

Montreal Lutheran Council

57 boul Westpark, Dollard-des-Ormeaux QC H9A 2J8

<http://montreal-lutheran.org/> ctrpastor@videotron.ca 514-684-1014

The Montreal Lutheran Council is an association of nine parishes in greater Montreal which are members of the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. Lutherans are the third-largest Christian denomination around the world, with over 70 million professing members, who live on every continent, including about nine million in North America. The Lutheran church is the first church of the Protestant Reformation, which began with Martin Luther (1483-1546).

On a typical Sunday in Montreal we worship in French, German, Chinese (Mandarin), Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Latvian and English. Lutherans from a variety of countries, beginning with immigrants from the nineteenth century, have benefitted from the hospitality of the people of Quebec. Some came from countries with very repressive governments which did not respect the dignity of people nor their fundamental human rights. Here they were able to balance their own cultural practices and languages with those of others they encountered. Their experience of hospitality, welcome and inclusion is what makes this place distinct.

After prayer and study we formally declare our opposition to Bill 60, presently before the National Assembly.

We support a secular state and its neutrality in relation to the practice of religion, but we find this already guaranteed in both the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*. We recognise that the Christian Church in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular exercised significant influence and authority in Quebec over the last few centuries, but at the present time we see no sign that the state endorses or favours one religious tradition over others. Our denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, is served by a female National Bishop (archbishop and vicar general) and many female pastors (priests), and we fully support gender equality.

We are not in favour of the proposed ban on the display or wearing of prominent religious symbols or clothing by persons employed by the provincial government or institutions funded by the province, believing that it represents an unnecessary violation of the freedom of religion guaranteed to the citizens of Canada and Quebec. Such action will isolate immigrants who wish to integrate into Québécois society, and will weaken the harmony and rich diversity of the people of this province.

Only a small number of our members will be directly affected by this proposed law, but we would like to express our support for the inclusion and respect of our fellow Quebecers who are Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, as well as Christians who wear identifiable garments, and persons belonging to a multitude of other faith communities. Preventing our neighbours from wearing symbols or clothes which are in keeping with their religious convictions, even while serving the general public on behalf of Quebec, is a needless and heavy-handed approach, an intrusion of the state into various public spheres of our shared lives.

(continued)

If the goal of this government is to create a tolerant, just and compassionate society, we believe that the bill, if enacted, will have the opposite effect. The goal of the State should be to foster a sense of community. Rather than dividing the province we would hope that a “Charter of Values” would serve to unite us all.

Therefore, we request that Bill 60, *a Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests*, be withdrawn and not enacted in the Province of Quebec.

Respectfully,
The Rev. James M. Slack
Chairperson