

THE 'R' IN ARPA

WHY ARPA CANADA IS EXPLICITLY
"REFORMED" AND HAS A PARTICULAR FOCUS
ON SERVING THE REFORMED COMMUNITY

The mission of ARPA Canada is to educate, equip, and encourage Reformed Christians to political action, and to bring a biblical perspective to our civil governments.

As the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) Canada has become better known, we are increasingly asked about the "R" in ARPA. For those outside of the Reformed Christian community, there is intrigue about what Reformed means, and how that distinguishes our political action from other political engagement. The questions are sincere and the questioners are generally satisfied by our responses.

But frequent questions also come from those within the Reformed Christian community, particularly from those who are concerned that we are being unnecessarily exclusive, or not taking advantage of an opportunity to have a greater impact. "Why can't it simply be a "Christian" organization?" "Won't this work be more effective if we do it in unity with all those who share our convictions, regardless of church affiliation?" And, "Even as a Reformed organization, why single out the Reformed church community in your mission statement?"

By God's grace, ARPA Canada's work has been principled and at the same time effective. It has been focussed and yet continues to

have a broad impact that goes far beyond the Reformed community. We are privileged to have a warm relationship of mutual trust and respect with a broad group of Canadians. It is an immense blessing to work alongside so many others who share a common heart for justice, righteousness, love, truth, life, and freedom.

From when we started in 2007 until today, the board of ARPA Canada has steadfastly maintained that the "R" in ARPA speaks both to who we are and who we are primarily directed towards. At the same time, and as explained further below, we are grateful to be a blessing to so many others, while remaining committed to this Reformed foundation.

In this article we desire to bring greater understanding to why we are committed to this foundation and direction.

ARPA CANADA IS EXPLICITLY REFORMED BECAUSE:

1. If we desire to be a faithful Christian witness and participant in the Canadian

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public square, we need to have a common, clear, and accurate understanding of God's will. ARPA Canada is grounded on God's infallible Word. The Bible is our rock-solid foundation. As such, we make every effort to make the light of God's Word shine on every issue in the public square. We seek to communicate this biblical perspective overtly or by articulating biblical principles, explicitly or implicitly. We have developed "core principles" which seek to apply God's Word to the political issues that ARPA Canada focuses on.

ARPA Canada believes that the doctrine contained in the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) fully agrees with the Word of God. These confessions are fruit of the Great Reformation of the 16th & 17th century, when the church returned to the Word of God as the only authority for church and life. Today too, Reformed believers desire to use the Word of God as the only authority in life, for family, church, state, and society.

In other words, we are Reformed not just because of who we strive to reach, but also in who we are. Our board and staff are required to share this foundation and be members of a confessional Reformed church. We strive to be united in the truth.

2. Our distinct theological basis strengthens, rather than limits, ARPA's work: We are blessed to work within a particular Christian community that governs itself through

time-tested confessions, forms, and church orders that also speak directly to our calling as Christians in public life. As a result, ARPA Canada is able to give unique and robust arguments to our civil governments. For example, in the 2018 Wall case, ARPA's intervention and arguments were particularly helpful to the Supreme Court because Reformed churches continue to faithfully practice church discipline, which was a central focus of the case. In the 2018/2019 Alberta Bill 24 court case launched in response to their government's imposition of secretive Gay Straight Alliance activities on Christian schools, our legal team was able to demonstrate to the court why the government's actions violate the core of our Reformed identity by referencing our confessions and Church Order.

This strong theological foundation adds a clarity and nuance that goes far beyond vague claims of religious freedom. Our leaders appreciate this, as evidenced by our high success rate in our applications to intervene in important court cases and the receptivity we receive from many government officials.

3. Every successful venture needs a clearly defined purpose. The founders of ARPA Canada started the organization to equip the Reformed church community in Canada to faithfully engage in political action. When ARPA Canada started, there was a great deal of cynicism and apathy among this community in regards to political

awareness and action. We wanted that to change. We are grateful that ARPA Canada's work has been a catalyst for political awareness and action within the Reformed church community in Canada, but we also know that this requires ongoing effort. In fact, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

4. There are significant practical benefits to having a focussed target audience: The Reformed Christian community that ARPA directs its mission to is a small fraction of the Canadian Christian population. This focus has important advantages including:

- a. *We are able to build relationships with the people we are seeking to educate, equip, and encourage.* Relationships take time and focus. Since we started this work, trust has grown so that we now are blessed with incredible receptivity to, and support for, our mission (local ARPA groups driven by volunteers, large turnouts at events, open invitations to present in churches and schools, the ability to share our publications in these churches, etc.);
- b. *The relationship of trust translates into action.* This relatively tiny group, when mobilized, has accomplished a lot - thousands of political actions annually! We also now see Reformed Christians active as MLAs, MPPs, MPs, and town counsellors, as well as employed as staffers in political offices across the country;
- c. *The relationship of trust has given us the means to exist.* This small

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community has given generously, so that ARPA Canada's budget could grow from almost nothing to well over a million dollars annually today, the vast majority of which comes without fundraising. The same cannot be said of many political organizations in Canada who are seeking to advance worthy missions and are directed towards large target audiences.

d. *Action inspires action beyond the initial impact.* If ARPA Canada were to disappear tomorrow, the impact of ARPA Canada's work (by the grace of God) would continue for a long time. An entire community is educated and equipped. Cynicism and apathy have been replaced with experience and hope.

5. The challenges that come from having an overly broad target group would dilute our effectiveness:

- a. Due to limited resources (staff, budget, volunteers, energy) and massive potential mission (3+ million Canadian Christians, federal, provincial, and municipal politics, legislatures, courts, and tribunals, and a host of issues) decisions have to be made about how to best use these resources. It is better to have a clear and focussed mission that can realistically be achieved than an idealistic mission that is not practical or sustainable.
- b. A large membership or constituency on paper likely means that the relationship with the target audience is impersonal. This can lead to cynicism and frustration, as both the organization and the audience expect much from the other but get little.
- c. An organization that is focussed on numbers or size easily loses mission focus. Resources are given to increasing growth rather than working faithfully with what we

have. The temptation is great to translate numbers into power, but we are not pursuing earthly power through force or might, or for our own purposes.

- d. Every successful mission will be pressured to expand to those who want to benefit from it. If ARPA Canada expanded its target audience to include all those who identified themselves as Reformed, there would be pressure then to expand to all those who identified as Christians generally. And if we went that far, there would be pressure to work more closely with believers of other religions who share common values. This is why it is so valuable for our organization to be governed by a board that is on guard against Mission Drift.
- e. ARPA Canada has been able to grow specifically because the Reformed community has stood behind us with its time, open doors, and finances. We cannot assume this to continue if we direct our mission beyond it, as finite resources will inevitably mean that less will be devoted to the community that made our existence possible.

OUR BROADER AUDIENCE & INFLUENCE

By no means does this focussed audience mean that ARPA Canada's work is limited to the Reformed community or is being isolationist. Our mission and influence go far beyond the Reformed community:

- 1. The second part of our mission is devoted entirely to bringing a biblical perspective to our civil governments.** We devote a great deal of time and resources to communicating with this large audience of influential leaders who usually do not share our faith-based convictions. ARPA's staff

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and our grassroots have built many relationships of trust and respect with our government officials. With an office just steps from Parliament Hill, regular interventions in court cases across the land, and a growing number of staff that have a special focus on provincial legislatures, we strive to assist our leaders in their difficult task. In spite of our small constituency, we have become one of the largest and most active Christian political advocacy organizations in Canada.

2. Through targeted campaigns, our work directly reaches the broader Canadian public. For example, ARPA Canada started and continues to oversee the WeNeedaLAW.ca campaign, which is a leader in the Canadian pro-life movement and is the primary means through which Members of Parliament work to advance pre-born human rights. This work includes numerous presentations to a variety of religious and even secular audiences and regular contributions to mainstream media outlets (through interviews, press releases, and articles). ARPA and WeNeedaLAW.ca have been instrumental in organizing large public events, like the Toronto March for Life and prayer services across the country in conjunction with the marches for life.

3. When resources allow, and when doing so doesn't undermine our principles, we assist and advocate on behalf of the broader Christian community. For example, with the Loyola case, we led an intervention on behalf of 314 different Christian schools representing a wide range of Christian traditions.

4. When it can further our mission, we speak at or have ARPA tables at conferences and events from a wide range of other organizations and religious communities. This might include political party conventions where we can interact with politically-minded Canadians, speaking at a March for Life, or presenting at an apologetics conference about the Reformed perspective on the role of the state.

5. We intentionally make our resources available freely and widely. Our website gives access to anyone interested in our publications and work, and we encourage the free use and sharing of our printed materials. Thousands of non-Reformed people are blessed by our publications, social media, website, and EasyMail system. We regularly advertise our events to the broader Christian community and public and make an effort to explain our theological basis in a way that is understandable to this broader audience.

6. We communicate regularly with other organizations to listen to, learn from, encourage, and assist each other. Publicly and privately we work very closely with our allies as we seek to pursue a common goal. Leaders of other Christian organizations regularly praise ARPA Canada's work and share it with their respective communities and networks, as we likewise share their work with our network.

CONCLUSION

Our Reformed basis has been an intentional, missional decision for ARPA Canada, and the board remains committed to maintaining this long-term. We are incredibly grateful for the shift we have seen in this community toward increased political engagement, and we are continually humbled by their generous support in so many ways. At the same time, we are so grateful to be able to do this work alongside so many others in this nation who share our goals. We have benefitted enormously from them and hope to continue to be a mutual blessing to each other.

We are keenly aware that all of the blessing we have witnessed on ARPA Canada's growth and public impact has been by God's grace alone. Our desire is that we can continue to improve and increase our honouring of God in the public square.