



Annual Report

2019-2020

Helping People with
Good Reason



Centre for Inquiry Canada

Tel 613-663-8198
info@centreforinquiry.ca

PO Box 24006, Hazeldean RPO
Ottawa, ON K2M 2C3

www.centreforinquiry.ca
Charitable #: 83364 2614 RR0001

Thank you to:

- members
- donors
- councillors
- directors
- volunteers
- partners

Our volunteers:

- write
- edit
- plan
- communicate
- fundraise
- manage
- organize
- speak
- listen
- lead
- follow

Thank you to all who give their time to CFIC. We couldn't do it without you.

Photos on page 1 by Edward Jenner from Pexels. Photos on pages 4, 7 and 9 by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels. Photo on page 8 by by Marcus Aurelius from Pexels

Message to Our Members

Message from Our President

CFIC already had big plans for 2019-2020, but when faced with a pandemic, we quickly regrouped to develop alternate strategies to carry out our mission. The ability of our volunteer team to respond quickly to the pandemic was nothing short of amazing.

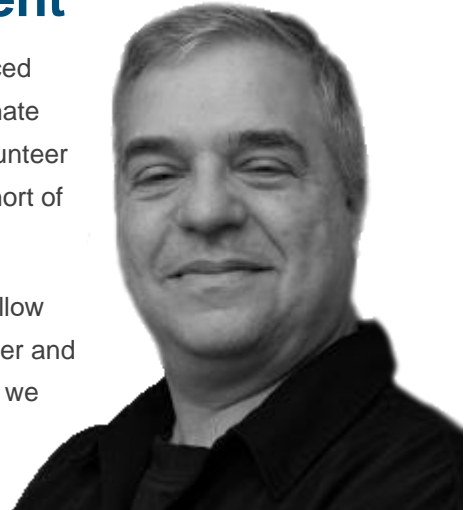
Our branches in some of Canada's larger urban areas allow likeminded people, to get together, to support one another and learn interesting new things. Even before the pandemic, we knew that we wanted to create this sense of community for our members living outside of urban areas served by our branches. That's why we started our Virtual

Branch last year. In March, in response to the pandemic our volunteer team moved all our programming online. Our virtual branch made this possible. Our virtual programming has been so successful that we intend to continue to offer it, even when we can enjoy meeting in person again. It turns out that COVID-19 was the impetus we needed to create more robust virtual programming.

We all know that the impacts of government decisions that prioritize religion are important. This year, we were able to demonstrate just how important, when we researched the cost of religious charities in Canada. We released the first in our Cost of Religion series last November, highlighting the cost of charitable tax receipts issued by charities organized under the purpose "advancement of religion": a staggering \$3 billion. Look for more reports in this series in 2021.

We run a tight financial ship at CFIC and rely on the support of our dedicated donors. Some give yearly, and some give monthly. Some even give stocks now and then. All are generous and committed to a secular Canada that supports science. We thank them and invite others to join them in supporting CFIC.

Centre for Inquiry Canada has a strong and committed board of directors. Our directors do much more than attend meetings. Each of them takes on significant responsibility for one or



Message from Our President

1. *Critical Thinking*

2. *Building Community*

3. *Secularism*

4. *Science and Education*

5. *Supporting CFIC*

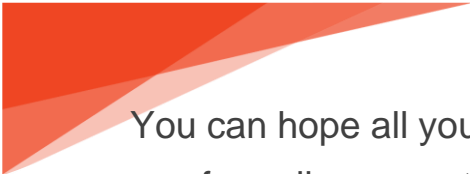
more areas of programming and they help support CFIC financially. I thank the board for helping CFIC fulfil its mission and for being philanthropic leaders of the organization.

Our volunteer team is an amazing group of passionate individuals. Their work is public facing and behind the scenes. They look after our programming, our on-line presence, our administration, and our strategy. I would like to offer my sincere thank-you to each of the volunteers who contributes to making CFIC a strong organization.

Most importantly, CFIC has amazing members. Our members support CFIC by letting us know what direction they would like the organization to take and telling us when we are straying from our mission. A significant percentage of our members recently responded to a survey about the CFIC decision-making process. It is this active membership that fuels CFIC. Thank you to all members. If you know others who share our values, please ask them to join CFIC. The more members we have the stronger our voice.

We look forward to the coming year. We look forward to the end of the pandemic and a time when, because of the advances in science, we can get together in person to hear a speaker. We look forward to continuing to provide on-line programming that meets the needs of people across Canada. Thank you for trusting CFIC to be your voice of reason.

Gus Lyn-Piluso
President – Centre for Inquiry Canada



You can hope all you want, you
can fear all you want, you can
pray all you want, but only
science will conquer COVID-19.

Gus Lyn-Piluso
March 2020

***Hero worship
is just letting
someone else
think for you.***

Diane Bruce
Critical Thinking
Chair

1. Critical Thinking

CFIC helps people to identify misinformation and to exercise caution in the interpretation of information. We believe that this is necessary to improve dialogue and to create a more civil society. Has there ever been a year when we needed this more or heeded it less?

Covid-19 brought out many pseudo-scientists and conspiracy theorists making it more important than ever to use appropriate critical thinking skills. In the middle of a pandemic, misinformation was everywhere. This misinformation was not merely annoying, it was dangerous. From home remedies for fighting the disease (please don't drink bleach) to ridiculous concerns about masking (yes, you will be able to get enough air) and perhaps most dangerous of all, the hype from the anti-vax movement (Bill Gates is not promoting immunization in order to microchip you.) COVID misinformation undermines the health and economic security of people in Canada and around the world.

CFIC was able to participate in healthy community dialogue on other important global issues this year. Environmental issues and climate change have not disappeared during the pandemic, and the need to remind people about the science of climate change has remained critical. CFIC, in partnership with Humanist Canada, brought you information related to the racism in the wake of the death of George Floyd. We explored Quebec's Bill-21, trying to understand why secularists disagree so vehemently on this issue. As always, through Critical Links articles and social media we try to help our readers identify good sources of information and appropriate ways to consider the current events of the day.

Is critical thinking the panacea for disagreement? Of course not. Even when we think critically, we may arrive at different conclusions based upon our personal values and priorities. However, if we can reference good sources of information, identify truths and biases, and respectfully listen to and share ideas, our conversations will become more productive and civil.

Diane Bruce – Critical Thinking Chair

2. Building Community and Supporting Stronger Branches

CFIC branches provide a sense of belonging for their members. Some of our branches offer many programs each week, while others offer a handful of programs each year. Whatever their structure, branches create important connections for like-minded people. In 2018, CFIC added a virtual branch to our complement to ensure that people who did not live in a community with a branch still had the opportunity to meet and connect with others. This year, at a time when people had few opportunities for any physical connections, our branches became more important than ever, and our virtual branch became the glue that held them all together.

Our branch managers had to move quickly to ensure the needs of their members were met when in-person meetings came to a halt in March. Some of our branches moved all of their events online and invited CFIC members from across Canada to join in. Other branches connected their members with CFIC national events being offered by our virtual branch. Our events became an important source of information and an important way to maintain and grow connections in the skeptical world.

We appreciate our volunteer branch managers who helped to keep our members connected, learned to use Zoom and helped CFIC with a number of different projects throughout the year. Many people have discovered and engaged with CFIC for the first time through an online event; some have become regular participants, volunteers, and even members of the leadership team. We look forward to the not-so-distant future when CFIC will be able to resume some in-person meetings, while at the same time maintaining a strong virtual presence.

Seanna Watson – Branch Liaison, Vice President

3. Secularism

Despite cancelling the *Unveiled* book tour with Yasmine Mohammed due to the pandemic, CFIC was busy in 2019-2020 promoting secularism in Canada. Throughout the year, CFIC held regular secular-themed meetings, including Secular Chat, Living Without Religion, and Secular Community Network discussion groups. These started as local gatherings, then became national as all CFIC events went virtual.

CFIC's most significant secular program is the ongoing support of Omer (a pseudonym), who is officially recognized as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In September 2020, CFIC hosted author Ali Rizvi, who spoke with Omer about his journey from his home in Pakistan to his current living situation in Nepal. CFIC is ensuring Omer can pay rent and buy food as he remains in hiding while his Canadian asylum application is being processed.

CFIC held several other events over the course of the year, including:

- "Why Secularists Disagree on Bill 21"
- "Conscientious Objection" The conflict between patients' rights to access to health services vs. doctors' rights not to perform services that violate their conscience
- An exploration of the BC House of Prayers Report by one of its co-authors
- "Society, religion, cults, taxes" questioned whether we as a society should start levying income taxes on currently established religions.

Political secularism, defined as government neutrality in matters of religion, wherein the government neither supports nor suppresses religious expression, is the compromise position that guarantees maximal liberty for all citizens, ensuring to the greatest possible extent both freedom of religion and freedom from it.

Leslie Rosenblood, Secularism Chair

Other highlights of 2019-2020:

- In September 2019, CFIC's Secular Chair, Leslie Rosenblood, provided a secular humanist perspective on the topic of human dignity to a largely religious audience at the Cardus Institute's Decretum Symposium.
- During the Ontario Liberal leadership race in late 2019 and early 2020, one candidate (Alvin Tedjo) made merging the public and separate (Catholic) school boards one of the main planks in his platform. Though he did not become the leader of the party, it focused attention on the wasteful spending in and discriminatory nature of Ontario's education system.
- In November 2019 CFIC released "The Cost of Religion in Canada" which quantifies the lost tax revenues resulting from charitable tax receipts being issued by charities that fall under the category "Advancement of Religion."

Leslie Rosenblood – Secular Chair

***Not everyone
has to agree at
the end of the
conversation.***

***It's the
conversation
itself --- the free
inquiry --- that
matters.***

Edan Tasca
Human Rights &
Mental Health Chair

Human Rights and Mental Health

Early in 2020, we were asked to assist with an international effort to rescue “Omer” who was viciously tortured while facing persecution in Pakistan for publicly doubting Islam. While Omer has sponsors here in Canada waiting to welcome him, he was (and continues to be) facing a lengthy stay in Nepal, waiting for Canada’s immigration process to be completed. Our members and supporters have assisted us in providing funds to support Omer, helping to keep him safe.

Omer is just one of thousands of apostates who live in countries where doubting means death. He is one of the lucky few who managed to escape. We know that we cannot help everyone, but we are working with many partners to improve the plight of secularist around the world. In addition to promoting the issues on social media, we have offered presentations (such as [When Doubting Means Death](#) and [Protecting Blasphemers](#)) to raise awareness about the issues and to coordinate the efforts of international secularist.

We have also been calling attention to the plight of the Rohingya Muslim community in Myanmar and the Uighurs in China through social media and our Critical Links newsletter. Along with partners, we have been advocating for the Canadian government to add atheists to its Less Complex Claims immigration process, which would make it easier for atheists and secular refugees like Omer to find refuge.



Edan Tasca – Human Rights and Mental Health Chair

4. Science and Education

Just when we thought the need for scientific literacy could not be any greater, 2020 arrived. Faced with a new disease, scientists around the world raced to understand the virus, how it was transmitted, who it impacted, how to treat it, and how to prevent it. One year into the pandemic, science is proving victorious; once again, we look forward to celebrating that the scientific method of inquiry prevailed. However, for people who believe in conspiracies, and those who pursue wishful thinking, the winding path to knowledge provided fodder for the proliferation of pseudoscience.

In the quest to understand COVID-19, the findings of some scientific studies were released without proper checks and balances – for example, peer review – and shared by popular media

2019-2020 Programs

Mental Health (Dr. Hector Caruncho)

Conscientious Objection (Dr. Udo Schuklenk)

The Polar Bear Catastrophe (Dr. Susan Crockford)

Critically thinking about COVID-19 (Dr. Christopher DiCarlo)

Evolution and Islam (Dr. Ali Rizvi)

The case against Islamic Reform (Armin Navabi)

Difficult Discussions: Why Secularist Disagree on Bill 21 (Catherine Francis)

Medical research in the time of COVID-19: Making Sense of Health Reporting (Dr. Michael Allen)

Our Livable World, Creating the Clean Earth of Tomorrow (Marc Schaus)

Religion, Fake News and Alternative Facts (Dr. Christopher Douglas)

COVID-19 Is it safe to go back to the gym? (Dr. Michael Allen, Kevin Brown)

Anti-black racism in Canada: Causes, Impacts, and Remedies (Scott Fraser, Dr. Ajamu Nangwaya)

Introducing Homo Naledi – Our Newest Relative (Dr. John Mead)

A Conversation with Aron Ra

The Other Atheists (Ridvan Aydemir, The Apostate Prophet)

Rationalism, Social Justice and Critical Theory (Dr. Helen Pluckrose)

Stab Everyone you Love (Leslie Rosenblood)

When Doubting Means Death (Dr. Ali Rizvi and “Omer”)

Confessions of a former Fox News Christian (Seth Andrews)

without context. Worldwide, public health officials without adequate pre-existing organizing structures or expectations, were called on to provide guidance to governments and populations about containment of the virus. The wavering advice of public health, notably around the issues of masking, the timing of shutting down air travel and local movement, etc, created a lack of confidence from the public.

However, dedication to the scientific method has allowed Canada and the world to quickly understand this novel threat, to provide ever-improving guidance on slowing its spread, and ultimately to create a vaccination to prevent the virus, in record breaking time.

CFIC focused the second half of the year on bringing our members together around reliable information about COVID-19. Throughout the year, CFIC has promoted science, exposed pseudoscience, and worked to highlight the work of reputable scientists, all in effort to improve the lives and health of Canadians.

Zack Dumont – Science Chair

Education – the Heart of Our Mission

At its heart, CFIC is an educational charity. This year, faced with a pandemic, CFIC moved its usual branch programs and events online, making them accessible across the country, and even around the world. In March of 2020, CFIC moved 8 events on-line. By April, we were able to offer 19 different on-line events and attract close to 400 people. In total, between March and September CFIC offered 127 different events with a total audience of 2,239 people.



While our friends in Halifax have been able to resume meeting in person, the rest of the country remains in lockdown. While we hope that by the end of the 2021, branches will be able to resume some face-to-face meetings CFIC will continue to offer virtual presentations, events, and activities to all

of our members from coast to coast to coast. Watch for CFIC's first ever, virtual conference, coming up this May.

Seanna Watson – Education Chair

Communications

Thank you to our Communications Team members who really made a difference this year. This year we:

- continued to offer Critical Links e-newsletter,
- significantly expanded our social media presence including adding Instagram and increasing our presence on Twitter and Facebook, and
- reactivated our YouTube channel adding 18 new videos.

CFIC's communications activities are completely volunteer driven. A sincere thank you goes out to the volunteers who spend countless hours working to promote science, secularism and critical thinking.

Rohit Mohindra – Communications Chair

I've noticed two types of people; those who are thankful for being shown a truth and those who get mad when their truth is disturbed.

Rohit Mohindra – Communications Chair

Report on Critical Links

Critical Links is CFIC's monthly newsletter providing current information about what is happening in the world related to critical thinking, scientific inquiry, and secularism. We are fortunate to have several volunteers who contribute regular or occasional articles, highlighting what is important to them.

This year we made some significant enhancements to our newsletter.

- Fact checking – we try hard to get information right, but occasionally we inadvertently misinterpret information or reference unreliable sources. Because we are human and make mistakes, we have added a fact-checker to our Critical Links team. This is an added source of protection. Thanks go to Ashley Ertel-Ritzmann who painstakingly verifies our sources and content.

- Updated appearance – we are sure you have noticed that Critical Links got a makeover last fall. More pictures, and headlines in the newsletter, and the full article (on the CFIC website) just a click away.

Hundreds of hours of volunteer work go into the production of the newsletter. A sincere thank you to our writers, proofreaders, and editors.

Edan Tasca – editor

5. Supporting CFIC

With each new member, our voice of reason gets stronger and more influential. As we grow in numbers, so does our influence with government decision makers and the public opinion that guides them. Without us, the major influencers will continue to be the large, self-interested groups and institutions that benefit from making baseless claims and spreading pseudoscientific nonsense.



Decision making based on misinformation is the greatest threat to health, wealth and peace in the world today. That is why CFIC needs your support.

Sandra Dunham – Executive Director of Development



We help people make decisions based on evidence, rational thinking and compassion. We know what a positive difference those kinds of decisions make for people, communities and organizations. We are Canada's only national non-profit with the mission of promoting critical thinking, science and secularism.

If you or someone you know wants to be a part of this important work, there are many ways you can participate. Visit <https://centreforinquiry.ca/> for more information.

Stronger Together - Report on Partnerships

CFIC regularly hears from our members that partnerships are crucial in *fostering a secular society based on reason, science, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values*. We hear you and we agree. This year we have been working with other like-minded organizations to advance our cause. We understand

that we are stronger together. CFIC has worked extensively with *Humanist Canada* to share communications, collaborate on programming, established a calendar of events to assist like-minded organizations in scheduling events, and explore other areas of mutual benefit. We are working with *Secular Connexion Séculière* and other organizations to include atheists in the Less Complex Claims policy for atheist asylum seekers. Our vision includes a future where secular organizations collaborate to have enough clout to create a secular and just society.

Gus Lyn-Piluso – Partnership Chair

Building Financial Health



Along with all other organizations and people in Canada, CFIC was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in the second half of our fiscal year. The planned book tour for Yasmine Mohammed's *Unveiled* in April 2019 had to be cancelled, so there were no event revenues to compensate for prepaid expenses such as transportation and event venue rental deposits. Membership and donation revenue benefited as all CFIC events went online, increasing 9% and 79%, respectively. Coupled with tight discipline on spending, CFIC did not operate at a loss for the first time in several years.

Thanks to the continued support of its members (especially friend, founder, and benefactor Richard Thain), CFIC is now financially stable and looks forward to continuing its mission to promote reason, science, and secular values in Canada.

Leslie Rosenblood – Treasurer

Statement of Operations and Net Assets					
For the year ending September 30, 2020					
			2020	2019	
REVENUES:					
	Donations		71,352		39,903
	Membership dues		9,428		8,655
	Sales and special events		2,201		4,503
TOTAL REVENUES			82,981		53,061
EXPENSES:					
	Subcontractors		42,989		39,724
	Occupancy		15,840		15,840
	Program		6,453		6,983
	Secular rescue		4,338		
	Fundraising related expenses		4,228		922
	Professional fees		3,065		4,709
	Office		2,975		2,276
	Insurance		2,203		2,236
	Amortization		334		426
TOTAL EXPENSES			82,425		73,116
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) OR REVENUES OVER EXPENSES			556		(20,055)
	Net Assets, beginning of year		18,475		38,530
	Net Assets, end of year		19,031		18,475

Statement of Financial Position			
As at September 30, 2020			
		2020	2019
ASSETS			
Cash		18,196	19,823
Accounts receivable		16,263	83
Prepaid expenses		1,540	1,558
HST recoverable		2,770	3,909
Equipment		1,313	1,647
		40,082	27,020
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS			
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities		19,829	4,654
Deferred income		1,222	3,891
Unrestricted net assets		19,031	18,475
		40,082	27,020

2019-20 Directors

Gus Lyn-Piluso	President and Partnership Chair
Seanna Watson	Vice President; Education Chair; Branch Liaison
Leslie Rosenblood	Treasurer; Secular Chair
Zack Dumont	Science Chair
Alex Kenjeev	Compliance Chair
Edan Tasca	Human Rights and Mental Health Chair; Critical Links Editor
Diane Bruce	Critical Thinking Chair
Rohit Mohindra	Communications Chair
Onur Romano	Virtual Branch Manager
David Simmons	Recording Secretary (ex-officio)

2019-20 Branch Managers

Sophie Shulman	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Victoria Branch
David Richards	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Regina Branch
Kendra Getty	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Saskatoon Branch
Jocelyne Lemoine	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Winnipeg Branch
Rohit Mohindra	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Toronto Branch
Diane Bruce	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Ottawa Branch
Matthew Brewer and Leonard Walsh	Co - Managers, Centre for Inquiry Canada Halifax Branch
Onur Romano	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Virtual Branch

2019-2020 Staff

Sandra Dunham	Executive Director of Development
Mark Maharaj	Office Manager