our world that calls us all – religious and secular alike – to engage in the public policy process to ensure that freedom from want and freedom from fear becomes realities. Bearing witness in ways that are true to our religious beliefs, convictions, and traditions can be both powerful and persuasive in helping to share fair and equitable policies.
- Several of our **Federal Government's priorities** – and some of its challenges – **align closely with those of the Anglican Church of Canada**; notably, poverty alleviation, homelessness and affordable housing, refugees, climate change, and the “new conversation” with Indigenous Peoples.
- As an open country, Canada also faces some **major challenges**, notably the unpredictability of political developments south of the border with our neighbour, ally, and key partner, but also in a **changing geo-political landscape** internationally and the rise of **nationalism, populism, and protectionism**.
- A **National Housing Strategy** is being driven from the “top”, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as its champion with Cabinet and several ministries fully engaged. **Investment in housing was the single largest item in the last Budget** (\$11.2bn/11 years). with the **longest extended agreement** (goes beyond next elections), with buy-in from the provinces and First Nations. Ending chronic homelessness is within reach.

**Faith-based organizations** bring an important perspective and experience and will continue to be important partners. Call for churches to advocate with provinces and local governments to make this successful. **“One you know, you have to speak and you have to act”**.

- The Federal Government has accorded a **high priority to the reconciliation between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in Canada**, a “new conversation” based on “recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership” with First Nations, Inuit, and the Metis Nation. This too is being driven by the “top” and with the active engagement of several ministries. This includes bilateral mechanisms to co-develop policy on shared priorities, a Working Group of Ministers to review federal laws, policies and operational practices related to Indigenous Peoples, full implementation of the TRC’s 94 calls to action (including removal of government qualifications on UNDRIP), investments of \$12bn/6 years for safe housing, clean water, high-quality education, child-and-family service reform, and revitalization of Indigenous languages and culture, the launch of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the development of a new fiscal relationship with First Nations.
- The Anglican Church of Canada has had a **long-standing commitment** with respect to self-determination for Indigenous Peoples both within the Church and in the larger society. We are invited into **further and deeper conversations** with the government.
- On the **international front**, the Anglican Church of Canada shares many goals with the government, notably on international assistance, human rights (especially with respect to freedom of religion and with Indigenous Rights), human trafficking, climate change, refugees, and peace in the Middle East.
- With the post-WWII **international system under intense pressure**, the Canadian government is exploring ways to advance peace, security, and prosperity both through its bilateral relationships and its multilateral commitments, often acting as a “bridge-builder”. The upcoming G7 meetings in Italy will address several high profile international issues and **Canada will assume the chair at the end of this calendar year and host the G7 in 2018**. (This represents an excellent opportunity for the Church to contribute to the policy process.) Meanwhile, the Canada-U.S. relationship is commanding a heavy investment of human capital.
- Although there was an ambitious consultation process on **International Assistance** (the ACC made a submission and PWRDF was involved in focus groups), the high priority accorded to fighting poverty at home (child tax benefit, investments for Indigenous Relations and National Housing Strategy) edged out an increase for international assistance in the last Budget. **“Smart spending” is the new mantra**. There is a move away from “countries of focus” towards “contributing to a more just and inclusive world”, e.g. fragile and failed states, humanitarian assistance, disease control, and women’s empowerment and gender equality.
- In terms of **citizen engagement**, unique time for churches to engage in the public square; “If you don’t, others will”. This government is committed to a more **collegial** approach in Cabinet and a more **cooperative** approach with other levels of government. Mandate letters are public and Ministers will be held accountable.

- **Youth and Gender** equality is not just for “optics” but reflect a genuine commitment and an acknowledgement of their value-added in the policy process.
- **Government is seeking advice on “how” to do things** and wants to succeed where others have failed. Great opportunity to inform and influence the policy process, especially with 200 “new” members of parliament and their staffs.
- **Advice** on how we can be effective in the public square? Build relationships; focus on local/riding level where doors are more open and accessible for constituents; align “ask” with government’s priorities; work on multiple levels; solicit partners; leverage sector experience and knowledge; validate what government is doing correctly; be prepared; come with short-term and turnkey proposals and new ideas.
- Rumours of a Cabinet shuffle this summer, prorogation, and new session and Speech from the Throne in September are well-founded. Time to prepare.
- There is a growing willingness among Canadians to engage in the democratic process, not just at the ballot box, but beyond. Civic education, more meaningful consultations with MPs, empowered representatives, and increased diversity can encourage and strengthen democracy.

Several **pearls of wisdom emerged** during the course of our two hour reflection and discussions on what we heard, what it means for our Church, and how to take things forward, including:

- The Symposium was a **two-way communication and educations process**, with speakers hearing what we had to say and inviting us to engage further.
- There is a felicitous **alignment between the Church’s priorities and those of the Federal government**. The terrain is ripe, especially on Indigenous Relations, Homelessness and Affordable Housing, Poverty, Refugees, and Climate Change.
- The **Church has a place in the public square and government relations is a ministry for all, not just the few**.
- We **need to be “intentional” in our engagement**; establish some policy priorities; ensure we are well prepared in terms of knowledge and draw from our experience; bring solutions or new perspectives to the public policy process; invest in relationships, both at the local, provincial, and national levels; connect the dots within the Church organizational structure; prepare for 2019 elections now (diversity, Indigenous Relations, and Climate Change emerged as key issues).
- Possible **Actions**? Meet your MP, MLA, Councillors; develop issues papers as per election resources; connect conversations within our Church; explore clergy formation, especially for Deacons; sensitize Bishops and Metropolitans; access “wider Church” resources and networks; give greater prominence to “tool kit” on website; refine and use our communications tools and social media; establish national group or network; use Dean and Cathedral networks. Pray!