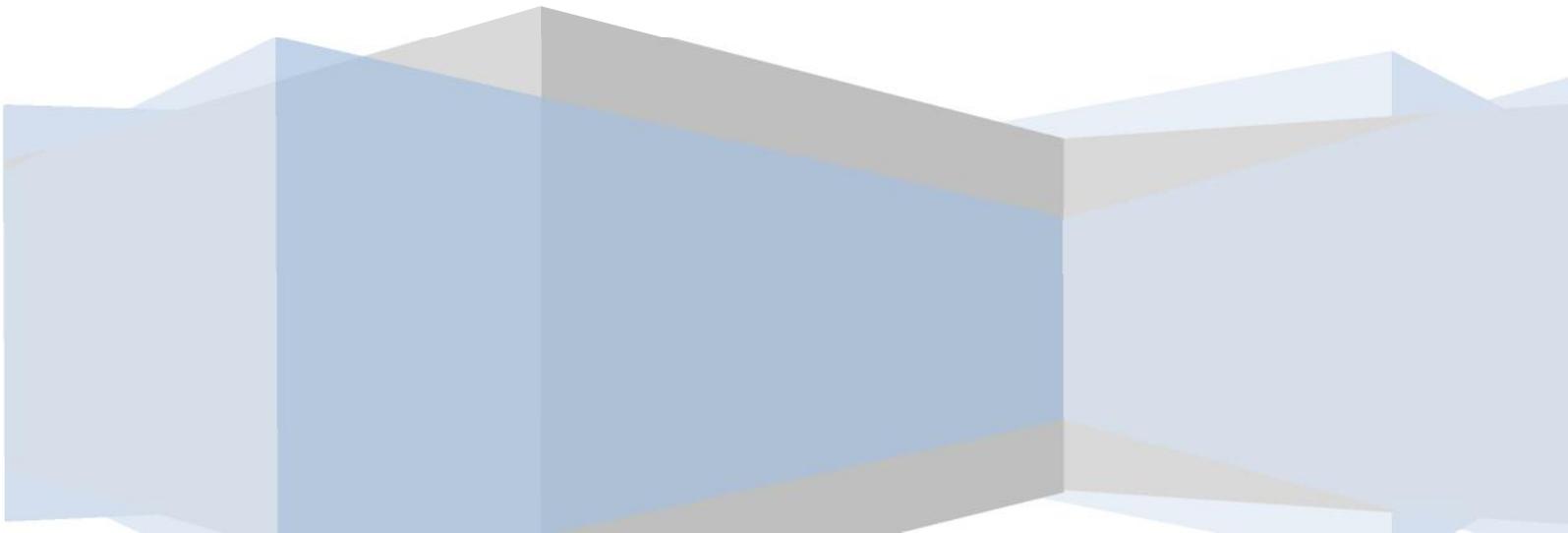




Lesson Plan:
Christian Political
Organizations in Canada
For Christian schools and home schools in Canada
(Grades 10 – 12)



Christian Political Organizations in Canada

(Two 50 minute lessons)

Level – Grades 9 - 12

Applicable Courses: Social Studies, Worldview Studies

Overview:

Christians care about what is going on in politics because our civil governments make decisions which impact almost every aspect of our lives. The Bible also calls us to be a voice for justice and righteousness. In a country where abortion is pervasive, child exploitation (through pornography etc.) is rampant, and many women are trafficked for sexual slavery, Christians need to speak up and promote justice and love.

Organizing political action usually increases its effectiveness. A number of Christian political organizations exist in Canada. Each has their own unique approach and niche in the political landscape. It is helpful to know which organizations exist so that we can benefit from the work that is already being done. The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to some of the types of political action possible and to familiarize them with some of the specific organizations that may help them in the future.

The article “A Welcomed Ally” (included below) introduces and explains the differences between grass roots mobilization, issue-based advocacy, and general Christian political advocacy. Two more groups have been added for the purpose of the assignment: Christian political parties and Christian think tanks.

- The Christian Heritage Party is the only Christian party in Canada. It attempts to promote the Christian worldview directly through democracy. Like all parties, Christian parties aim to be elected into public office. If they are successful (which is the case in the Netherlands and other countries), they can have a great deal of influence because they are part of the law-making process. However, if they don't get elected, they have difficulty making a significant contribution apart from presenting a Christian perspective around election time. The electoral system in Canada has resulted in the CHP never having a candidate elected into office.
- Think tanks are academic organizations that develop research and studies with the goal of getting this into the hands of policy makers. They focus their research on topics that are in keeping with their organizational goals and priorities. Their hope is that government leaders will use their research in creating laws and policies. This is a form of indirect influence. Politicians look to think tanks which they know share their ideology on a particular issue. They benefit with research to support their position. The think tank benefits by having its ideas influence new laws. However, think tanks also have weaknesses. Their attempt to be academic and professional creates a distance between them and the general public. As a result, they do little to help everyday Christians make a

difference in the public square. They are also quite limited in what they can say, given their desire to appear objective and academic.

Each type of political action has its own unique strengths and weaknesses. It is not about one type vs. another but rather how they work together to make a positive difference in this country.

Procedure

- 1) In the first class, give a lecture explaining the five general types of Christian political groups and the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- 2) Use the handout (below) and explain what their assignment will be in the second class.
- 3) In the second class, have the students go to a computer with internet access to fill in the assignment.
- 4) Go over the answers with the students, explaining the ones which students have different answers for. The answer sheet is below.
- 5) Timer permitting, ask the students which type of organization they would go to for:
 - a. Suggestions on what they can do about a specific issue (either A, B, or C)
 - b. Research for an academic report they are writing on a political topic (E)
 - c. Help with writing a letter to the government (A)
 - d. Thoughts on who to vote for (D)

Further Reading:

A WELCOMED ALLY: Christian political organizations already exist, so where does ARPA Canada fit in?

2014 Update: This article has been modified to reflect the changes since it was written.

by Mark Penninga

Politics impacts everything we do, from what kinds of light bulbs we can buy to what we read on our cereal boxes. Given the impact politics has on our daily lives, it's worth asking how much Christians are doing to positively influence society through politics. Which Christian organizations are already involved in Canadian politics? How successful are they? And is there room for one more?

Canadian Christians have indeed been doing some work in the political sphere, and there are at least three different types of Christian political advocacy organizations already at work in our country. We're going to look at each of them, and then explain just where ARPA Canada fits in.

1. Grass-roots mobilization

Have you ever received an email from a group calling you to respond to something that is going on in Parliament, such as the definition of marriage, or a bill to increase the age of consent? Chances are the email came from an organization that is promoting grass-roots mobilization.

The two main organizations in Canada that are doing this are the Canada Family Action Coalition (CFAC) and My Canada. Like almost all Christian political organizations, these are actually very small organizations with only one or two employees. They rely on regular Canadians to get their message out to our civil governments. The primary method of action that these groups use is

the Internet – through email “action notices” or “1 click technology” that allows individuals to send an email to many government officials at the click of their mouse.

Pros:

Grass-roots mobilization is very important because it is in keeping with the Biblical mandate for *all* Christians to be a light in our world. The work is not left up to a few professional lobbyists in Ottawa. Furthermore, since we live in a democracy, the people still have an important influence in the public policy process. Giving citizens a voice is an important part of promoting democracy.

Cons:

Grass-roots mobilization organizations are often reactive rather than proactive. Emails flood Parliament when something bad is happening, but little is being done to promote positive action before changes are already happening. Furthermore, internet-based lobbying only has limited value. Few things are more effective than meeting with a government official face to face, or at least giving them a phone call.

2. Issue-based advocates

Recognizing that Canada is promoting many harmful things, such as abortion and the breakdown of the family, some groups exist to make a difference on those specific issues. Campaign-Life Coalition is a primarily Catholic organization that has been promoting the pro-life cause in Parliament. Groups like this have also sprung up in response to the changing definition of marriage (such as Defend Marriage Canada) but they have died out about as quickly as they came up. Many Reformed Christians are also familiar with the ECP Centre (Equipping Christians for the Public Square) which is now defunct. Although their name suggests that they may belong in the first category of Christian political groups, they have instead focussed primarily on defending civil liberties.

Pros:

These organizations focus on one (or a few) issues which means that they are often good at what they do. They can also strategize and be proactive so that they influence the government officials before they make decisions. Furthermore, they are often able to interact more directly with Members of Parliament and hopefully also build a relationship with them.

Cons:

This approach does not usually encourage much action from every-day people because it is just a few paid employees who do all the work. Some of these groups struggle with having to give the same message for many years and end up becoming distracted from their goal or wearing out their welcome.

3. General Christian advocacy groups

Religious groups and denominations realize that government decisions have a big impact on the things that they care deeply about. That explains why organizations such as the Catholic Civil Rights League and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada have offices devoted to political action. These organizations work with a broad variety of issues and try to provide a religious perspective to government.

Pros:

These organizations don't try to hide the fact that they are bringing a religious perspective. This results in a more Biblically-based approach. Furthermore, they have a stronger connection to their support-base and are therefore able to encourage grass-roots mobilization as well. The EFC in Ottawa is a good example of how effective this type of organization can be. They have nurtured good relationships with MPs and earned a lot of respect for the work they do.

Cons:

Having a broad mandate can often result in a lack of focus. These groups struggle with having to cover such a wide variety of issues and still be effective.

Read the rest of the article (which introduces ARPA Canada) online at www.arpacanada.ca

Assignment – Identifying Christian Political Organizations

Look up the following websites from Christian political organizations in Canada. From a brief analysis of the website, choose which category best describes the organization:

- A. Grass roots mobilization
- B. Issue-based advocacy
- C. General Christian political advocacy
- D. Political Party
- E. Think Tank

Canada Family Action Coalition (www.familyaction.org) _____

Explain why (point form):

Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (www.evangelicalfellowship.ca) _____

Explain why:

Cardus (www.cardus.ca) _____

Explain why:

Christian Heritage Party (www.chp.ca) _____

Explain why:

ARPA Canada (www.arpacanada.ca) _____

Explain why:

Institute of Marriage and Family Canada (www.imfcanada.org) _____

Explain why:

REAL Women of Canada (www.realwomenca.com) _____

Explain why:

Campaign Life Coalition (www.campaignlifecoalition.com) _____

Explain why:

Answers – Identifying Christian Political Organizations

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Canada Family Action Coalition (www.familyaction.org) A

- help people get active on social conservative issues

Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (www.evangelicalfellowship.ca) C

- Keep the evangelical churches informed, represent them, on a variety of issues.

Cardus (www.cardus.ca) E

- Produce research and resources to change Canada's social architecture.

Christian Heritage Party (www.chp.ca) D

- Goal is to be elected.

ARPA Canada (www.arpacanada.ca) C

- Combination of informing, representing, research, and encouraging action.

Institute of Marriage and Family Canada (www.imfcanada.org) E

Produce research on family issue for government

REAL Women of Canada (www.realwomenca.com) B

- Promote a conservative view of women's issues in opposition to feminism

Campaign Life Coalition (www.campaignlifecoalition.com) B

- Promote pro-life position in government