

For Christians, an election is not just about voting—it is about discerning the kind of life that God calls us to. It is a time for broad discussion with others about being part of a community, about sharing resources, about alternatives to violence, and about hope for the future. It is part of our on-going commitment to uphold politicians and public life in prayer and to witness to God's reign of peace, justice, and wholeness.

For more information on MCC advocacy, coalition partners, or programs please visit [www.mcc.org/canada/ottawa](http://www.mcc.org/canada/ottawa)

## A Prayer for Election Time

### *Almighty God,*

All of life is in your embrace—  
Even the political life of our country.  
We give you thanks for Canada, our home.  
We give you thanks for a political system that invites our participation.

### *Saviour Jesus,*

You cared for those who were poor, physically challenged, social outcasts.  
You called all people to practice love, peace and reconciliation.  
Empower us to hear the voices of the marginalized.  
Move our hearts to seek the common good, rather than our own gain.

### *Holy Spirit,*

You enliven us as Christians to be salt and light in this world.  
Increase in us conversation, vigilance and prayer about this election.  
Guide candidates to campaign fairly and present their viewpoints honestly.  
Guide voters as they listen and assess the positions of the different parties.  
May all of us speak and act in ways that bear witness to you. Amen.

—Adapted from a prayer by Carol Penner



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## Peace and justice issues for Christians to consider during the 2005-06 Federal Election Campaign

Elections are occasions for citizens to express the values by which they want their nation governed. They are also opportunities for Christians to bring their faith commitments into the public arena, and to discern how God's will for the world can be furthered through the electoral process.

Elections provide opportunities for organizations like Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to offer insights for public policy makers. These insights flow from MCC's experience working among the poor, powerless and suffering people of the world.

The teachings of scripture have profound import for many issues in the public realm. What, for example, are the political implications of a Christian understanding that the earth and its resources belong to God (Psalm 24:1); that God's loving embrace extends to all the world (John 3:16); that God's people are called to love their neighbours and to care for the most vulnerable (Matthew 25:40); and that God's plan includes peace and economic sufficiency for all (Micah 4:3-4)?

As we prepare to elect a new federal government, we consider how faith informs our view of current issues. The following issues and questions are offered by MCC Canada for your consideration, based on MCC's programs, education, and advocacy for justice and peace.



1. Canada's commitment to **refugees** is most clearly demonstrated by the annual immigration levels. The 2006 levels for all immigrant categories has been increased to 250,000 but there is no mention of an increase for refugees sponsored or resettled from abroad, which has fallen far below the level of a decade ago. In addition, the signing of a new border agreement with the US last December (the Safe Third Country Agreement) has reduced the number of refugees admitted directly at our borders by 25 percent. In order to make up for these decreases, advocates recommend that the target for refugees resettled from abroad should be increased to make up for the decrease at the border. *In light of the increasing overall immigration levels, how will the parties ensure that refugee numbers increase correspondingly?*

2. A **home** is much more than a physical dwelling. It can also be a place of security, of welcome, and a first step in getting other elements of life under control. Yet 1.7 million Canadians were unable to find shelter that is adequate, suitable, and affordable. Those most affected include refugees, people who have been incarcerated, people living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, those living with mental health concerns, Aboriginal people, and low income Canadians. *What measures will your candidates take to help ensure that these groups can access appropriate housing?*

3. What should **Justice** mean to our politicians? Current policy discussions around crime advocate higher levels of incarceration and new laws, with little or no consideration for substantive victim and community needs. *With fewer than 50 percent of victims of abuse, assault, or theft reporting their victimization to the police and only \$2 million dedicated to meeting victim needs, what can be done by the Canadian government to meet the needs of victims? In comparison, how could the \$10 billion we spend be used more effectively?*

4. **International Development** continues to be a crucial issue. Some two billion people live in severe poverty. An estimated 30,000 die unnecessarily every day. In the year 2000, virtually all heads of governments committed themselves to reaching eight "Millennium Development Goals" by 2015. If this is to succeed, industrialized countries will have to increase aid, provide more debt relief, and do more to promote justice in international trade.

In 1994, Canada cut its budget on foreign aid substantially. Recently, Canada has committed itself to a gradual increase but, according to this new plan, Canada's aid will still not reach the widely accepted goal of .7 percent of gross national income by 2015.

On debt relief, Canada has been somewhat of a leader since the 1980s, but more needs to be done. Many countries suffer from terrible debt loads because of changes in international interest rates and uneven international commodity prices, and also from bad management of their economies. African governments have made deep cuts in expenditures on education, health and other basic needs just to service their debts.

A strong voice from Canada is needed in multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

On justice in trade, Canada has also taken positive steps but, again, much more is needed. A key problem is that in trade negotiations, poor countries are pressured to open their markets to products from richer countries, which in many cases, are heavily subsidized. A recent UN report says that donor countries "spend \$1 billion a year aiding agriculture in developing countries and \$1 billion a day on domestic subsidies that undermine the world's poorest farmers."

*What do the parties envision as Canada's role in international development? In line with the "Make Poverty History" campaign, what will Canada's political parties do to increase aid, provide more debt relief to hard-pressed developing nations, and promote justice in international trade?*

5. Work on issues of **international peace** is also urgent. On nuclear weapons, the threat of a nuclear war no longer manifests itself as it did in the Cold War years. Nuclear disarmament is, however, stalled and the number of countries with nuclear weapons is increasing. This should be addressed and the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Canada has always supported, should not be allowed to collapse.

On small arms, (which claim 500,000 lives each year, most of them in Africa) Canada should make every effort to ensure the success of the 2006 UN conference to review and strengthen the 2001 "Programme of Action" to control these "instruments of death". On Canada's arms exports, which rank as the sixth largest in the world, Canada should review its 1986 export regulations to ensure that export decisions are made, not only as trade issues, but also in light of our foreign policy ideals. Further, to limit proliferation in the developing world, Canada should press for an international treaty on the transfer of conventional weapons.

On security spending, Canada spends four times more on defense than on development aid. Smaller still is our spending on diplomacy, even though it can do much in terms of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

*What are the most effective ways of promoting our own security and that of our sisters and brothers the world over?*

6. **Water** is life. Its multiple uses offer us spiritual, physical, economic, and social sustenance. Perhaps because of its importance in so many aspects of our lives, water is often the subject of conflict. *How can the use of Canada's waterways balance indigenous uses of land and water with the demands for hydroelectricity? How can we ensure good quality drinking water for all Canadians? How will Canada's rich water resources be managed as the market for water continues to grow? How should we respond to the needs around the world for safe and accessible water?* Ask your candidates what concerns him or her about water in Canada and around the world.