



## THE COST OF RELIGION IN CANADA

Government Transfers to Charities Advancing Religion

The third in a series of reports

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## WHY DOES GOVERNMENT TRANSFER MONEY TO CHARITIES?

Many charities apply for and receive funding from the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of government. While T-3010 forms (which all charities are required to submit to Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) annually) provide data on which level of government grants funding (and how much), they do not provide information on why charities receive funds, nor what their obligations may be in return.

Many government programs fund charities. Some government transfers are recurring, while others are one-time. Governments transfer money to charities to provide various activities and services, including:

- Funding specific services that meet government needs, such as a social services or arts and cultural programming;
- Providing funds for the general operations of a charity that allow it to keep operating when the government believes that this is in the best interest of the community;
- Assisting charities to absorb the costs of meeting new legislative requirements that might cause undue hardship;
- Assistance with costs related to improving services in an area that the government has prioritized, such as projects that improve access for individuals with physical disabilities;
- Funding to preserve a heritage building.

While this report details the amounts of direct government subsidies to religious charities, the data in the T-3010 does not provide information about the purpose of the transfers; it is, therefore, impossible to determine how government funding is used.

## HOW MUCH MONEY DOES GOVERNMENT GIVE TO RELIGIOUS CHARITIES?

In 2018, 3,612 religious charities in Canada received funds from at least one level of government. In total, Canadian governments transferred slightly more than \$1 billion to charities incorporated under the category of advancement of religion. The federal government gave \$143.7 million to 2,536 religious charities; provincial governments directly funded 1,394 religious charities to the tune of more than \$726 million; and municipal governments transferred almost \$217 million to 658 religious charities across Canada (see Table 1).

Table 1: Government Transfers to Religious Charities 2018

Province / Territory	Federal	Provincial	Municipal	Total
Alberta	18,504,363	150,107,642	6,760,764	175,372,769
British Columbia	26,976,217	118,925,965	3,351,191	149,253,373
Manitoba	3,574,369	29,213,109	528,047	33,315,525
New Brunswick	4,275,743	7,970,209	7,702,865	19,948,817
Newfoundland and Labrador	895,908	2,473,589	227,513	3,597,010
Nova Scotia	4,629,048	10,586,027	1,361,388	16,576,463
Northwest Territories	365,974	5,295,822	118,316	5,780,112
Nunavut	-	-	-	-
Ontario	67,610,773	307,299,330	181,519,318	556,429,421
Prince Edward Island	540,356	1,258,888	15,264	1,814,508
Quebec	11,216,733	68,026,251	10,495,675	89,738,659
Saskatchewan	5,033,153	24,808,613	4,899,556	34,741,322
Yukon	103,850	368,506	-	472,356
USA	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>143,726,487</b>	<b>726,333,951</b>	<b>216,979,897</b>	<b>1,087,040,335</b>

Note: Provinces and territories refer to the location of the headquarters of the charity.

## THE LARGEST RECIPIENTS

### LARGEST MUNICIPAL TRANSFER

The [YMCA of Greater Toronto](#) is a charity registered under the “advancement of religion” purpose. In 2018, [it received the largest municipal transfer in Canada](#), worth almost \$75 million. While the “C” in YMCA reflects its origins as a Christian charity, there is nothing else in the public record to indicate that it remains in any way Christian. Unlike many other charities in the advancement of religion category, “The Y” does not require that users subscribe to specific dogma, participate in religious ceremonies, or otherwise engage in Christian focused activities. “The Y” operates as a non-denominational community centre and would be a natural fit under the “Other purposes beneficial to the community” charitable category.

Mission: “The YMCA of Greater Toronto is a charity that ignites the potential in people, helping them grow, lead and give back to their communities.”

Vision: “Vibrant Communities where everyone can shine.”

Values: Inclusiveness

Integrity  
Kindness  
Optimism  
Respect  
Well-Being

#### LARGEST PROVINCIAL TRANSFER

[Christian Horizons](#) received the largest direct subsidy from provincial governments. Headquartered in Ontario, it received \$163.4 million from the governments of Ontario and Saskatchewan in 2018. [Christian Horizons](#) was founded in 1965, when the Reese family “realized that there was a need for a Christian organization to support families who experience developmental disabilities in Ontario.” They have an “ongoing commitment to innovative faith-based service options.” Christian Horizons’ mission, vision and values continue to have a strong Christian focus:

Mission: “As an expression of Christian faith, we work together with people who experience disabilities to accomplish their goals and nurture communities where everybody belongs.”

Vision: “People who experience disabilities belong to communities in which their God-given gifts are valued and respected.”

Values: “Christian Horizons’ values arise from our belief that every person is loved by God and created in His image. Because of this, we strive to honour God and value people in all we do and with all of our resources”

#### LARGEST FEDERAL TRANSFER

The largest federal grant in 2018 was \$20,198,383 to the Kelowna Christian Center Society. [Blumberg’s Charity data](#) show that this direct subsidy began in 2013 with \$13.7 million and increased every year to \$22,194,409 in 2019. Prior to 2013, the Kelowna Christian Centre Society received annual grants from the provincial government, most recently \$12.5 million in 2012. Programs offered by Kelowna Christian Center Society are:

- Weekly church services
- Christian education (K-12 through a campus school and online)
- Christian preschool
- Christian outreach
- Local, provincial, national, and international Pastoral Care programs for development of families from children through senior adults

- Christian daycare (starting in 2019)

[The Kelowna Christian Center's](#) tagline is, "Where People belong and Jesus matters." Their vision is "To raise up and influence the world around us by creating a space to know God, find freedom, discover purpose and make a difference through bible-based and Jesus-centered living."

## SHOULD GOVERNMENT FUND RELIGIOUS CHARITIES?

Religious charities self-identify under the category "advancement of religion." Some religious charities solely advance religion, while other organizations (such as YMCA and YWCA) have evolved beyond their original mission of advancing religion to act primarily as community centres, open to and serving all, without distinction on the basis of religious affiliation.

There are evident difficulties in allowing advancement of religion to be a charitable purpose when looking at three largest recipients of government transfers. Taxpayers and governments should be asking:

- How comfortable are Canadians with massive government transfers to churches, schools and ministries that, while providing education and counseling, clearly do so overwhelmingly from a Christian perspective?
- If a charity carries out "good works," is the purpose of these good works to convert people to their faith?
- If these charities were not funded under the advancement of religion, could they do the same work under a different head of charity?
- Is it appropriate to bundle much-needed services with evangelism?

Canadians must decide on the value of the work carried out by religious charities, compared with the cost of allowing part of our social safety net to be managed by faith-based institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Religion has no place in government. Churches can and should function as non-charitable, non-profit organizations, like most other social clubs and groups. Organizations that require people to adhere to a particular faith, or evangelize to recipients of their services (for example, by engaging in prayer before a meal), should not be funded by the government. They are discriminatory in nature.

Were faith-based groups to discontinue their offerings, non-denominational and secular organizations can put government transfers and the generosity of donors to good use and ensure that important, non-proselytizing programs serve the entire community.

There is over \$1,000,000,000 in government subsidies at stake. A reordering of government priorities is appropriate to ensure public money is spent on services supporting all Canadians, regardless of religious affiliation.

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