



Federal Election Kit

2011



The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

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Introduction

What do you care about? Is it climate change? Peace? Refugee rights? Regardless of which issues matter most in your life, the 2011 election will have an enormous impact on them. Now more than ever, all faith voices need to be heard in the political process. It is our right and duty to participate in forming a government that reflects the will of its people.

Your vote will make a difference. Matters of Aboriginal rights, food security, and criminal justice are not isolated to far-off lands, but are concerns for every community in our country. The more we know about how our faith and values can influence government policies, the more we have a chance to transform our own and others' lives for the common good. We witness to our faith in a just and life-giving God in the public arena by advocating for justice and peace. This is our faith and our vote.

“Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (Isaiah 58:1)

The United Church has been active in the public arena—including elections—since its earliest days. The founders of this church believed that ours is a living faith and witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ that is expressed in active, thoughtful involvement in society. It is important for people of faith to bring forward the consistent message that every individual must be cherished and included, and that the Earth must be carefully tended. Our combined voices have greater impact when we work together.

Our non-partisan strategy aims to raise awareness about these issues and to build relationships around them with politicians in communities across Canada. This kit provides information based on United Church policies and the church's ongoing work with Canadian and global partners.

Share what you and your congregation decide to do in this election season by e-mailing the national United Church General Council Office c/o Barbara Lloyd, Program Coordinator for Public Witness (blloyd@united-church.ca).

Making Election Connections

a) Worship

The United Church of Canada was built on the assumption that faith communities had a role to play in shaping society and developing the common good. The measure is the same in the congregation and in the world: the discipleship of Jesus Christ, which is to say love of God and neighbour. In today's pluralistic Canadian society, the public square is represented by a variety of interests: business, labour, the media, and civil society organizations, all engaged in a civil discourse to shape the common good. Faith communities, whether they choose to participate or not, are part of this public space.

The Western principle of the separation of church and state is usually misunderstood. Freedom of religion prevents the state from favouring one religion over another, but was never meant to deny religion a voice in a public forum. In the same way, our witness can never be used on behalf of or in opposition to any specific candidate or party platform. The church cannot be a chaplain for one party or a cheerleader for a specific candidate. We must be political, but not partisan; principled, but not ideological.

The public, non-partisan witness of the church in asking questions of all candidates, and in sermons at the time of an election, is an appropriate and indeed integral aspect of the role of the church in society. Faithful public witness gives concrete expression to Christ's way of love and justice.

Preaching is a challenging business. It is no easy task to form congregations that remain committed to Christian discipleship rather than preoccupied by party politics during an election. So there may be no more risky time than preaching during an election to fulfill the church's role in encouraging questions and challenging narrow-minded ideological views. Generally, it is always helpful to remind people of global concerns that are forgotten during a national election, or domestic concerns that have little public profile. It's always a challenge to question policy proposals that we might benefit from, like the call for lower taxes.

Here are some questions and suggestions that you might want to use within a worship service. They reflect principles and values from the ministry and teaching of Jesus:

1. What are the responsibilities of families, community organizations, markets, and government? How can these elements of society work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, care for the Earth, and overcome injustice?
2. In evaluating the promises of the various parties there are three things to consider. Are they economically just? Are they inclusive—who is left out? Are they environmentally sustainable?
3. Encourage everyone to vote. Ensure transportation for the elderly and follow suggestions below for the participation of youth and children.
4. Invite the neighbourhood association and other faith communities to jointly sponsor an all candidates meeting. Ensure the attendance of all candidates by joining with other civic-minded groups in your community and starting the process early. For more suggestions for organizing an all candidates meeting, please see the section below in this election kit.
5. Include people seeking public office in the prayers of the people every week. When we share our hopes and desires in prayer, we are speaking from the heart about the society we want to build.

Of course, the prophetic ministry outlined above is not just for election time. Our cause is justice for the marginalized; peace, by defending everyone's human dignity; and respect for the Earth, not a particular party or candidate. As disciples of Christ, we are called to carry these values into the public arena and all debates and choices over the values, vision, and leaders that will guide our country.

b) Study Groups

Use this election kit as a resource for two or three study sessions during the election period. By studying the Questions for Candidates section (perhaps 2 or 3 areas of local interest per session), participants will learn more about current issues in which the United Church and its partners are engaged. Participants will also become familiar with the United Church social policies that undergird public statements, actions, and advocacy campaigns. This can be a rich time for discussion and consideration of different points of view.

c) Youth and Children's Ministries

Just because some youth are not old enough to vote doesn't mean they can't be involved in an election. Throughout history, politicians have looked to the voices of youth as a source of inspiration. Youth groups can get together to engage their congregation and community in the issues that are important to them.

Youth can be involved by

- organizing a documentary film series at your church that deals with important issues for youth
- participating in and helping organize an all candidates meeting at your church
- volunteering to provide child care or walk people's dogs while they vote
- watching televised debates together and discussing issues of faith and the common good

Youth leaders and Sunday school teachers can lead their group or class in a discussion about the importance of elections.

Sample questions:

- Why is voting important? Why do you think some people don't vote?
- Who is running for office and what do you think they stand for?
- What things do people need to live a good life? How can governments respond to some of these needs?
- How do the teachings of Jesus help us to think about the issues being discussed in this election?

All Candidates Meetings

Organizing an All Candidates Meetings

One of the best ways for a congregation to promote an engaged democracy is to organize an all candidates meeting. By doing so, the church sends the community the message that public debate matters and that the church has an interest in the issues discussed. It is an opportunity for the church to take leadership in the public arena.

Many churches organize and hold all candidates meetings during election campaigns. These are non-partisan events where all the candidates in a riding are invited to share their views and answer questions from the audience. This provides helpful information to church members and the local community about where the local candidates stand on issues of concern. Here are the steps to organizing an all candidates meeting:

1. Start early to make sure you have the candidates committed to your event.
2. Consider partnering with other community organizations. Co-operating to host an all candidates meeting allows you to share costs, access a broader group of voters, and build partnerships.
3. Choose a place, possible dates, and a time for the meeting. Give the candidates a range of dates so that you can schedule for a day that works for everyone.
4. Plan the format of your meeting:
 - Decide how long each candidate will have for their opening remarks (usually 5 minutes). Choose the order in which candidates will speak (e.g., alphabetical order by last name).
 - Decide how long the question and answer period will be (such as one hour), and how long to give for each question (whether asked by the moderator or directly from the audience) and answer (e.g., 30 seconds for each question, one minute for the answer).
 - Plan how much time the candidates will be given for closing remarks (usually three minutes). Choose the order in which the candidates will give their closing remarks (such as in reverse order from the opening remarks).
5. Choose an interesting and engaging debate moderator. Ask the audience to submit questions to the moderator in advance. The moderator will introduce the candidates and moderate questions from the audience. This person will explain the guidelines and schedule for the meeting and make sure the rules are being followed. The moderator must remain neutral and not get involved in the questions or answers. No personal attacks will be allowed.
6. Choose a time-keeper to monitor and notify the candidates and questioners of the time limits. This person will have a stopwatch and gavel or bell. The time-keeper will notify candidates one minute before the end of the time limit for opening and closing remarks.
7. Send an invitation to the candidates, asking them to participate. Send them the guidelines and format for the evening. Ask them to provide a short biography to help the moderator introduce them. Let them know there will be tables available for their literature. (If a candidate says “no” or does not return calls, consider having an empty chair or name card on display, and ask the moderator to note the absence of the candidate.)

8. Advertise your meeting. Use the local media, e-mail lists, websites, networks, and partners. Send out the information more than once. Remind the media directly. Give the date, time, and location of the meeting, and the names and party affiliation of the candidates. Inform your congregation of the meeting through a bulletin insert, e-mail, and/or announcement.
9. Set up for your meeting:
 - Tables, chairs, and microphones should be set up at the front of the room for the candidates and moderator, with clearly visible signs indicating their name and political party. Provide water for the candidates.
 - Have at least one floor microphone for the audience.
 - Provide tables in the hall or foyer for each candidate's literature.
10. After the meeting:
 - Team debriefing—review and assess the successes and challenges of organizing an all candidates meeting and how you efforts could be improved next time.
 - Prepare a follow-up media release. Include quotations and a media contact.
 - Send thank-you letters to candidate, organizers, partners, and any other contributors.

Attending an All Candidates Meeting

The sample questions that follow are based on immediate public policy concerns of The United Church of Canada. They reflect the holistic mission of the United Church to build sustainable and just communities, locally and globally. If you wish to raise questions such as these at candidates meetings, choose a topic you personally feel passionate about. Write out your question ahead of time to stay focused and to the point. Ask all candidates to respond to your concern.

Before the meeting begins, look for the location of the floor microphones and sit as close to them as possible. When question period is announced, people will move quickly toward the microphones. Often you will only have one opportunity to ask a question. If you can ask two, you might ask about a local concern and a global concern.

If you are attending an all candidates meeting as a member of a group, such as a congregational social justice committee, plan your strategy beforehand. Divide key questions among different members of your group according to your interests, and consider assigning follow-up questions to different group members.

Always be polite. The goal is not to embarrass the candidates, but to raise specific peace and justice concerns and get them on the political agenda. Bring easy-to-read literature about your issue along to distribute to all the candidates.

Questions for Candidates

Aboriginal Justice

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Canadians, through the federal 2008 Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools and the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are seeking to create right relationships with Indigenous peoples. In 2007 the United Nations adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a means of recognizing historic injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples and moving into right relations.

On November 12, 2010, the Government of Canada endorsed that UN Declaration. Indigenous peoples and groups across Canada are calling for implementation of the UN Declaration to protect Indigenous peoples' rights, including rights to lands, territories and resources, livelihoods, health and self-determination. See the KAIROS website for more detail: www.kairoscanada.org/en/dignity-rights/indigenous-rights/undrip.

Sisters in Spirit

The Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit initiative has played a crucial role in building public awareness and advancing the necessary solutions to uphold the rights and safety of Indigenous women and girls.

The Native Women's Association of Canada has promoted vigils across Canada to honour the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls over the last five years. Sisters in Spirit vigils have become a genuine national movement, with events in more than 80 cities and communities.

These vigils were part of work that included vital research, public education, police and government engagement, and support to affected families. Sisters in Spirit has played a crucial role in building public awareness and advancing the necessary solutions to uphold the rights and safety of Indigenous women and girls. The federal government has publicly acknowledged the importance of these vigils and the other vital research and advocacy work carried out by Sisters in Spirit.

There is currently no secure funding in place to ensure the continuation of this initiative. The federal government must make a clear public commitment to

- supporting the ongoing work of the Sisters in Spirit Initiative
- providing sustained, long-term funding for research and advocacy led by Indigenous women
- ensuring that Indigenous peoples' organizations, including Indigenous women's organizations, are centrally involved in the identification and delivery of effective solutions to address the high rates of violence faced by First Nations, Inuit & Métis women
- working with Indigenous women's organizations to develop a comprehensive national plan of action consistent with the scale and severity of violence faced by Indigenous women and girls.

See the KAIROS website for more detail: www.kairoscanada.org/en/solidarity/indigenous-rights/sisters-in-spirit.

First Nations Children

First Nations children are severely over-represented in child welfare care. There are more First Nations children in child welfare care in Canada than at the height of residential schools.

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada states that First Nations children come to the attention of child welfare authorities for different reasons than non-Indigenous children. First Nations are not more likely to experience abuse than non-Indigenous children. First Nations children are more likely to be reported for neglect, which is driven by poverty, poor housing, and caregiver substance misuse.

Provincial child welfare laws apply both on- and off-reserve. Provinces fund child welfare for children off-reserve, but expect the federal government to fund it on-reserve. If the federal government does not fund services adequately, the provinces typically do not top up the funding levels. This results in a two-tiered child welfare system, where First Nations children on reserves get less funding for child welfare than other children.

The Auditor General of Canada (2008) and Standing Committee on Public Accounts (2009) confirm that federal government funding for child welfare services on reserves is inadequate and must be changed in order to ensure First Nations children and families on reserves receive comparable and culturally-based child welfare services. See the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada site for more detail: www.fncfcs.com/fnwitness.

Questions You Can Ask—Aboriginal Justice

- How would you and your party work collaboratively with Indigenous peoples in Canada toward the full and effective implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?
- How will you and your political party work to secure federal funding commitments—as indicated in the March 2010 Speech from the Throne—to support the ongoing work of the Sisters in Spirit initiative on the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women?
- How will you and your political party work to ensure that First Nations children and families on reserves receive equitable and culturally based child welfare?

Climate Change and Energy

Our world is in crisis. Human-induced climate change and conflicts over oil are killing people and the planet. Emissions from the burning and overuse of fossil fuels cause global climate change, deepen human rights abuses, create conflict, and cause economic inequality. Canadians are looking for alternatives to reduce our use of fossil fuels, and re-energize ourselves, our country, and our world.

Climate Change

- It is widely accepted that in order to prevent catastrophically dangerous climate change, the global average temperature increase above pre-industrial levels must be kept well below 2 degrees Celsius. Scientists warn that optimal levels are 1.5°C, and 350 parts per million of CO₂.
- In order to achieve this, global greenhouse gas emissions must be stabilized and begin to decline before 2015, and be further reduced to less than 50 percent of 1990 levels by 2050. This means that developed countries, including Canada, must reduce emissions 25 to 40 percent by 2020, and 80 to 95 percent by 2050.
- For churches in Canada and around the world, climate change is an issue of international justice and intergenerational justice. It is a moral and ethical issue.

Global warming is an unparalleled and unequivocal human-made environmental crisis. Around the world we are already witnessing numerous climate change impacts, including ice-loss, drought, flooding, extreme weather events, and forest fires. In Canada, we have seen the melting of glaciers, the dramatic loss of sea-ice in the Arctic, loss of permafrost, and the destruction of forests by the pine beetle. Ocean acidification is adding to the problem at an alarming rate. Without immediate action, long-term impacts such as rising sea levels will result in millions of environmental uprooted people and the destruction of crops that could lead to world-wide famine.

Especially hard hit will be developing nations whose geography leaves them more vulnerable to climate change and who lack resources to be able to adapt to the effects of global warming. Future generations of humans as well as other species will also suffer severely from the climate changes precipitated by the industrial, transportation, and consumer practices of this generation.

Energy

- There should be no subsidies for the oil industry, especially when these subsidies contribute to increasing greenhouse gas emissions or assist oil companies operating in areas of conflict and human rights abuse.
- There must be a change toward investing in sustainable renewable energy alternatives.

The Government of Canada provides around a billion dollars in tax breaks every year to companies producing fossil fuels, who are among the richest in the country. As the world moves toward a clean energy economy, Canada's ongoing tax breaks and subsidies to the fossil fuel sector are taking us in the wrong direction.

In an era of fiscal constraint, hundreds of millions of dollars in savings could go a long way toward meeting pressing social and environmental needs in Canada and abroad. By ending fossil fuel tax breaks, Canada would also be meeting the commitment our government made in Pittsburgh in 2009, along with other G20 leaders, to phase out subsidies and tax breaks to companies producing oil, gas, and coal.

By subsidizing the companies that produce fossil fuels, the Government of Canada is encouraging greater production and facilitating the rapid expansion of the oil sands, Canada's fastest-growing source of greenhouse gas pollution. Globally, artificially low costs of fossil fuels have been shown to encourage wasteful consumption, distort energy markets, and allow for increased greenhouse gas pollution, thereby fuelling the climate crisis. Subsidizing oil extraction also makes investments in oil more attractive

compared to cleaner alternatives like wind and solar power, thereby further tying our economies to fossil fuels.

Between government, World Bank, and Export Development Fund subsidies, five cents of every dollar of oil profit made in Canada is public money. One cent of every dollar of profit made by private oil companies is public money. And oil and gas exploration around the world continues to be propped up by public money.

Meanwhile, fragile ecosystems are placed at risk and Indigenous rights are violated from Ecuador to Indonesia to Canada. Conflicts rage over oil from Colombia to Nigeria to Iraq and greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, threatening vulnerable peoples and ecosystems the world over.

Questions You Can Ask—Climate Change and Energy

- *Climate Change:* How much will your party's plan reduce global warming emissions, and by when?
- Will your party support a legislated cap on Canada's total emissions that declines over time, and an economy-wide price on carbon emissions through taxes, a cap and trade system, or a combination of the two?
- Will your party support and give leadership to a strong global agreement on climate change to be concluded in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011, and accept a legally binding target to cut Canada's net annual greenhouse gas emissions to 450 megatonnes or less by 2020 in line with international scientific recommendations?

- *Energy:* What will your party do to build a just and sustainable energy economy? For example, will you implement world-class emissions and efficiency standards for industry, vehicles, and buildings?
- How much will you invest in renewable energies for heat and power, public transit, and energy retrofits for buildings, particularly for low-income housing?
- Will you and your party address domestic and international policies supporting the fossil fuel industry (such as subsidies and diplomatic interventions) that contribute to ecological destruction, human rights abuses, and conflict around the world?
- Will your party eliminate tax breaks for oil coal and gas companies?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Socially Responsible Investment (SRI)

- The recent financial crisis, along with climate and environmental crises, shows the need for a new economic model based on sustainability, equity, justice, inclusion, and corporate accountability.
- The criteria for socially responsible investment (SRI) should include the integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues.
- When Canadian corporations go abroad, there are no mandatory Canadian accountability mechanisms to ensure that they abide by international human rights and environmental standards.
- Civil society and business members of the National Roundtable on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the Canadian Extractive Sector called for mandatory human rights and environmental standards, including the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).
- The response of the Canadian government to the recommendations of the March 2007 Final Report of the CSR Roundtables is highly inadequate, as it contains no possibility of sanctions for companies not complying with voluntary guidelines.

Increasingly the impacts of the recent global financial crisis, along with climate and environmental crises, point us toward the need for a new economic model where the creation of wealth is based on sustainability, equity, justice, and inclusion. As irresponsibility and unaccountability of the financial sector was a prime cause of the crisis, the clear need is for strong regulation, corporate accountability, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Particularly regarding the environmental and social costs of the current inadequate economic system, there is a growing consensus among civil society, asset managers, institutional investors, and governments that new indicators are needed to measure economic well-being. The criteria for socially responsible investment (SRI) should include the integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues. These should be legislated in the understanding and requirements of “fiduciary responsibility” for pension funds and institutional investors.

Most Canadians are aware that extractive industries, including mining, oil, and gas, can have negative impacts on the environment, community development, Indigenous peoples, and workers’ rights. When Canadian corporations go abroad, there are no effective Canadian accountability mechanisms to ensure that they abide by international human rights and environmental standards. Many companies cut corners to lower their costs and increase short-term profits, operating in ways that would be illegal or unacceptable at home.

Civil society and business members of the National Roundtable on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the Canadian Extractive Sector called for mandatory human rights and environmental standards, including the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), for Canadian extractive companies operating overseas, and credible enforcement mechanisms to hold them accountable. As Canada has now signed the International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it is urgent and necessary to implement its provisions. The response of the Canadian government to the recommendations of the March 2007 Final Report of the CSR Roundtables is highly inadequate, as it contains no mandatory complaints mechanism and no possibility of sanctions for companies not complying with voluntary guidelines. The dispute resolution process, established under the Office of the Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Counsellor, is a voluntary soft path that allows Canadian mining, oil, or gas project-affected communities, groups, or individuals to bring a request before the office; Canadian companies that believe they are the subject of unfounded allegations may also bring a request. The focus is on promoting good performance standards, without enforcement capability.

The defeat of Bill C300, which was an attempt to codify into regulation a number of key recommendations on accountability for Canadian extractive companies operating in developing countries, means that there remains the need for further legislation to implement the Final Report of the CSR Roundtables. A new Bill that regulates Canadian government agencies with respect to Canadian extractive companies operating in developing countries, creates eligibility criteria for political and financial support from the Canadian government, defines the guidelines that articulate corporate accountability standards, and creates a complaints mechanism is urgently needed.

Questions You Can Ask—CSR and SRI

- How will your government regulate the financial sector and ensure compliance with socially responsible investing (SRI) and corporate social responsibility (CSR)?
- Will your government ensure that environmental, social, and governance issues (ESG) are included and supported in the legal requirements of “fiduciary responsibility” by all investors, including pension boards and institutional investors?
- Will you and your government support mandatory regulatory measures to ensure the compliance of Canadian companies to international human rights and environmental obligations when they operate overseas?
- Will your government ensure that the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) for communities who will be affected by extractive sector projects is incorporated into CSR standards for Canadian companies?

Criminal Justice and Corrections

- The United Church believes that the increased investment in prisons and the emphasis on greater imprisonment makes neither human nor economic sense. Public safety is enhanced through healthy communities that support individuals and families.
- We know that 78 percent of inmates are non-violent and at least half haven't even been convicted. Many repeat offenders are mentally ill and/or addicted, with the majority not classified as high risk. These offenders require treatment, health services, educational, employment, and housing interventions—all less expensive and more humane than incarceration.
- We know that 75 percent a day is saved when, instead of remand to custody, monitored, supportive housing and supervision in the community is provided.

The treatment of offenders has long been an important issue for The United Church of Canada. Over the years, our social policies have reflected our intentions as Christians to work to build a more humane society. We place emphasis on God's holistic vision of restorative justice as a way to rebuild critical, life-giving relationships between the offender, the victims, and the broken communities involved.

The Canadian government has recently made commitments to increase investment in the building of new prisons at a time when crime rates continue to decrease. At the same time, funding cuts have continued to social programs and services.

The United Church and its partner the Church Council on Justice and Corrections believe that increasing levels of incarceration of marginalized people is counter-productive and undermines human dignity in our society.

Questions You Can Ask—Criminal Justice and Corrections

- Given that the majority of inmates are non-violent, what will you and your party do to provide humane, effective, and economically responsible programs and services that will help to rebuild relationships and communities?
- How will you and your party reform the present system of corrections to promote restorative rather than retributive justice?

Democracy

Since 2006 the Government of Canada has systematically undermined democratic institutions and practices, and has eroded the protection of free speech and other fundamental human rights. It has deliberately set out to silence the voices of organizations or individuals who raise concerns about government policies or disagree with government positions. It has weakened Canada's international standing as a leader in human rights. The impact and consequences for the health of democracy, freedom of expression, and the state of human rights protection in Canada are unparalleled.

In 2010, the United Church joined the Voices-Voix campaign to call on the Government of Canada to do the following (quoted directly from the Declaration of the Voices Coalition):

1. Respect the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Therefore,
 - Cease to deliberately target those who speak out against government policies with the use of smear campaigns, dismissal from employment, funding cuts, blatant and subtle threats, regulations designed to obfuscate and prevent public debate, and other acts of bad faith.
 - Commit to parliamentary hearings that address widespread concerns about the loss of democratic space in Canada.
2. Act in accordance with Canada's democratic traditions and values. Therefore,
 - Actively promote and support political diversity and public debate, instead of avoiding it.
 - Recognize and respect the vital role, expertise, and necessary independence of civil society organizations.
3. Be transparent. Therefore,
 - Demonstrate full respect for and accountability to the Parliament of Canada and the Canadian People.
 - Allow complete access for Canadians to information regarding public policy decisions.
 - Base funding decisions for government and civil society organizations on fair standards and democratic principles, instead of partisan agendas.

According to the Voices coalition:

Organizations that disagree with the Government's positions and/or engage in advocacy have had their mandates criticized and their funding threatened, reduced or discontinued. In many cases these organizations have a long history of service to the public, such as KAIROS, MATCH International, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Alternatives, the Canadian Arab Federation, the Climate Action Network, the National Association of Women and the Law and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. The Court Challenges Program, which funded many human-rights cases, has had its mandate drastically reduced. The Women's Program at Status of Women Canada now effectively excludes many women's groups that conduct research and work to advance women's equality and participation in society.

Further, an unprecedented level of secrecy now shrouds a long list of government activities and decisions, making it increasingly difficult for the public to hold the government accountable across a range of fundamentally important issues. Diplomats, leaders of governmental agencies, public officials, senior military officers, and scientists at Environment

Canada are being pressured to obey a law of silence and censored from communicating to the Canadian public.

The Government has taken positions domestically and within such key international bodies as the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council that undermine essential human rights, environmental and other global principles. The government's actions have set back or weakened crucial international human rights initiatives such as a worldwide moratorium on executions, more effective protection of human rights in the Middle East, protection against torture, the rights of gays and lesbians, the rights of women, and the rights of children. Among many distressing examples, since the Supreme Court of Canada found that Canada is responsible for continuing violations of Omar Khadr's human rights, the government's response has been grossly inadequate and a source of shame on the world stage.

In this context, Canadian democratic institutions, civil society organizations, and human rights defenders have been weakened, marginalized and silenced. Their capacity to monitor and safeguard the respect for democracy, free speech, and other rights is in jeopardy. The quality and health of democratic life in Canada is under serious threat.

See the Voices-Voix website for more detail: www.voices-voix.ca.

Questions You Can Ask—Democracy

- How will you and your party open democratic space by encouraging freedom of opinion and expression for individuals as well as for civil society organizations?
- What steps will you and your party take to demonstrate full respect for and accountability to the Parliament of Canada and the Canadian people?

Food

Developing a comprehensive global food policy

- The United Church welcomes recent Canadian government efforts to develop policies to improve food security in Canada and globally. If they are to succeed, Canada's domestic and international policies must be linked with and be consistent with one another.
- National and global food security is inseparable. Decisions taken in Canada can have negative or positive impacts on our efforts to improve food security in other countries. The values and policies we promote abroad can directly affect the policies we pursue within our borders. A national food policy must therefore include a well-developed international component that acknowledges the links among issues, and takes account of Canada's international goals, commitments, and obligations.
- Policy integration within the Government of Canada will be critical. Food and agricultural issues touch many aspects of government responsibility, including agriculture, health, environment, transport, trade, finance, and international cooperation. To develop and implement an effective Canadian policy it will be essential for these departments to work toward common objectives, not at cross-purposes.

Background: Global food security

In 2011, nearly one-sixth of the world's population is chronically hungry. After three decades of slow progress, global hunger increased sharply in 2008, when more than a billion people lived with chronic hunger. Since then the figure has dropped to an estimated 925 million: an improvement, but still unacceptably high. Millennium Development Goal #1 (to cut poverty and hunger by half between 1990 and 2015) is seriously off track.

The food crisis of 2007–2008 pushed food prices beyond the reach of many poor people, and dramatically increased the number of hungry people in the world. Causes of the crisis include a rapid increase in the use of grains and oilseeds for bio-fuels and speculation in food commodities, but its roots can be traced to the previous two decades, when prices fell below the cost of production, crippling agricultural production in many countries. In addition, the impacts of climate change have already begun to disrupt food production and livelihoods, exacerbating the crisis. The crisis of 2007–2008 also accelerated a wave of large-scale land acquisitions in developing countries by foreign investors seeking more reliable food sources and the profits that follow. Such “land grabs” are now coming into direct competition with local populations for whom land is a critical source of food and livelihoods.

Canada's impact on global food security

Canada can and should play a strong and positive role in the struggle against global food insecurity. In a globalized economy, Canadian policies on agriculture and food are affected by, and have an impact on, the rest of the world. Our food exports, our trade and investment relationships, our foreign aid (both short-term food aid and long-term development assistance), and our role in multilateral processes may all have an impact on global hunger. In 2009, Canada joined with other G8 countries in the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative, a substantial re-investment in agriculture and food intended to tackle global hunger. CIDA adopted a new Food Security Strategy, pledged to double Canada's aid for agriculture, and targeted smallholder farmers in the poorest countries. This strategy is an important element in a coherent, whole-of-government approach to global food security.

Canada is a major exporter of food, including grain, oilseeds, and meat products. These food exports can contribute to greater food security in food-insecure countries, but only if Canadian policies are carefully constructed so that our exports do not undermine local producers and the markets they rely on for their survival. Canadian trade and investment policies can have a significant impact on global food security, and can undermine the Government of Canada's own global food security objectives. There is no guiding

Canadian policy framework to govern Canada's relations with the numerous multilateral institutions that deal with food and agriculture. CIDA relates to the UN's World Food Programme, the Food Aid Convention, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research; Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) relates to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization; AAFC and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The lack of coherence across these departments weakens Canada's influence, and can lead to conflicting messages and actions abroad.

Canada is a world leader in food aid, with the highest per-capita contributions to the Food Aid Convention. It is currently playing a key role in a process to renegotiate the Convention. This will provide an opportunity for Canada to promote the integration of the Convention into the emerging global food security architecture. If successful, it will also make food assistance more responsive to the needs of undernourished people, while continuing to provide a predictable minimum level of global food assistance.

Policy makers should also remember that the human right to food is recognized internationally as a fundamental human right, which all "States Parties" to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including Canada, have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill. Canada's Official Development Assistance Accountability Act lays out three conditions to govern Canada's official development assistance (ODA). It states that all Canadian ODA must:

1. contribute to poverty reduction;
2. take into account the perspectives of the poor; and
3. be consistent with international human rights standards.

In developing a national policy on food security, Canada must therefore consider its responsibilities with respect to the human right to food.

*—adapted from the Nov. 2010 policy brief
"A Comprehensive National Food Policy: Strengthening Canada's Place in the World"
by the Food Security Policy Group*

Questions You Can Ask—Food

- What will you and your party specifically do to support aid for agriculture in the world's developing countries?
- What will your party do to ensure that international trade agreements actually work for small-scale farmers in developing countries?
- What will your party do to ensure that international financial institutions help rather than hinder the struggle to meet the Millennium Development Goals?
- What will your party do to ensure a whole-of-government approach as a means of improving the coherence and effectiveness of Canadian policy to improve global food security?

Health Care

- In negotiations on the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), the government needs to negotiate a special allowance for Canada's health care system that guarantees that "nothing in the CETA shall be construed to apply to measures adopted or maintained by a party in relation to the health sector or public health insurance." (Canadian Health Coalition)
- In the CETA negotiations, the government should refuse to lengthen the period of its monopoly drug patents that delay the availability of lower priced drugs.

In the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, the most recent trade agreement being negotiated by Canada, the European Union is demanding that Canada weaken NAFTA protections that shield Canada's health care system from international trade deals.

As well, on behalf of big pharmaceutical companies, Europe is pushing Canada to lengthen the period of its monopoly drug patents and delay the availability of lower priced drugs. The proposed changes would add \$3 billion annually to Canada's drug bill. Canada's high prescription drug prices are already a barrier to medically necessary medicines for millions of Canadians, and CETA will only make the situation worse.

In addressing these challenges, the United Church encourages members and politicians to reflect critically on who stands to benefit and who stands to lose if the health care system is allowed to be driven by market forces.

Canadians want the public health care system protected and improved, not traded away. The United Church believes that the values of solidarity, community, equity, compassion, and efficiency must hold sway as we shape our future vision for health care in Canada. (United Church submission to the Romanow Commission, 2002).

Questions You Can Ask—Health Care

- In the CETA negotiations, how would your party protect the Canadian health care system?
- How would you and your party work to break the monopolies of big pharmaceutical companies so that Canadians, and others around the world, could benefit from lower prescription drug prices?

Official Development Assistance (ODA)

Do Canadians hope to be viewed as effective partners in the global struggle to address the underlying causes of poverty and injustice?

For decades wealthy nations have pledged to contribute 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) as Official Development Assistance. Canada has repeatedly reaffirmed that pledge, but it has never met that commitment. Canada, despite having a relatively stable economy, currently ranks at *18th among 23 donor countries* with its ODA for the 2011–12 fiscal year budgeted at a mere 0.32% of Canadian GNI. The budgeted amount of \$5.44 billion is slated to be frozen, which will cause Canada’s ODA performance ratio to fall to an expected 0.28% of GNI.

There is also criticism that the inclusion of many expenditures in measuring ODA skews the picture of what is actually spent to the end of achieving equality and justice for those who are marginalized in the global South. More critical thought needs to be brought to the consideration of the types of assistance included as ODA expenditures. In recent years, the training of police and army personnel in places such as Afghanistan and Haiti have been included. More spending on humanitarian assistance (emergency relief) has distorted the relatively small expenditures on ODA to the extent that addressing the underlying causes of poverty; the promotion of peace and human rights seem to be an afterthought.

The 40th General Council of The United Church of Canada (Kelowna, 2009) called on the General Council to “urge our national government to immediately increase its Official Development Assistance, and to publicly commit to a firm timetable for meeting the 0.7% goal by 2015.” This call has been repeatedly voiced by dozens of non-governmental and faith-based organizations.

Despite promises by leaders of various political parties to increase ODA and commit to a timeline to meet the 0.7 % of GNI goal, there is inconsistent movement in this direction.

Questions You Can Ask—ODA

- Would you and your party commit to increasing aid, or Official Development Assistance, expenditures to meet the UN target of 0.7% of the Gross National Income (GNI)? If so, by what date do you commit to meeting this goal?
- How would you and your party go about changing Canada’s poor track record regarding ODA? (presently ranked 18 out of 23 countries)
- How would you and your party ensure that increases to international aid spending do not simply mean cuts to related budget items, such as existing poverty reduction programming and financing to address climate change?
- Canada has excellent new legislation, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Accountability Act, that states that Canada’s ODA must 1) contribute to poverty reduction; 2) take account of the perspectives of the poor; and 3) be consistent with international human rights and standards. How would you and your party propose to ensure that the ODA Accountability Act is rigorously implemented?

Peace in Palestine/Israel

- Canada has demonstrated double standards with its uncritical support of the Israeli government's acts of violence against civilians, while singling out the Palestinian government for censure for acts of violence against civilians.
- In voting against resolutions of the United Nations Human Rights Council condemning Israel's violations of Palestinian human rights, Canada has also failed to live up to its obligations to uphold respect for international human rights and humanitarian law.

Canada has historically supported a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on established International Humanitarian Law, and as required by United Nations resolutions. United Nations resolutions require that Israel end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories and dismantle all settlements in the occupied territories. Canada should play a constructive role in promoting a negotiated, just peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority that ensures respect for human rights and international law, addresses the security concerns of both the State of Israel and the future Palestinian State, and supports the economic viability of a Palestinian State and the State of Israel.

However, over the past four years, there has been marked shift in Canada's long-standing approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that raises grave concerns about Canada's commitment to international legal norms and to being an honest broker for peace. In January 2006, after supporting democratic elections in Palestine that were widely acknowledged to be free and fair, Canada then rejected the Palestinian people's democratic choice and was the first country in the international community to impose economic and political sanctions on an occupied people. This ongoing siege has exacerbated poverty and despair among Palestinians and has led to a humanitarian disaster, particularly for the people living in the Gaza Strip. Canada has repeatedly voted against UN resolutions in recent years calling for both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to abide by their obligations under International Law.

Questions You Can Ask—Peace in Palestine/Israel

- Will you and your party continue to support United Nations resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which are based on established International Humanitarian Law, in order to secure a just resolution to the conflict?
- Will you and your party live up to Canada's obligations to uphold International Humanitarian Law by condemning acts of violence against civilians by both sides?
- Will you and your party play a constructive role in promoting a negotiated and just peace agreement between Israel and Palestine by bringing all parties concerned to the table?

Poverty

- Single parents, Indigenous peoples, new immigrants, people with disabilities, and older adults experience unacceptably high rates of poverty. 42 percent of urban Indigenous people live in poverty. 65 percent of new immigrants experience poverty sometime during their first 10 years in Canada. In 2005, 788,000 Canadian children lived in poverty. 38 percent of families headed by a single parent live in poverty.
- At the same time, incomes of senior managers in Canada increased 86 percent between 1993 and 2003, while incomes of people in low-skilled jobs increased by only 13 percent.
- Churches and other faith and social justice groups must continue to raise their voices against poverty and for a just economy. The Dignity for All campaign (www.dignityforall.ca) and the KAIROS Week of Action—Connecting Climate Justice and Global Poverty (www.kairoscanada.org) supports this public witness.

Globally, a vast economic gap divides those living in the North and South. In Canada, too, the gap between rich and poor is widening. Free trade, globalization, and climate change have made these trends worse, not better. In Canada, some groups are feeling the effects more than others. In June 2010 Canada hosted the G8/G20 combined leaders summit. At this 2/3 point in their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, wealthy countries must be held accountable to their promises to cut global poverty in half by 2015.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (the HUMA Committee) has released its final report “Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty in Canada”:
www2.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/Committee/403/HUMA/Reports/RP4770921/humarp07/humarp07-e.pdf

Questions You Can Ask—Poverty

- Will you and your party support the HUMA Committee Report recommendations for ending poverty in Canada by recommending goals, timelines, and investments in family benefits, affordable housing, early learning and child care, and good jobs at living wages?
- Will you and your party call for accountable international financial institutions, just trading relationships that respect human rights and the right to food, and the cancellation of illegitimate debts?
- Will you and your party honour Canada’s commitment to the Millennium Development Goals especially regarding measures to cut global poverty in half by 2015?
See also: Trade; Aboriginal Justice.

Refugees and Immigration

- Canada's processing of immigrants and refugees is too slow in many parts of the world, but it is slowest of all in Africa. Refugee applicants in Africa have to wait three to five years for an interview, including those who have private sponsors in Canada who are ready to support them. The Canadian High Commission office in Nairobi handles all immigration and refugee application for over 18 countries in Africa. Privately sponsored refugees being processed through the Nairobi office have to wait longer than any other refugees in other parts of the world. We need to be fair to all refugees.
- There has been a significant increase in the processing time for family reunification. It takes an average of three to five years for people to reunite with family members who are permanent residents or citizens of Canada. The long processing times have profound impacts on families, including on the welfare of children separated from their parents.
- Lately, we have seen a pattern of anti-refugee rhetoric. Some politicians and the media are promoting myths making unproven accusations and creating xenophobic sentiments. This is a negative trend that can have destructive consequences in society. This rhetoric is contrary to the Canadian values of fairness, welcoming of newcomers, and multiculturalism. The Canadian government has a responsibility to uphold our legal obligations toward refugees and asylum seekers who reach our borders.
- In the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of temporary foreign workers in Canada such that their numbers have exceeded the numbers of permanent residents admitted into Canada. Because of their lack of status and protection, their isolation and their lack of access to information on their rights, migrant workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, of which there are countless documented cases. Canada is largely a nation of immigrants. Immigrants are vital to our future development.

For about a century and a half, Canada has had immigration programs in place that have helped develop a diverse community of Canadian citizens who are respected worldwide. Canada has the highest per capita immigration rate in the world, driven by family reunification and favourable economic policy for highly skilled workers.

Canada's immigration policies have helped to facilitate the rich multicultural diversity of its population. They have also helped to nurture strong communities of individuals who have the opportunity to realize their full potential as citizens, irrespective of their cultural, ethnic, or religious differences. Canada has both a humanitarian tradition and an international obligation to provide protection to thousands of displaced and migrant workers every year.

Questions You Can Ask—Refugees and Immigration

- How will you and your party uphold Canada's humanitarian and international obligation to provide protection to thousands of refugees every year? How will you ensure this is done?
- How will you and your party address the issues of long delays and processing times especially at the Canadian High Commission office in Nairobi and in other areas?
- How will you and your party facilitate a more efficient and timely system for family reunification?

Trade

Canada's experience with trade agreements has shown that they can affect our society in ways we did not intend. Investor protection provisions in trade agreements have, for example, restricted governments' ability to maintain the environment, shield water as a public trust, or guarantee access to medicines.

In recent years, the government has concluded bilateral agreements with Colombia, Peru, Panama, and Jordan, and is carrying forward negotiations Honduras, the Republic of Korea, and the European Union, among others.

As people of faith, we have a vision motivated by the economy of God, an economy of life and abundance that promotes global solidarity, human dignity, and care for the integrity of creation. At various moments in the past decade, The United Church of Canada has expressed concerns about various sets of bilateral trade negotiations. Through participation in coalitions like KAIROS, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, and the global Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, we have also advocated for the principles of just trade with the World Trade Organization and other global bodies. As pointed out by KAIROS, Canada's approach to trading relations continues to rely on global rules that facilitate liberalization and promote increased economic growth as a means for poverty eradication. United Church partners such as the Council of Latin American Churches and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) say that this approach has increased the concentration of wealth instead of promoting sustainable development for all.

- Trade agreements are not infallible documents: they can be publicly reviewed and renegotiated. If the lives of the poor and marginalized have not improved; if governments have less capacity to make public policy; if citizens feel they have no input into these agreements—then something is wrong.
- Bilateral trade deals are a key element in the Canadian government's "Americas Strategy." The flagship deal—a free trade agreement with Colombia despite the country's poor human rights record and ongoing civil war—was approved by Parliament in June 2010. Currently, negotiations move forward with Honduras, whose government was overthrown in a military coup in June 2009. Unless the subsequent human rights crisis is addressed, free trade may serve to further inequalities. Together with other churches and non-governmental organizations, The United Church of Canada has called for a new approach to trade that improves the condition of those affected by violence or living in poverty.

Questions You Can Ask

- Will you and your party press for renegotiation of the investor-protection chapter of the North America Free Trade Agreement, and press to exclude similar investor-protection schemes from future trade agreements?
- In trade negotiations, will you and your party work to protect the sovereign power of countries to protect their own citizens, including access to life-saving medicines?
- Will you and your party call for protection of human rights in Honduras ahead of a trade deal, and for a new approach to trade that improves the condition of those affected by violence or living in poverty?

Recommended Websites

Information on justice issues can be found on the United Church website (www.united-church.ca) or your Conference website (*see* www.united-church.ca/contact/conferences).

For further information regarding social justice issues and the federal election, explore the websites below. (Note that the websites below cannot be cited as United Church policy.)

Ecumenical Partners

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives (www.kairoscanada.org)

KAIROS unites churches and religious organizations in a faithful ecumenical response to the call to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). KAIROS deliberates on issues of common concern, advocates for social change, and joins with people of faith and goodwill in action for social transformation.

Roll With the Declaration Campaign, part of the KAIROS “The Land, Our Life” Campaign to Implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: www.kairoscanada.org/en/take-action/the-land-our-life/roll-with-the-declaration

Project Ploughshares (www.ploughshares.ca)

Ploughshares is a project of the Canadian Council of Churches to carry out the practical application of biblical teachings concerning peace, justice, reconciliation, and non-violence as a witness to the reconciling power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Civil Society Organizations

Campaign 2000 (www.campaign2000.ca)

Campaign 2000 is a cross-Canada public education movement to build support for the 1989 all party House of Commons resolution that pledged to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

Canada Without Poverty (www.cwp-csp.ca)

Canada Without Poverty is a not for profit, non- partisan, member- based organization dedicated to the eradication of poverty.

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (www.policyalternatives.ca)

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Ottawa, offers an alternative to the message that citizens have no choice about the policies that affect them, and promotes research on social and economic justice.

Canadian Council for International Co-operation (www.ccic.ca)

A coalition of Canadian voluntary sector organizations working globally for sustainable human development, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation seeks to end global poverty, and to promote social justice and human dignity for all.

Canadian Council for Refugees (www.ccrweb.ca)

The Canadian Council for Refugees is a non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank (www.foodgrainsbank.ca)

This partnership of 15 Canadian church agencies seeks a Christian response to hunger.

Canadian Health Coalition ([www.healthcoalition](http://www.healthcoalition.ca))

This not-for-profit and non-partisan organization is dedicated to protecting and expanding Canada's public health system for the benefit of all Canadians.

Canadian Youth Climate Coalition (www.ourclimate.ca)

This is a non-partisan coalition seeking immediate and meaningful action on climate change by governmental and private sector leaders.

Church Council on Justice and Corrections (www.ccjc.ca)

The Church Council on Justice and Corrections is a national faith-based coalition seeking to foster healthier communities and crime prevention through social responsibility.

Citizens for Public Justice (www.cpj.ca)

Citizens for Public Justice is an organization comprising over 1,500 justice-oriented Christians along with dozens of local churches, religious orders, and others to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key policy debate through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue.

Climate Action Network Canada (www.climateactionnetwork.ca)

Climate Action Network Canada (CAN Canada)/Réseau action climat Canada (RAC Canada) is composed of member organizations committed to preventing dangerous levels of human interference with the global climate system, protecting environmental sustainability and public health, while upholding principles of just transition, equity and social justice. The United Church of Canada is a member.

Common Frontiers (www.commonfrontiers.ca)

Common Frontiers is a multi-sectoral working group that proposes an alternative to the social, environmental, and economic effects of economic integration in the Americas.

Council of Canadians (www.canadians.org)

Founded in 1985, the Council of Canadians is Canada's largest citizens' organization, promoting progressive policies on fair trade, clean water, safe food, public health care, and other issues of social and economic concern to Canadians.

Faith and the Common Good (www.faith-commongood.net)

An inter-faith and inter-cultural organization that affirms common values of justice, peace, participation, human rights, ecological inter-relationship, and compassion as cornerstones of a healthy society.

Green Communities Canada (www.gca.ca)

A national network of community-based non-profit organizations that deliver innovative environmental program and services, with a focus on household and community action.

Make Poverty History (www.makepovertyhistory.ca)

Make Poverty History is a campaign of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation endorsed by the United Church of Canada and many other organizations.

Political Parties

Bloc Québécois (www.blocquebecois.org)

Conservative Party of Canada (www.conservative.ca)

Green Party of Canada (www.greenparty.ca)

Liberal Party of Canada (www.liberal.ca)

New Democratic Party of Canada (www.ndp.ca)

Elections Canada (www.elections.ca)

Using the Media

A Helpful Ally

The media can be a helpful ally in raising public awareness on issues. A well-written story can gain community support and engage candidates in dialogue; a well-timed story can have a significant impact on a political campaign. If your group intends to contact local media or issue a media release, please remember these points:

- Consult the United Church Election Kit and the websites of your Conference and the General Council regarding the information you want to send to the media. In any campaign, it is important to maintain consistency about what is being said, to which media, and by whom.
- Please remember that you can only speak on behalf of your own group (committee, congregation, presbytery, Conference), not for the United Church as a whole.
- Timing of a news release is important. Your local paper may publish only once a week: make sure your release gets there in plenty of time for follow-up before their deadline.
- Always provide a name and phone/fax/e-mail details of a member of your group that the media can contact to discuss your release.
- If you are focusing on radio programs, check the names of the shows' producers and telephone ahead to let them know you are sending a release—they may wish to do an on-air interview on the subject matter. The names of local radio outlets, as well as contact information and staff positions, can be found in the reference section of your local library.
- Check websites for specific guidelines for submitting letters to local papers and media outlets.

Using Talkback Radio

The biggest daytime radio audiences are for talkback radio. On such shows, you'll only be given a short time to talk, so plan your points and expect to make only a few. Remember these tips:

- Talk to one person at a time. Of course, more than one person is listening, but each is an individual. Just imagine yourself talking to one person—not the whole of Canada.
- To prevent interference from your radio, turn your own radio off before you go on. When you can hear the program through the phone—and that will be well before you go to air—switch your own radio off. You'll hear callers through your phone, so you won't miss out on anything.
- Radio can be anonymous—one of its problems, as scurrilous things can be said, but useful if you're a reluctant speaker.

Letters to the Editor

The most well-read part of any newspaper or media website is the letters section, and politicians use it to gauge support for issues. A letter to the editor is good way to raise an issue and engage in public debate. Some key points for getting a letter to the editor published:

- Keep your letter short and simple (no more than 200 words).
- Relate it to a previous story, letter, editorial, or feature that the paper publishes (make imaginative links if necessary).
- Plan your first sentence carefully—if it is dull the editor may read no further; if it's catchy you're in with a chance.
- A simple letter pattern could be to state
 - what you support or disagree with
 - what evidence or examples you can offer to support your view
 - what can be done about it

- If you're sending your letter by e-mail, the contents must be sent in the body of the e-mail. Send the message as plain text only. You may also send submissions in by fax.
- Make sure you sign your letter, and include your name, address, and phone number so the editor can verify it. Generally only one letter in 10 gets published. If yours doesn't make it the first time, don't give up. Keep writing and eventually you may end up in print.

Social Media

Use Facebook and other social media to

- advertise upcoming candidates meetings
- urge people to get out to vote
- let others know about the United Church Election Kit as they consider their options
- discuss election issues