CENTRE FOR INQUIRY Canada

Annual Report

2020-2021

Helping People with

Good Reason

Tel 613-663-8198
info@centreforinquiry.ca

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

www.centreforinquiry.ca
Charitable #: 83364 2614 RR0001

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Message to Our Members

Message from Our President

Once again, the pandemic was the big story of the year, but that did not stop CFIC from exploring other topics and making significant strides towards educating the public about all things science, critical thinking and secularism. CFIC's big stories included supporting refugee Omer for another 12 months, holding our first ever national, on-line conference and publishing a series of reports exposing the cost of religion in Canada.

CFIC also provided entertainment, community and support to our members through weekly and monthly programs such as Living Without Religion, Secular Community Network, Skeptics in the Pub and Book Clubs.

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 continued our exploration of the Cost of Religion in Canada. In addition to the cost of charitable tax receipts issued by religious charities, CFIC explored the cost of government transfers, municipal property tax exemptions and various tax exemptions enjoyed by charities that identify under the "advancement of religion" purpose.

Centre for Inquiry Canada's Board of Directors lead by example. They each take on significant volunteer work for CFIC including writing, researching, organizing events and stewarding the organization. They also provide significant philanthropic support, each of them donating monthly and stepping up to provide significant support that helped CFIC have our biggest December campaign in 2020.

Our volunteers continue to be the lifeblood of CFIC. It is almost beyond belief that CFIC has accomplished so much with only two, part time contractors (a total of 25 hours per week of paid time). Everything else that is accomplished is the result of committed volunteers, taking on leadership roles to ensure that CFIC is a healthy, vibrant active organization.

Message from Our President

Plans for 2021-2022

CFIC has big plans for 2021-2022. You can look forward to:

- **Podcast for Inquiry**
  Deep discussions, edgy topics
  Get it where you get your podcasts

  Web RSS Spotify iTunes Google Stitcher YouTube
- Our second **Conference for Inquiry**
- **World Humanist Day Activities**
  (June 20, 2022)
  A day of service by humanists across Canada
- Refreshed **Website**
- 12 issues of ***Critical Links***
- On-line **Critical Thinking Resource Library**
- More **presentations and events**

This year, CFIC asked our members to tell us what they thought about membership, organizational activities and the state of the organization. We have used our members' advice to create a new strategic plan which we will unveil at this year's Annual General Meeting.

Looking forward to 2021-2022 we are planning for a new podcast series that will allow us to explore more controversial topics and to create dialogue that assists with understanding. The idea was brought to us by a member, who has taken a leading role in its organization. We welcome members to bring their skills to CFIC as volunteers. If you have an idea for a program or event you'd like to run, that is in keeping with CFIC mission, vision and values, please let us know. We are a member-driven organization. We need you.

Once again, we are hopeful that 2022 will be the year that life gets back to normal. Increasingly we are realizing that the new normal may not be quite like it was pre-pandemic. We hope to see some of you in person, but we are committed to continue to provide robust virtual programming. Thank you for trusting CFIC to be your voice of reason.

Gus Lyn-Piluso
President – Centre for Inquiry Canada

What a great year it has been fostering public discourse that values facts over feelings, evidence over emotion, and observation over opinion.

Gus Lyn-Piluso

Critical Thinking Report

We must not just teach science but instill in others the need to use critical thinking skills to combat misinformation and disinformation

– Diane Bruce
Critical Thinking Chair

As the pandemic grinds on and social unrest is fueled by disinformation, the need for high quality information about critical thinking has never been greater. CFIC continues to work diligently to combat misinformation and disinformation. We do this through social media, our monthly *Critical Links* newsletter, presentations, seminars, and discussion groups.

Although almost all CFIC presentations have a critical thinking component, some focus specifically on issues in which analysis, presentation of different points of view, and identification of misinformation are the key themes. In the year ending September 30, 2021, some of our critical thinking workshops included:

- Basic Income for All (February 2021)
- Vaccines and the Misinformation Hydra (January 2021)
- Appreciative Inquiry: An Approach to Community Development (October 2020)
- Courageous Conversations: Talking About Decolonization (February 2021)
- Cultural Intelligence: Engaging Effectively in Diverse Cultural Contexts (March 2021)
- Bad Science in Consumer Health Products and Services (December 2020)
- The Appropriation of Sex Education by Conservative Populism (Nov. 2020)
- Rejecting Retributivism (February 2021)
- Surviving Misinformation in a Global Pandemic (May 2021)

Our branches, whose programming was largely on-line and available across the country, also focus on critical thinking in many of their discussions and book reviews. Secular Community Network in Ottawa held three critical thinking video lecture series: Philosophy of Mind: Brains, Consciousness and Thinking Machines; Introduction to Philosophy: God, Knowledge and Consciousness and Introduction to Social Psychology.

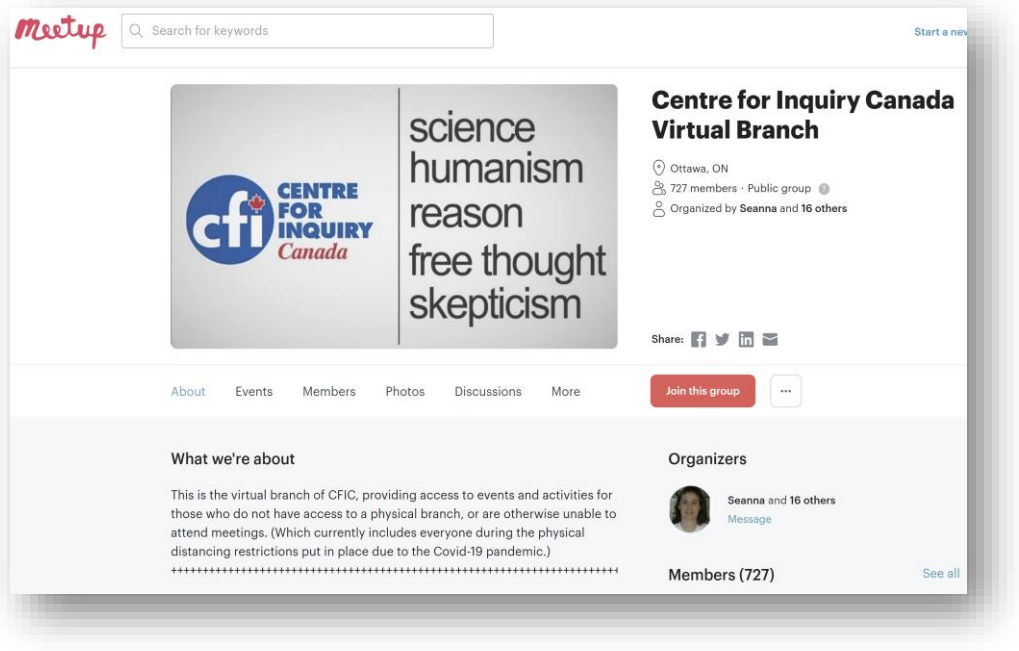
We continue to print monthly articles that create awareness about the importance of critical thinking in everyday life in our monthly *Critical Links*, where we also provide our monthly, mind-bender “Keith’s Conundrums.”

We know that critical thinking remains the most valuable tool in our effort to create a more civil society. We recognize the importance of dialogue as a mechanism for bridging differences of opinion and of recognizing the importance of ideas and learning. In the coming years, CFIC will continue to nurture critical thinking for Canadians.

Diane Bruce – Critical Thinking Chair

Building a Virtual Community

CFIC branches provide a sense of belonging for their members. While a few of our branches have been able to meet in person, most of our community-building has occurred on-line this year. Many CFIC members are eagerly awaiting a time when in-person events allow us to participate in activities in a more interactive manner, however, most have also appreciated the ability to hear from international speakers and participate in discourse with members from across Canada and around the world that our more virtual life permits. For some of our members who live in remote communities, the necessity of moving programming on-line has created a sense of community among like-minded people that they could otherwise not have enjoyed.



Our virtual programming also included two different Living Without Religion Groups, several weekly or bi-weekly discussion groups, two monthly book clubs (one of which resumed in-person meetings in the summer of 2021), 22 workshops and a national virtual conference.

Our branch managers continued to engage their local community through social media and sharing national events, with a smattering of in-person meetings where it was possible. Our virtual community includes many people who are new to CFIC, some from outside of Canada. We look forward to a new year, new challenges and new opportunities. We are committed to keeping skeptical, rational Canadians connected.

Seanna Watson – Branch Liaison, Vice President

Onur Romano – Virtual Branch Manager

Report on Secularism

The most important research CFIC has published in several years is its groundbreaking Cost of Religion in Canada series of reports. This has placed CFIC at the forefront of secular leadership in Canada and is gaining attention from the religious establishment.

– Leslie Rosenblood, Secular Chair

Many "nones" in Canada are largely apathetic about religion and look upon believers in much the same way they do those who root for a different sports team - perhaps with surprise and incredulity, but with tolerance and a "live and let live" approach. While this is a healthy approach towards people, it is often over-generalized and leads people to refrain from criticizing bad ideas. Most Canadians do not understand the negative impact a non-secular government has on society. CFIC has worked independently and with our partners in humanist and secular communities to work tirelessly toward change.

One way that CFIC worked to create change during the past year was researching and publishing “The Cost of Religion in Canada” series of reports. These reports explore the financial cost of Canada’s charitable category “Advancement of Religion.” Through this research, CFIC demonstrated that this charitable purpose costs Canadians in excess of $5 billion every year. Another avenue of change was raising awareness of a biased question on Canada's census. Every ten years, the long-form census (sent to approximately one-quarter of Canadian households) asks people to identify what religious group they belong to “even if they were no longer practicing.” The wording of this question artificially inflates the reported religiosity of Canadians, creating a bias that favours decisions supporting religion in general, and Christianity in particular. Because government and industry use this data to make important policy decisions, CFIC recommended that its members and those of other secular and humanist groups select “no religion” as the answer to this census question.

In partnership with other secular organizations, CFIC ensured that the House of Commons will respond to a petition demanding that atheist refugees receive equal consideration through the Less Complex Claims refugee application process. (At present, Canada has a streamlined program for refugees fleeing their home country due to religious persecution; it is maddening that atheists fleeing due to persecution for their unbelief are ineligible.) CFIC looks forward to seeing this discussed in Parliament later this year

Throughout the year CFIC has advocated for the defunding of religious hospitals and schools. In a June interview with Yahoo News, Leslie Rosenblood points out that without public funding of religious facilities “the only difference is that health care — such as reproductive services and medical assistance in dying — would not be rationed due to religious taboos, and there would be a single secular school system for all in each official language.” *Critical Links* provided information about the horrors that occur when church and state are combined. Among many other articles, see: faith-based hospitals and hospices are permitted to opt out of providing Medical Assistance in Dying; La Grande Noirceur: When Church and State Unite; and Making Amends to the Indigenous Community.

Leslie Rosenblood – Secular Chair

Human Rights Update

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. For another full year, our members have dug deeply into their own pockets to help to keep Omer safe while he waits out a pandemic and the very slow wheels of Canada’s immigration process. This year, the years of exile took their toll on Omer as he endured a series of health issues. Today he is physically well, while he continues to wait.

Omer is just one of thousands of apostates who are criminalized and victimized for expressing doubt. This year, the situation became even more perilous for atheists around the world as the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan. CFIC continues to raise awareness about the situation faced by apostates internationally and to work with our partners to coordinate the efforts of secularists in Canada and around the globe.

This year, CFIC held our second annual Protecting Blasphemers event with an international lineup that included Seth Andrews, Howard Burman, Sadia Hameed, Leo Igwe, Zara Kay, Susanna McIntyre, Armin Navabi, Ali Rizvi, Onur Romano, Christina Sheliska, Harris Sultan and Mohammed Syed.

This year, we also helped TalentLift help an atheist refugee family. TalentLift sponsors refugees to access the immigration entrepreneur visa program. They brought us the challenge of helping a musician and our members helped to raise the $10,000 needed to begin the process.

We are committed to continuing this important work and hope that in the next year we may finally welcome Omer to Canada.

Onur Romano – Human Rights Chair

Science Report

CFIC continued to focus on science literacy as the global pandemic ground on, and as we witnessed a series of Canadian climate emergencies. This year, CFIC brought you the latest updates, corrected misinformation and provided information on new and exciting scientific activities.

CFIC cheered along with much of the world as safe and effective vaccines facilitated our exit from deadly waves of the COVID pandemic. We helped to clarify information about these new vaccines, amongst a sea of misinformation. And we tried to provide context about new variants of COVID, and the changing COVID situation.

Last summer, Canada's west coast felt the impact of global climate change with heat domes and fires. In the fall, both the west and east coasts of Canada suffered through significant flooding events. CFIC has kept you informed about these events, even as the world leaders came together in Glasgow at the COP26 climate summit.

CFIC continued to bring you important healthcare related science programming, including Kavin Senapathy's "Vaccines and the Misinformation Hydra" and Ryan Armstrong's "Bad Science in Consumer Health Products."

We know that science is about more than health and the environment, so we brought you news in *Critical Links* about new discoveries. We were also incredibly fortunate to have renowned scientists present their current work including:

- "Canada's Underground Astronaut" Marina Elliott exploring her incredible journey into the Dinaledi cave in the Cradle of Humankind in South Africa.
- Matt Paneitz explaining how he was "Saving the World, One Tire at a Time."
- Allan Offenberger describing how Fusion can provide clean sustainable power for our future in "Fusion – The Ultimate Energy Source."

CFIC looks forward to continuing to provide our readers with accurate, reliable science information.

Zack Dumont – Science Chair

2020-2021 Programs

TEDx Countdown: We can Change Climate Change
– Marc Schaus & David R. Boyd

Female Genital Mutilation: Religion, Culture and Human Rights
– Farzana Doctor

Canada's Underground Astronaut
– Marina Elliott

The Appropriation of Sex Education by – Conservative Populism 19
– Lauren Bialystok

Bad Science in Consumer Health Products and Services
– Ryan Armstrong

Vaccines and the Misinformation Hydra
– Kavin Senapathy

Secularism in Canada
– Leslie Rosenblood

Basic Income for Canadians: from COVID-19 emergency to income security for all
– Evelyn L. Forget

Courageous Conversations: Talking About Decolonization
– Cortney Baldwin

Saving the World, One Tire at a Time
– Matt Paneitz

Engagement with Civil Society Organizations
– Robyn Fila

The Medicine Wheel Revisited: Indigenizing the Enlightenment
– Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson

The God Business and the Death of Reason in Africa
– Kato Mukasa

Fusion – The Ultimate Energy Source
– Allan Offenberger

Mission Education

At its heart, CFIC is an educational charity. As the pandemic dragged on, CFIC continued to offer programs and events online, making them accessible across the country, and even around the world.

This year, CFIC held 22 on-line events, and offered three video lecture series: Philosophy of Mind: Brains, Consciousness and Thinking Machines; Introduction to Philosophy: God, Knowledge and Consciousness; and Introduction to Social Psychology. As well, members came together more informally for learning through book clubs and facilitated discussion groups.

CFIC's first ever, virtual conference, happened in May. We enjoyed amazing presentations from some of the CFIC leadership team and some external speakers including:

- Andy Thomson – *Why We Believe in God(s)*
- Gus Lyn-Piluso and Joan Harrison – *Education for Democracy*
- Michael Wong – *Star Trek and Science*
- Amire Artaban Sedaghat – *East, West, Islam: a perpetual misapprehension*
- Sandra Dunham – *The Cost of Religion in Canada*
- Sean Manning – *Ancient Astronauts Build the Science Fiction of Egypt*
- Zack Dumont – *Surviving misinformation in a global pandemic*

CFIC continues to offer education of interest to our membership, relevant to current events and useful in the efforts to improve critical thinking, alleviate misinformation and promote the scientific method.

Seanna Watson – Education Chair

Communications

The CFIC Communications Team is a group of skilled volunteers who plan how we share information with our membership and the broader community. Our volunteers provide graphic design, publish *Critical Links*, provide technical skills to our website development and YouTube channel and otherwise help to ensure that CFIC's educational mandate is realized.

This year, those volunteers:

- Provided 12 issues of *Critical Links*
- Increased the quality and quantity of social media activity
- Added 44 new videos to the CFIC YouTube channel
- Conceptualized the CFIC Podcast for Inquiry project being released in the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

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.

John Varghese – Communications Chair

Report on *Critical Links*

Once again, we were happy to bring you 12 editions of *Critical Links*. This would not happen without our volunteer writers, editors, and technical assistants. Throughout the year, *Critical Links* let you know what events were happening at CFIC, we brought you news of "Omer," and we brought you information about current events in science secularism and critical thinking.

Critical Links is our members' work, and we appreciate every person who has contributed. If you have something to say that will stand up to scientific rigor and standards of critical thinking, we invite you to get involved.

Edan Tasca – editor

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.

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.

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

Financial report:

Statement of Operations and Net Assets

For the year ending September 30, 2021

	2021	2020
Revenues		
Donations	66,953	71,352
Membership dues	10,085	9,428
Sales and special events	3,185	2,201
Total revenues	**80,223**	**82,981**
Expenses:		
Contractors	46,064	42,989
Occupancy	15,840	15,840
Program	3,537	6,453
Secular Rescue	7,626	4,338
Fundraising related expenses	1,804	4,228
Professional fees	3,114	3,065
Office	2,250	2,975
Insurance	2,451	2,203
Amortization	265	334
Total Expenses	**82,951**	**82,425**
Exess (dificiency) of revenues over expenses	**(2,728)**	**556**
Net Assets, beginning of year	**19,031**	**18,475**
Net Assets, end of year	**16,303**	**19,031**

Statement of Financial Position

For the year ending September 30, 2021

	2021	2020
Assets		
Cash	23,011	18,196
Accounts receivable	119	16,263
Prepaid Expenses	1,900	1,540
HST recoverable	2,869	2,770
Equipments	1,048	1,313
Total Assets	**28,947**	**40,082**
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	6,505	19,829
Deferred income	6,139	1,222
Unrestricted net assets	16,303	19,031
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	**28,947**	**40,082**

2020-21 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	Mental Health Chair and *Critical Links* Editor
Diane Bruce	Critical Thinking Chair
E. Onur C. Romano	Human Rights Chair and Virtual Branch Manager
John Varghese	Communications Chair
David Simmons	Recording Secretary (ex-officio)

2020-21 Branch Managers

Sophie Shulman	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Victoria Branch
Kendra Getty	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Saskatoon Branch
Joycelyne Lemieux	Manager, Centre for inquiry Manitoba Branch
Diane Bruce	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Ottawa Branch
*Rohit Mohindra	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Toronto Branch
Matthew Brewer and Leonard Walsh	Co - Managers, Centre for Inquiry Canada Halifax Branch
Onur Romano	Manager, Centre for Inquiry Canada Virtual Branch

* Rohit resigned in March 2021

2020-21 Staff

Sandra Dunham	Executive Director of Development
Mark Maharaj	Office Manager