Advancing Religion: Caring for the spiritual needs of Canadians

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Respectfully submitted to:
Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector

April 8th, 2019
Purpose:
Crossroads Christian Communications Inc. (Crossroads) requests that the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector endorse caring for the spiritual needs of Canadians, a public benefit, and protect the advancement of religion as a head of charity.

Summary:
Crossroads would like to thank the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector for the opportunity to share research about the public benefit of religious advancement documented by Crossroads through its operation of a 24/7 prayer phone line service to Canadians. We aim to validate this statement: People who receive spiritual care are healthier, more generous and able to manage life’s difficulties with greater hope than if they hadn’t received it; spiritually healthy people contribute to a better Canada.

Crossroads requests that the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector protect advancement of religion as a head of charity with the knowledge that investing in the spiritual health of Canadians provides benefits to the religious and non-religious in our country.

Who we are:
Crossroads has been operating as a charity in Canada for over fifty years and exists to advance religion in Canada through media. Resulting from Crossroads’ presence in Canada, this charity found that people had unmet spiritual needs and created a 24/7 phone line in 1977 for prayer and spiritual encouragement.

Crossroads has since responded to over 10 million calls for prayer.

Each day over 1,200 people will call the toll-free prayer lines for Christian spiritual care. Religious and non-religious Canadians will discover this prayer line through the media programs produced by Crossroads and through online promotion of the phone number. Originally established as a way for viewers of Canada’s longest running daily show “100 Huntley Street” to spiritually respond to the content of the program, Canadians with and without religious backgrounds will talk with a “prayer partner” and receive encouragement and prayer, any time of the day or night. The advancement of religion provided through the comfort and belief in the power of prayer is a significant lifeline of spiritual support for people with physical, emotional and mental needs.

Research:
Prayer Partners are volunteers who receive comprehensive training. There are currently 75 active volunteers, and the total group has provided more than 961,227 hours of service since the beginning of the prayer lines.

Calls to the Crossroads Prayer Centre are anonymous; however, they are tracked based on topic to understand the unique spiritual needs of Canadians.
The top six categories of calls are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Needs</td>
<td>3,063,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Concerns</td>
<td>2,970,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Healing</td>
<td>2,634,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Growth</td>
<td>914,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Needs</td>
<td>813,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td>323,758</td>
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</tbody>
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Crossroads has responded to 13,764 callers who identified that they were suicidal. There is a careful procedure for handling these calls. After people have received comfort from the prayers of the team, they are referred on to services that provide specialized care in this area. Receiving religious care can be the catalyst for some callers to seek out professional medical help in these circumstances.

Our services have been endorsed by mental health professionals such as Dr. Grant Mullen, who described the prayer lines this way, “To the person who is suffering (with mental health concerns) that day, they are feeling hopeless and isolated - life is not worth living that day - the prayer counselor can give them words of hope and life that can change their direction and get them started in a recovery program.”

Referrals are made to professional mental health services such as The Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, Grief Share, and Teen Challenge.

**First-Hand Examples:**

This sampling of calls from January and February 2019 demonstrate how religious advancement through spiritual care is a public benefit. These interactions have been recorded by Crossroads prayer partners for documentation.

**Community Volunteerism**

1. One Sunday night, a woman struggling with mental illness called the Crossroads Prayer Centre to thank us for the love and support she has received from the pastoral team over the few months leading up to the call. She expressed that as one gripped with personal turmoil, it was refreshing to have access to human-to-human prayer support throughout her journey. Because of the non-judgmental support she received, today she is an active member of society, making valuable contributions to various church volunteer activities. She said that if it weren’t for Crossroads’ 24/7 prayer line support, she would have continued to lead a life of isolation and wouldn’t have been able to cope with even the most mundane stresses of life.

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1 Mullen, Grant Dr. 100 Huntley Street. Depression and the Importance of Prayer. [http://www.100huntley.com/watch?id=223831](http://www.100huntley.com/watch?id=223831)
Community Integration

2. Community integration is crucial for our emotional wellbeing, yet seemingly impossible for individuals stricken with mental illness, like the man who called into the Crossroads to thank Marc Rudy, our follow-up pastor in the Prayer Centre for encouraging him in prayer and follow-up support. “Thanks to Marc, who motivated me to get involved in my community, I have found a new reason to wake up every morning. Thanks to your generous support I’ve been growing in my faith and spiritual walk with Christ and now find meaning and purpose. — I am so grateful, thank you!”

Family Reconciliation

3. On a late January evening, a first-time female caller anguished over her lacerated relationship with her father reached the prayer lines for hope. The prayer partner, on-call that late night, shared biblical wisdom that spoke into her situation. The caller came away from that encounter feeling that although the difference between her and her father seem irreconcilable, God could bring peace and restore their relationship. Thanks to Crossroads, her relationship with her father is on the road to recovery.

Restoration

4. When an agnostic student from western Canada, going through a painful break-up, came across a Crossroads Toll-Free Prayer number at her university, she decided to call in for hope and to simply have someone to listen to her. After hearing her story, the prayer partner opened her eyes to God’s unchanging love. Filled with pure joy, the young woman said she felt whole despite being alone and affirmed that the call had made a difference. She has since continued to grow in her newfound relationship with God and herself.

Overcoming suicidal thoughts

5. A 22-year old suicidal woman called into our prayer lines as a last-ditch effort for hope. The empathetic prayer partner quickly shifted her focus from taking her life to fully embracing it. Although the caller didn’t attend church or read the Bible, the Prayer Partner encouraged her that God loves her and has the best plans for her life. The caller felt as if she had been “woken up” to life and welcomed further follow-up from the Prayer Centre’s pastor. This call sparked a fresh start and a new beginning.
**Conclusion:**

Crossroads is grateful for the review conducted by the Special Committee on the Charitable Sector to assess charity effectiveness in Canada and respectfully ask that advancing religion as a charitable cause in Canada continue to be recognized as providing significant public benefit. The 1,200 people who reach out for spiritual support each day depend on this service, available to all Canadians whenever they need it. The demonstrations of hope, help for mental health, comfort and companionship to the lonely, addiction recovery and the myriad of social ills addressed by the Crossroads 24/7 prayer line would not be possible without charitable donations. The charity head of advancing religion makes this service to Canadians possible, as it is completely funded through charitable gifts.

We are grateful to the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector and their thoughtful work on the wellbeing of our nation and this important cause.

Sincerely,

**Lorna Dueck, CEO, Crossroads Christian Communications Inc.**

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