



**CHRISTIAN  
LEGAL  
FELLOWSHIP**



May 4, 2020

**Sent via e-mail**

Hon. Premier Doug Ford  
Premier of Ontario  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford:

We wish to thank you for your Government's continuing leadership in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. You are facing enormous and unprecedented challenges, and we are grateful for the efforts you are exerting to serve the public's needs. We are also deeply appreciative of this Government's recognition of the sanctity of the lives threatened by this virus, regardless of age, health, or economic status, and we support the continued prioritization of the health and safety of all Ontarians, especially the most vulnerable among us.

In addition to the protection of physical health and safety, we strongly encourage this Government to recognize Ontarians' heightened emotional, psychological and spiritual vulnerabilities during this pandemic. Churches and other religious communities play an essential role in meeting all of these needs. Churches and charities in Ontario have been serving diligently in their efforts to provide food, medicine, social assistance and other physical care to the most vulnerable. They are conducting food drives, supporting drop-in centres for the homeless, and even housing a face shield production facility. Equally as important, churches and other religious communities meet the oft-hidden need for hope, psychological security and spiritual wellbeing in the broader community.

Religious communities and their leaders are particularly needed by Ontarians at a time when they are facing fear, uncertainty about the future or grieving the loss of loved ones. Ministers provide pastoral care to those who are in crisis, who are elderly, who are at the end of life. For many, it is their faith that gives them hope and strength to carry on during difficult times.

We are grateful that churches across the country, along with many other organizations and individuals, are supporting initiatives to "flatten the curve", finding creative ways to care for their communities while continuing to respect social-distancing requirements and support public health. Online prayer meetings and worship services are just some of the ways religious communities have been trying to achieve this balance. However, such means are not necessarily feasible for all religious communities or all vulnerable persons, particularly the economically marginalized.

In this respect, as we enter the next stage of this pandemic, and the government begins to re-open certain services, we would welcome the opportunity to consult with you about how to support religious communities and charities, who can make important and essential contributions to our province during this time. We note that your government recently announced that it will be consulting with sectors impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, but faith communities were not specifically included in its list of stakeholders. We ask you to prioritize support, increased flexibility, and accommodation for religious communities seeking to serve Ontarians. We are concerned that an ongoing exclusion of religious communities such as churches from the province's list of "essential" services, especially for an extended period, may have a disproportionate burden on many individuals and families, at a time when they are most in need of the unique and vital support that their faith leaders and communities can provide.

While recognizing the need to continue protecting the physical health of our communities, we respectfully request that, moving forward, an approach be developed keeping in mind the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of Ontarians. Churches are seeking to be innovative in this regard, while respecting public health concerns.

We urge this Government to consider the fundamental role that churches and other religious communities continue to serve in a free and democratic society, especially in times of great hardship, and to find ways to prioritize the work of these communities alongside other essential services. We understand the tensions and concerns that you are facing, and we share many of them ourselves. We are at your service and welcome the opportunity to work with you in the coming days and weeks to help find the appropriate balance of health, safety, religious and other constitutional freedoms for the good of all Ontarians. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours very truly,

Derek B.M. Ross, Executive Director & General Counsel

CHRISTIAN LEGAL FELLOWSHIP

Rev. John Pellowe, Chief Executive Officer

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

Bruce J. Clemenger, President

THE EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP OF CANADA