



GOD

grant me the

SERENITY

to accept the things

I cannot change

GODLESS SERENITY

Unconstitutional prayers in
New Brunswick municipal council meetings



May 2026
BC HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION



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THE SAGUENAY PROJECT

The Saguenay Project is an ongoing research and advocacy campaign by the BC Humanist Association to audit and promote compliance with the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *MLQ v Saguenay*.¹

Report	Province	Date	Regular prayers	Inaugural prayers
Duty of Neutrality Beyond Saguenay	BC	Nov 2020	0/162	23*/162
In Open Defiance	MB	Mar 2022	4/101	6/101
Open for Unconstitutional Business	ON	Dec 2022	9/360	156/328
We Yelled at Them Until They Stopped	BC	Nov 2023	0/161	7/148
The Last Municipality Standing	AB	May 2024	6/177	6/172
An Impossible Task	SK	Oct 2024	2/95	3/90
Prayer Free BC	BC	Apr 2025	0/160	8/155
The Island Anomaly	PEI	Sep 2025	0/14	1/6

*We identified three more prayers at BC's 2018 inaugural meetings in *We Yelled At Them Until They Stopped*, bringing the total to 26.

This report, the ninth in our series, builds on, and borrows from, these previous reports. Our study of municipalities across the country is ongoing and we have identified several trends: (1) The number of municipalities including prayer in their meetings (regular or inaugural) has steadily declined since *Saguenay*. Some municipalities responded to the ruling by changing their practices: sometimes abolishing the practice altogether, other times altering or adjusting their procedures. (2) Despite this reduction, prayer continues to be included in some municipal council meetings across the country. (3) These prayers are disproportionately delivered by Christian men. (4) Advocacy works, and more advocacy is needed.

The *Saguenay Project* seeks to highlight violations of *Saguenay* to increase compliance with the ruling, thereby strengthening the separation of religion and government in Canada and ensuring that all feel welcome in municipal council chambers across the country.

¹ Learn more and find links to all our report at <https://www.bchumanist.ca/saguenay>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Saguenay Project.....	1
Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
The <i>Saguenay</i> decision.....	4
Methodology	5
Quantifying Prayer Practices	8
2016 Inaugural Meetings.....	8
2021 Inaugural Meetings.....	9
2022 Inaugural Meetings.....	9
Prayer in Regular Meetings	10
Individual Case Studies	13
Overt Prayers and Religious Elements	13
Secular moments.....	18
Stealth Prayers	23
The Impact of <i>Saguenay</i>	29
Interprovincial Comparisons.....	31
Indigenous Content	33
Limitations and Future Research.....	35
Potential Sources of Error	35
Future Research	36
Conclusion.....	37
Appendix A: The <i>Saguenay</i> Decision	38
The Initial Complaint.....	38
The Appeal and Standards of Review	39
The Supreme Court of Canada	41
Justice Abella’s Concurrence	42
Consequences of <i>Saguenay</i>	43
Appendix B: Transcriptions.....	45
1. Grand Manan	45
2. Dieppe	49
3. Fundy Albert.....	51
Bibliography	65

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that opening a municipal council meeting with a prayer was an unconstitutional breach of the state’s duty of religious neutrality. Despite this precedent, over a decade later, there are still examples of local councils flouting the law.

As part of the ongoing Saguenay Project, here we report on our audit of practices in New Brunswick municipalities with populations over 1,000. Through careful examination of council proceedings, we quantify religious and secular practices, documenting inaugural and regular meetings for evidence of prayer and other religious elements, as well as secular moments and indigenous content.

New Brunswick presented a particular challenge as the province underwent significant amalgamation and municipal reorganization in 2022. This resulted in some municipalities holding inaugural meetings in 2021, new ones holding them in 2022, and some in both years. Data for dis-incorporated municipalities was particularly challenging to locate.

Nevertheless, we identified four municipalities that included prayers in the 2016 inaugural council meetings, eight in 2021 and three in 2022. Additionally, four municipalities (Dieppe, Grand Manan, Miramichi, and Tobique Valley) include prayers in their regular council meetings. We delve into many of these individual case studies to illustrate the variations in practice and compliance with *Saguenay*. In particular, we note several examples of “stealth prayer” in New Brunswick municipalities where crafty councillors seemingly attempt to find loopholes in the judicial rulings by merely dropping the “god” from well-established Christian prayers.

Overall, this report provides a comprehensive review of the impact of the *Saguenay* decision on municipal prayer practices in New Brunswick, offering valuable insights for policymakers, legal scholars, and community stakeholders concerned with religious neutrality and inclusivity in public governance.

Table 1 – Summary of prayers, secular practices, and indigenous content in 2016, 2021, and 2022 inaugural meetings and 2023 and 2024 regular council meetings of New Brunswick municipal councils.

Year	Type	Number	Data	Prayers		Secular practices		Indigenous content	
2016	Inaugural	64	35	4	11.4%	3	8.6%	0	0.0%
2021	Inaugural	64	39	8	20.5%	7	17.9%	6	15.4%
2022	Inaugural	58	42	3	7.1%	4	9.5%	5	11.9%
2023	Regular	73	64	4	6.3%	7	10.9%	12	18.8%
2024	Regular	73	68	4	5.9%	7	10.3%	18	26.5%

THE SAGUENAY DECISION

In December 2006, Alain Simoneau challenged the prayer that opened the municipal council meetings of Saguenay, Quebec. As an atheist, Simoneau was uncomfortable with the religious displays and had asked the Mayor to stop the practice.² After the Mayor refused his request, Simoneau pursued a human rights complaint to the Supreme Court of Canada.

In October 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada ordered Saguenay Council to “cease reciting a prayer in the municipal council chamber.”³ Although the Canadian and Quebec Charters of Rights and Freedoms do not explicitly impose a duty for the state to remain neutral in matters of religion and belief, the Court ruled that to protect the “variety of beliefs,” the state must maintain true neutrality.⁴ Justice Gascon, who authored the decision, elaborated that:

“True neutrality is concerned not with a strict separation of church and state on questions related to religious thought. The purpose of neutrality is instead to ensure that the state is, and appears to be, open to all points of view regardless of their spiritual basis. Far from requiring separation, true neutrality requires that the state neither favour nor hinder any religion, and that it abstain from taking any position on this subject. Even if a religious practice engaged in by the state is ‘inclusive,’ it may nevertheless exclude non-believers.”⁵

Justice Gascon concluded that no matter how inclusive the prayer, the mayor and council used their public powers to engage in a practice where they “adopted or favoured one belief to the exclusion of others” while acting on behalf of the state, thus turning council meetings into a “preferential space for people with theistic beliefs.”⁶ Furthermore, Justice Gascon elaborated that the state has a “democratic imperative” to pursue “true neutrality” as this ensures that institutions, such as municipal council meetings, are a “neutral public space that is free of discrimination and in which true freedom to believe or not to believe is enjoyed by everyone equally.”⁷ We provide a detailed exploration of the *Saguenay* decision in **Appendix A**. Ultimately, the *Saguenay* ruling was clear: municipal council meetings cannot include prayer.

“Far from requiring separation, true neutrality requires that the state neither favour nor hinder any religion, and that it abstain from taking any position on this subject.” Justice Gascon⁸

² *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)*, 2015, SCC 16 [2015] 2 S.C.R. 3, paras. 6 and 8.

³ *Ibid.* paras. 151, 155, 160, and 161.

⁴ *Ibid.* paras. 68 and 71.

⁵ *Ibid.* para. 137.

⁶ *Ibid.* paras. 113 and 120.

⁷ *Ibid.* paras. 73–75.

⁸ *Ibid.* para. 137.

METHODOLOGY

We follow a similar methodology here to our previous reports in the Saguenay Project. Our team reviewed publicly available records—typically meeting agendas, minutes, and/or videos—for evidence of religious content in municipal council meetings. We distinguish between two types of meetings: regular and inaugural. Regular meetings are normal business meetings of a council held at least four times a year, as defined by the *Local Governance Act*.⁹ Inaugurals are the first meeting of a newly constituted council following an election. These may be ‘organizational meetings’ where the mayor and council take their oaths of office, or more ceremonial events involving piping or drumming, inaugural speeches, and the swearing-in of newly elected officials.

As with our previous reports, we have restricted our survey to municipalities with populations equal to or greater than 1,000. Because the Government of New Brunswick significantly restructured local governments in January 2023 (see **Figure 1**), we had to form two datasets: pre and post-amalgamation. For the pre-amalgamation period, we relied on the populations in the 2016 Census for the 2016 and 2021 inaugural meetings.¹⁰ After amalgamation, we drew municipal populations from the 2024 Local Government and Rural District Statistics for New Brunswick, as the 2021 Census divisions still reflected the pre-amalgamation borders.¹¹

Due to the amalgamations, there were elections in 2022 for some municipal councils, leading to another round of inaugural meetings. Many of the municipalities that formed our dataset for 2016-2021 ceased to exist and data remain incomplete for this period. Additionally, because the 2022 elections were held in late November, some of these municipalities did not hold their inaugural meeting until January 2023. We still refer to these here as 2022 inaugural meetings.

In 2023, the provincial government also created twelve rural districts, which feature an elected advisory council, rather than a formal mayor and council.¹² These bodies meet just four times a year and data on their practices is less readily available than for larger towns and cities, so we have excluded them from our review.

⁹ Government of New Brunswick. (2017). “Local Governance Act. (2017).” Available at <https://laws.gnb.ca/en/document/cs/2017.%20c.18>

¹⁰ Population data based on: Statistics Canada. (2017). Population and dwelling counts, for Canada, provinces and territories, and census subdivisions (municipalities), 2016 and 2011 censuses (table). Population and Dwelling Count Highlight Tables. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-402-X2016001. Ottawa. Released February 8, 2017. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/pd-pl/Table.cfm?Lang=Eng&T=302&PR=47&S=86&O=A&RPP=25>

¹¹ Government of New Brunswick (2024). “New Brunswick Local Government and Rural District Statistics 2024.” *Department of Environment and Local Government*. Available at <https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/45293257/new-brunswick-local-government-and-rural-district-statistics-2024/46192056/>

¹² New Brunswick. (n.d.) “Rural Districts: New Brunswick’s reformed local governance system.” Available at <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Corporate/Promo/localgovreform/rural-districts.pdf>



Figure 1 – Summary of the effects of New Brunswick municipal amalgamations, excluding municipalities with populations under 1,000.

For each municipality, members of our research team visited the municipality’s website and located the agenda, minutes and, where possible, an audio/video recording of the inaugural

meetings after the 2016, 2021, and 2022 elections; two recent regular council meetings¹³; and the last meeting before the *Saguenay* decision (April 15, 2015).

As with our previous studies, our team reviewed the available data to verify whether the meeting included a prayer, invocation, moment of silence, indigenous content or other ritual practice to mark the start of a meeting. We noted those municipalities that included a prayer in their meeting, along with the name, affiliation and gender of the person who delivered the prayer, when available.¹⁴ We transcribed the prayers and made note of any procedures and practices surrounding prayers, such as recording any gestures made, whether the task rotated among council members, if a guest delivered the prayer, or if audio/visual recordings were paused during the delivery of the prayer. To better understand the procedures surrounding these prayers, we examined additional meeting minutes, and agendas, and if the procedures were still unclear, we contacted the municipality for clarification.

Finally, we also made note of any other practices that occurred to mark the start of council meetings, such as secular reflections, moments of silence or Indigenous land or territorial acknowledgements. We also observed that a few municipalities opened their meetings with the national anthem, O Canada; however, we have not systematically recorded this practice.

¹³ To ensure we compared across a consistent timeframe, we used the first meeting after two randomly selected dates: March 1, 2023, and October 12, 2024.

¹⁴ We made efforts to identify the individual's gender identify via publicly available information, i.e. pronoun use in church websites, media reports, blogs, etc. where possible.

QUANTIFYING PRAYER PRACTICES

2016 Inaugural Meetings

Using data from the 2016 census,¹⁵ we identified 64 New Brunswick municipalities with a population of 1,000 or more. Because of amalgamations and the lack of consistent archives, data were available for 35 of these municipalities.¹⁶ From this subset, we identified four municipalities that had prayers at their inaugural meetings (**Table 2**). Notably, Rothesay had both opening and closing prayers.¹⁷ All five prayers (including both in Rothesay) were delivered by Christian men. We also identified three additional communities that included poems or secular reflections in their 2016 inaugural meetings (**Table 3**).

Table 2 - Presence of prayer in 2016 inaugural meetings of New Brunswick municipalities.

Municipality	Prayer delivered by	Affiliation	Religion	Gender
Grand Manan	Pastor Karl Ingersoll	Baptist	Christian	M
Riverview	Rev. Brent Ham	Anglican	Christian	M
Rothesay	Rev. Canon Albert Snelgrove	Anglican	Christian	M
	Rev. Father J. Stanislas Paulin	Our Lady of Perpetual Help	Christian	M
Sussex	Pastor Richard Vincent	United Pentecostal Church	Christian	M

Table 3 - Presence of poems or secular reflections in 2016 inaugural meetings of New Brunswick municipalities.

Municipality	Content	Delivered by	Role	Gender
Fredericton	Poem	Ian LeTourneau	Poet Laureate	M
Moncton	Poem and Reading	Honorable Herménégilde Chiasson	Former Lieutenant Governor	M
Quispamsis	Reflection	G. Murray Driscoll	Outgoing Mayor	M

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. (2016). (table). *Census Profile*. 2016 Census of Population. Statistics Canada, Ottawa. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/search-recherche/lst/results-resultats.cfm>

¹⁶ Even between the time of our data collection and publication, some websites were taken offline or videos of meetings were no longer available.

¹⁷ Rothesay. (2016 May 25). "Oaths of Office Ceremony." Available at <https://www.rothesay.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/agenda-may25-2016.pdf>

2021 Inaugural Meetings

We found minutes for the 2021 inaugural meetings for 39 of 64 communities. Of these, six (15.4%) included a prayer in their meeting (**Table 4**). Rothesay again included both opening and closing prayers. The minutes of Salisbury’s inaugural meeting note that the meeting opened with the Lord’s Prayer, but do not specify who delivered it.¹⁸ An additional seven municipalities (20.5%) opened with moments of silence, reflections, or other secular practices (**Table 5**).

Table 4 – Presence of prayer in 2021 inaugural meetings of New Brunswick municipalities.

Municipality	Prayer delivered by	Affiliation	Religion	Gender
Grand Manan	Ruth Fair-Parker	Baptist	Christian	F
Hillsborough	Barry Snider	Outgoing Mayor	Unknown	M
Minto	David Williston	Christian Community Church of Minto	Christian	M
Quispamsis	Bruce Smith	Hockey Ministries International	Christian	M
Rothesay	Paul Rideout	St. Paul’s Church	Christian	M
	J. Stanislas Paulin	Our Lady of Perpetual Help	Christian	M
Salisbury	Unknown	Unknown	Christian	N/A

Table 5 - Presence of poems or secular reflections in 2021 inaugural meetings of New Brunswick municipalities.

Municipality	Content	Delivered by	Role	Gender
Caraquet	Reflection	Unknown	N/A	N/A
Hampton	Moment of Silence	Unknown	N/A	N/A
Moncton	Poem	Kayla Geitzler	Poet Laureate	F
Petit-Rocher	Moment of Silence	Luc Desjardins	Mayor	M
Saint John	Moment of Silence and smudging ceremony	John Collin	City Manager	M
Shediac	Special Council Reflection ¹⁹	Unknown	Unknown	N/A
St. Stephen	Moment of reflection	Allan MacEachern	Mayor	M

2022 Inaugural Meetings

As a result of the restructuring process, many New Brunswick municipalities had elections in 2022. Some were combined into entirely new municipalities and had full elections, others were simply amalgamated with adjacent communities and added one or two councillors to represent

¹⁸ Town of Salisbury. (2021 June 14). “Minutes of June 14, 2021 Regular Meeting.” Available at https://salisburynb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MINUTES_Jun_14.pdf

¹⁹ There was also a moment of silence in memory of a former councillor. See Town of Shediac (2021 October 25). “Minutes.” Available at https://shediac.ca/images/conseil_municipal_2021/PostMeetingMinutesOCOct252021TraductionAc cent.pdf

the new wards. Additionally, because these elections were held on November 28, 2022, several inaugural meetings were delayed until January 2023. We located minutes from the 2022 inaugural meetings for 42 of 58 municipalities. Of these, three (7.1%) included prayers, while four (9.5%) featured secular reflections (**Table 6** and **Table 7**, respectively). Again, Salisbury’s meeting opened with the Lord’s Prayer before the newly elected council took their oaths of office.

Table 6 – Presence of prayer in 2022 inaugural meetings of New Brunswick municipalities.

Municipality	Prayer delivered by	Affiliation	Religion	Gender
Miramichi	Adam Lordon, Mayor	N/A	N/A	M
Salisbury	Unknown	N/A	Christian	Unknown
Tobique Valley	Tom Eagles, Mayor	N/A	N/A	M

Table 7 – Presence of secular reflections in 2022 inaugural meetings of New Brunswick municipalities.

Municipality	Content	Delivered by	Role	Gender
Caraquet	Opening	Jonothan Roy	Poet Laureate	M
Edmundston	Reflection	Karen Power	Councillor	F
Hampton	Silent Reflection	Robert Doucet	Mayor	M
Shediac	Special Council Reflection	Roger Caissie	Mayor	M

The agenda for Bathurst’s 2022 inaugural meeting included a “Moment of Reflection/National Anthem,” but we did not observe this taking place during the meeting when we reviewed the video recording.²⁰ As such, we have omitted Bathurst from our list of municipalities with secular reflections in the 2022 inaugural meetings.

Prayer in Regular Meetings

We located data for regular council meetings for 68 of 73 New Brunswick municipalities. Four (5.9%) began with a prayer (see **Figure 2**), while seven (10.3%) had a secular reflection or moment of silence (see **Table 8** and **Table 9**, respectively). Most notably, Tobique Valley opens with the Mayor reading the Lord’s Prayer and Grand Manan invites a local pastor to each meeting. We discuss each of these examples further below. Nearly all the secular practices

²⁰ Not that as of October 14, 2025, the recording was no longer available online. The agenda is available at City of Bathurst. (2022 December 19). “City of Bathurst Regular Public Meeting Agenda.” Available at https://www.bathurst.ca/en/secure_document/392/meeting/agenda

were a moment of silence or reflection, with Belledune’s mayor also leading council in a reaffirmation of their oaths of office at every meeting.

Table 8 – New Brunswick municipalities with prayer in regular council meetings, as of October 2024

Municipality	Delivered by	Description in agenda
Dieppe	Mayor	Opening Word
Grand Manan	Invited Pastor	Prayer
Miramichi	Mayor	Moment of Prayerful Reflection
Tobique Valley	Mayor	Lord’s Prayer

Table 9 – New Brunswick municipalities with reflections and moments of silence in regular council meetings, as of October 2024

Municipality	Delivered by	Description in agenda/records
Belledune	Mayor	Reaffirm Oath of Office and Moment of Reflection
Caraquet	Mayor	Moment of Reflection
Edmundston	Council Member	Reflection
Hampton	Mayor	Silent Moment of Reflection
Quipamsis	Council Member	Moment of Reflection
Saint John	Council Member	Moment of Reflection
Shippagan	Mayor	Minute de silence

Additionally, our randomly chosen 2023 regular council meeting for Alnwick/Haldimand included a “Moment of Silence for our Fallen Soldiers and Citizens”²¹; however, this practice was only included in every second meeting and had stopped by March 2024.²² Like its inaugural meeting, Bathurst’s agendas include a ‘Moment of Reflection,’ but we only observed the singing of O Canada in recordings.²³ As such, both cases have been excluded from **Table 9**.

²¹ Township of Alnwick. (2023 March 7). “Alnwick/Haldimand Agenda Council Meeting”. Available at <https://alwickhaldimand.civicweb.net/Portal/MeetingInformation.aspx?Org=Cal&Id=1115>

²² Township of Alnwick. (2024 March 12). “Regular Council Meeting Agenda, Tuesday, March 12, 2024 @ 9:30 AM.” Available at <https://alwickhaldimand.civicweb.net/document/156303>

²³ For example, see City of Bathurst. (2021 October 21). “City of Bathurst Regular Public Meeting Agenda.” Available at https://www.bathurst.ca/en/secure_document/460/meeting/minutes

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

Here we review various notable individual municipal examples from our reviews. Some of these represent egregious violations of the state's duty of religious neutrality, others demonstrate practices that allows for a moment of secular and inclusive solemnity. Finally, several represent efforts to skirt the law, through minimal nominative changes, which we have described as 'stealth prayer.'

We drew from transcripts of recordings, where available. Because most of the prayers we found are short, they are included here. Due to the restructuring process, some municipalities had discussions concerning whether to include prayer practices in the new municipal bylaws following amalgamations. A review of these debates (transcripts provided in **Appendix B: Transcriptions**) provided additional insight into how some municipalities have engaged with the *Saguenay* decision.

Overt Prayers and Religious Elements

Grand Manan

The Village of Grand Manan opens every council meeting with a prayer delivered by a different local invited religious representative.

Somewhat uniquely, Grand Manan did not undergo restructuring and therefore has remained the same legal entity it was prior to *Saguenay*. The Village's procedure bylaw, adopted in September 2004, includes a prayer following the call to order.²⁴ Meeting minutes are available dating back to January 2007 and regularly included prayers.

We reviewed and recorded the speakers for the prayers of the meetings from January 2023 to February 2026 (33 total) and their religious affiliations (see **Appendix B.1**). Most were delivered by invited religious representatives, but some, including the first three meetings of 2026, were delivered by councillors. All invited speakers represented Protestant Christian churches. Of the six prayers delivered by councillors, five were delivered by Wayne Sturgeon and one by Jayne Turner. Sturgeon's prayers began by invoking "Heavenly Father," frequently mentioned the Biblical characters Solomon and Job, and ended "in Jesus's name." Turner's prayer was more non-denominational:

"Dear god we just pray tonight that you would make us mindful of the decisions that we have to make for this community that we are privileged to live in, and we just ask that we would use our best judgement and guidance and direction in

²⁴ Village of Grand Manan. (2012). "Bylaw 40-04 (Respecting the procedure and organization of the Village of Grand Manan." Available at <https://www.villageofgrandmanan.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/By-Law-40-04.pdf>

making these decisions for the betterment of our island. And we just thank you for that. In your name, amen.”²⁵

In total, 23 prayers (69%) directly used the words “Jesus” and/or “Christ.” Three women provided eight (24%) of the prayers; the remainder were delivered by men.

Several of the 2025 prayers had overtly Christian dominionist messages, implying the council was at their god’s disposal. For example, at the June 2, 2025, meeting Lighthouse Church Pastor Shea Linton’s prayer included, “Holy spirit, come have your way. We give you our evening, and we give you this meeting.”²⁶ Linton also delivered the October 6, 2025 prayer,²⁷ while fellow Lighthouse Church pastor John Lamos delivered one on April 7, 2025,²⁸ both of which included the phrase “May your kingdom come and may your will be done on Grand Manan as it is in heaven.”

Pastor Dorin Seicaru of Seal Cove Baptist Church included even stronger language in his prayer at the August 11, 2025, meeting:

“It is a duty and a privilege to pray for our authorities. As the Bible tells us in 1 Timothy chapter 2, we are urged to pray for them. And we thank you lord for this privilege. Lord, we also thank you because you are our god, our creator, and we thank you because this nation is created on Christian foundations, as our forefathers decided long ago to give you dominion from sea to sea.”²⁹

Citing Bible verses and declaring Canada is founded “on Christian foundations” at a municipal council meeting is one of the more blatant violations of the duty of religious neutrality we have recorded to date.

Grand Falls

While it did not include a prayer, the 2022 Grand Falls (French: Grand Sault) inaugural council meeting did include a religious element. To symbolize the amalgamation of different municipalities, there was a “transfer of power” ceremony described in the minutes.³⁰

The former mayor of each municipality being amalgamated to form the new municipality passed down a symbolic object to the new mayor. The former mayor of the Communauté

²⁵ Village of Grand Manan. (2026 February 2). “February 2 2026 Regular Council Meeting.” [Video]. Available at https://youtu.be/TsZZd00tzj8?si=Ba4pprP_EEm02vFT

²⁶ Village of Grand Manan. (2025 June 2). “June 2nd, 2025 council Meeting.” [Video]. Available at <https://youtu.be/90K9-6fGBZ0>

²⁷ Village of Grand Manan. (2025 October 6). “October 6th 2025 Council Meeting.” [Video]. Available at <https://youtu.be/Fl6dlJofnBM>

²⁸ Village of Grand Manan. (2025 April 7). “April 7th 2025 Council Meeting.” [Video]. Available at <https://youtu.be/cqGhIhGARWY>

²⁹ Village of Grand Manan. (2025 August 11). “August 11th, 2025 Council Meeting.” [Video]. Available at <https://youtu.be/pDfMwAobVWk>

³⁰ Regional Municipality of Grand Sault Grand Falls. (2022 December 18). “Minutes”. Available at https://www.grandsault.com/en/_files/ugd/e0dd02_87b79de8b2fc4281b4cf766eafba27b3.pdf

Rurale de Saint-André presented a Bible, while the other three mayors presented secular objects (a gavel, a seal, and a frame). Symbolizing the transfer of power in a municipality with a Bible is problematic as it implies our government derives its authority from the Christian holy book. That said, as a one-off amalgamation ceremony, it is unlikely to recur.

Quispamsis

At the 2021 Quispamsis inaugural meeting, Chaplain Bruce Smith, from Hockey Ministries International, delivered the following prayer:

“Let us pray. Eternal god. We approach you at this time and give you thanks for this occasion. This is a special time for these men and women who have been elected by the citizens of his community to serve in government. Government is your idea. You’ve instituted it. Thank you for these men and women and their willingness to give, to lead, to govern, the people of Quispamsis. Give them much wisdom in their execution of their duties and responsibilities. May they have much discernment, exercise sound judgement, and make wise decisions. Please bless the mayor and council as they seek to govern for the good of all. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”³¹

This prayer includes many problematic elements. It is overtly Christian and the phrase “Government is your idea, you’ve instituted it” implies a divine teleology to local governance, bordering on the theocratic.

We also observed in one randomly selected regular meeting a wreath behind the mayor featuring the words “Praying for Peace” (see **Figure 3**). This first appeared at the March 15, 2022, meeting—the first meeting following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.³² Mayor Libby O’Hara introduced the wreath as follows:

“The other thing of course that’s on everybody’s mind is the trouble in Ukraine. And I say that with a heavy heart. I’d like you to acknowledge that behind me one of our staff created a wreath in the colours of the Ukraine flag. When you leave, if it’s dark, you’ll see that we have yellow and blue lights facing the chamber, and also at the Q-plex we have a flag at each end of the arena, so that everybody gives a silent thought or prayer or whatever your wish is in order to send some positivity to a country that is being overtaken, overrun, by a tyrant. So certainly, I think it’s important that as Canadians that we look after our fellow world citizens.”³³

³¹ Town of Quispamsis. (2015 April 7). “Quispamsis Town Council Regular Meeting Minutes.” Available at <https://portal.laserfiche.ca/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=542100&repo=r-000187a6489a>

³² Town of Quispamsis. (2022 March 15). “Quispamsis Town Council – March 15/22.” [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRED9GKF7lw>

³³ *Ibid.*



Figure 3 – Screenshot of the “Praying for Peace” wreath at the March 15, 2022, Quispamsis council meeting.³⁴

The wreath remained up for over a year, and can be seen during the May 16, 2024, meeting,³⁵ though it was removed before the June 20, 2023, meeting.³⁶ While we support efforts to stand up for peace and justice in the world, we would underscore that such efforts can be done in more inclusive and secular ways.

Rothesay

The Town of Rothesay had two prayers at both its 2016 and 2021 inaugural council meetings: one opening and one closing the meeting.³⁷ All four prayers were Christian. The 2016 prayers were delivered by Rev Canon Albert Snelgrove of St. Paul’s Church (Anglican) and Rev. Father J. Stanislas Paulin of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Catholic). The 2021 opening prayer was delivered by Rev. Paul Rideout, also of St. Paul’s Church (Anglican), while the closing prayer was again delivered by Rev. Father Paulin. The prayers were not recorded; therefore, we cannot comment on their contents.

³⁴ Town of Quispamsis. (2022 March 15). “Quispamsis Town Council – March 15/22.” [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRED9GKF7lw>

³⁵ Town of Quispamsis. (2023 May 16). “Quispamsis Town Council – May 16/23.” [Video]. Available at <https://youtu.be/chqirtRfVSU?si=-c7fglN2CaDsuxlW>

³⁶ Town of Quispamsis. (2023 June 20). “Quispamsis Town Council – Jun 20/23.” [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvT5LD3sZ6Y>

³⁷ Town of Rothesay. (2016 May 26). “Rothesay Council Open Session – Oath of Office Ceremony.” Available at <https://www.rothesay.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2016May25Minutes.pdf> and Town of Rothesay. (2021 June 7). “Rothesay – Oaths of Office Ceremony, Rothesay Council Meeting, Town Hall, Monday, June 7, 2021.” Available at <https://www.rothesay.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FINAL2021Jun7-Oath-of-Office-Agenda-Package.pdf>

The inclusion of multiple prayers from different denominations is often argued as reflecting diverse religions within a municipality, and indeed, Anglican and Catholic are the largest Christian denominations in Rothesay according to the 2021 census.³⁸ However, at 31.1% “no religion” comprises a larger group than either Catholics (29.0%) or Anglicans (11.5%). Together, Catholics and Anglicans represent only 40% of the population of Rothesay. Thus, if it was the intent of the town to be inclusive, this approach clearly failed.

As we have elaborated on in previous reports,³⁹ whether a meeting includes one prayer, two prayers from different faith traditions/denominations, or more prayers, this practice still excludes non-believers and those from other faith traditions and is still a violation of *Saguenay*. The City of Vancouver, for example, conceded that the inclusion of five prayers at its 2022 inauguration ceremony still constituted “a breach of the duty of religious neutrality.”⁴⁰

For Rothesay, the message being sent by the Town was that Christians of two denominations are welcome and celebrated at council meetings, while everyone else is a second-class citizen or guest in the chambers.

Salisbury

The Town of Salisbury began each council meeting with recitation of the Lord’s Prayer until December 12, 2023, which was the last meeting of the old council following restructuring. The minutes for that meeting note: “it was moved by Councillor Colwell that ‘Council amend the order of the agenda to skip agenda item number 2, The Lord’s Prayer.’ Then by a unanimous ‘nay’ vote, the motion failed without a seconder.”⁴¹ The Lord’s Prayer was then recited. Later in the meeting:

“Mayor Campbell explained that Council had looked into changing the Village’s Procedural By-Law but was unable to do so because of the timeline of municipal reform and the resulting election. It was noted that item number 2 on the agenda at the present time, The Lord’s Prayer, will not be part of the new Procedural By-Law that will take effect in 2023 under the new municipal entity to be known as the Town of Salisbury.”⁴²

³⁸ Statistics Canada. (2023). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. [Table]. Ottawa. Released November 15, 2023. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

³⁹ See Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., & Bushfield, I. (2025 April). “Prayer Free BC.” *BC Humanist Association*, 1-41. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/prayer_free_bc, p.9.

⁴⁰ BC Humanist Association. (2024 June 3). “Vancouver concedes 2022 prayers breached duty of neutrality.” Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/vancouver_concedes_2022_prayers

⁴¹ This description appears to describe a process that flies in the face of conventional procedure; nevertheless, we have reproduced it directly from the minutes. Town of Salisbury. (2022 December 12). “Minutes of December 12, 2022 – Special Meeting.” Available at https://salisbury.nb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/MINUTES_Dec_12_Special_Meeting.pdf

⁴² *Ibid.*

Notably, immediately following the regular business at that December 2022 meeting, council took their oaths of office. As such, we categorize Salisbury as having prayers at both its 2021 and 2022 inaugural meetings.

We did not find any evidence of prayer at Salisbury regular council meetings since the new Procedural By-Law took effect.

Tobique Valley

The phrase “Mayor Eagles lead [sic] the meeting in the Lord’s Prayer” has appeared in all meeting minutes examined since the first Tobique Valley regular meeting in 2023.⁴³ This is a clear violation of the state’s duty of religious neutrality.

The Village of Tobique Valley was incorporated on January 1, 2023, as part of the amalgamation process. The only former municipality with a population of over 1,000 incorporated into Tobique Valley was the Village of Plaster Rock. We could not find a webpage for Plaster Rock and its Facebook page did not contain regular meeting minutes. Therefore, we do not have any data on whether Plaster Rock council meetings formerly included prayer.

Secular moments

Caraquet

Caraquet begins every council meeting with a “Moment de recueillement” [Moment of reflection], introduced by the mayor. How this moment is introduced varied from meeting to meeting.

For example, the March 13, 2023, meeting began with: “pour commencer l’ouverture bien sûr en fait ce qu’on fait chaque mois avec un moment de recueillement” [To begin, of course, the opening, in fact, what we do every month, is a moment of reflection],⁴⁴ which was followed by ~14 seconds of silence.

The October 15, 2024, meeting had a longer introduction, referencing an individual who had recently died:⁴⁵

“Euh on commencera peut-être par un moment de recueillement bien sûr pour ceux qui nous ont quitté, nous quittent régulièrement récemment j’aurais une attention spéciale pour Monsieur Alie LeBouthillier qui vous verrez sur certaines des photos là a déjà été le greffier municipal	“Well, perhaps we’ll start with a moment of silence, of course, for those who have left us, who have left us regularly recently. I would like to pay particular attention to Mr. Alie LeBouthillier, who you will see in some of the photos there. He was the municipal clerk at the time when clerks were not permanent
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⁴³ District of Tobique Valley. (2023 January 23). “Minutes – Regular meeting.” Available at <https://irp.cdn-website.com/75ad3eee/files/uploaded/Minutes+for+Website+-+January+23rd%2C+2023.pdf>

⁴⁴ Ville de Caraquet. (2023 March 13). “Assemblée ordinaire du conseil municipal de Caraquet - 13 mars 2023.” [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0voZiYMLp0>

⁴⁵ Ville de Caraquet. (2024 October 15). “Assemblée ordinaire du conseil municipal de Caraquet - 15 octobre 2024.” [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJxnydweUvA>

à l'époque où les greffiers n'étaient pas des employés permanents. C'est une personne qui... a qui bien sûr impliqué dans les affaires mais également dans la vie communautaire à Caraquet et c'est peut-être en pensant à lui et aux autres qui nous ont quitté qu'on aura cette petite réflexion."	employees. He was a person who was involved in business, of course, but also in community life in Caraquet, and it is perhaps by thinking of him and the others who have left us that we will have this little reflection."
--	---

This was followed by approximately 10 seconds of silence.

The October 14, 2025, meeting referenced Thanksgiving:⁴⁶

"Euh on va commencer par un moment de recueillement. Comme c'est le lendemain de l'action grâce, on va tout simplement avoir une petite pensée pour tout ce que nous recevons et que nous pouvons donner à d'autres."	"We'll start with a moment of reflection. Since it's the day after Thanksgiving, we'll simply take a moment to think about all that we receive and that we can give to others."
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All introductions that we reviewed were secular—they did not include reference to a god or gods, allude to a religion, or evoke religious language, imagery, or symbolism.

The moment of reflection has been on the "Ordres du jour" [agenda] since 2018, the earliest agendas available on their website.⁴⁷ Details about these moments are not recorded on the "Procès verbaux" [minutes], which are available dating back to 2014, and as a result, it is not possible to determine when or why this practice started.

At the December 20, 2021, inaugural meeting of Caraquet Council, two lines from "Minuit, Chrétiens" [Midnight, Christians], played as people were finding their seats. The song traditionally opens the Catholic Midnight Mass:⁴⁸

Le Rédempteur a brisé toute entrave La terre est libre et le ciel est ouvert.	The Redeemer has broken all obstacles The earth is free and the sky is open.
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Elsewhere, we have also seen Christian songs serve as a form of stealth prayer.⁴⁹ However, in this case it is unclear if the song was played intentional, approved by the municipality, or

⁴⁶ Ville de Caraquet. (2025 October 14). "Assemblée ordinaire du conseil municipal de Caraquet - 14 octobre 2025." [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mrR09P405Y>

⁴⁷ Ville de Caraquet. (2018 January 15). "Ordre du jour – Lundi 15 Janvier 2018 à 18h 30." Available at <https://www.caraquet.ca/sites/default/files/ordres-du-jour/2018-01-15.pdf>

⁴⁸ Ville de Caraquet. (2022 December 20). "Assermentation du conseil municipal de Caraquet - 20 décembre 2022." [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VE1Nizr-K0U>, song plays at 4:25.

⁴⁹ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Bushfield, I., Jensen, O. (2023 November). "We yelled at them until they stopped: Revisiting prayers in BC municipal council meetings and the power of secular advocacy." *BC Humanist Association*. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/we_yelled_at_them_until_they_stopped. p.20.

included as an oversight as part of a broader pre-meeting playlist. We encourage municipalities to choose inclusive songs for these events.

Edmundston

Edmundston council meetings open with a ‘reflection,’ according to their minutes. The city clerk verified that the following is read by a different councillor at every meeting:⁵⁰

Réflexion Que cette réunion soit guidée par la sagesse, l’honneur et le respect et que les décisions qui y sont prises soient empreintes du plus grand souci envers le bien commun et les besoins et aspirations de l’ensemble de la communauté.	Reflexion May wisdom, honour and respect guide this meeting and may the decisions be taken for the greater good of all the citizens and the needs and aspirations of the entire community.
--	--

Prior to *Saguenay*, councillors read a prayer prior to the meeting.⁵¹ That practice was changed at the meeting immediately following the decision, where a local poet was invited to read from his latest book before a councillor delivered the “reflexion”.⁵² Notably, this was done “on the occasion of a challenge from the Mayor of Calgary.”

Hampton

Hampton’s regular council meetings begin with a “Silent Moment of Reflection.” The minutes of the November 12, 2024, meeting, for example, described how “Mayor Doucet led Council through a moment of silent reflection.”⁵³ No recording was available to verify how this moment was introduced. This practice appears to be essentially unchanged since 2019, the earliest meeting minutes we found on the Town’s website.

Quispamsis

Despite opening its 2021 inaugural meeting with a prayer, Quispamsis’ regular council meetings have begun with a “moment of reflection” back to the oldest meeting minutes we were able to find from 2014. However, until the regular meeting of April 7, 2015, (the week before *Saguenay*) the description of the “moment of reflection” consisted of “Councillor [name] led the meeting in prayer.” As videos are not available from this time, the exact nature of the prayer is unknown.

⁵⁰ Correspondence with municipal staff, August 18, 2025.

⁵¹ City of Edmundston. (2015 January 1). “Réunion ordinaire publique du conseil municipal d’Edmundston.” Available at https://edmundston.ca/application/files/2016/3810/1386/2015-01-20_ProcesVerbaux_Minutes.pdf

⁵² City of Edmundston. (2015 April 21). “Réunion ordinaire publique du conseil municipal d’Edmundston.” Available at https://edmundston.ca/application/files/6616/3810/1387/2015-04-21_ProcesVerbaux_Minutes.pdf

⁵³ Town of Hampton. (2024 November 12). “Regular council meeting minutes.” Available at <https://hampton.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-11-12-Regular-Council-Meeting-Minutes.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2025).

The April 7, 2015, meeting minutes still include a “moment of reflection” but the description changed to “Councillor [name] read the moment of reflection.”⁵⁴ Subsequent meetings read “[name] led the moment of reflection.”⁵⁵ Recent meetings have the section titled “Opening remarks” with the text “[name] provided a treaty acknowledgement and moment of reflection.”⁵⁶ The town recently updated this wording, replacing ‘treaty acknowledgement’ with ‘land acknowledgement.’⁵⁷

Since videos became available in April 2021, this reflection has consisted of a councillor reading the following secular phrase:

*“May we remind ourselves of the important work we have before us tonight.
May we make good decisions without prejudice or bias and always in the best
interests of our community, which we are here to serve.”⁵⁸*

Saint John

Meeting minutes for the City of Saint John begin with “[Councillor] read aloud the Land Acknowledgement and called for a moment of reflection.” The Land Acknowledgement is read, followed by “Let us reflect on that for a moment,” for about 10 seconds of silence.

Prior to *Saguenay*, meetings opened with a prayer. The minutes of first meeting following the decision, read:

“Mayor Norton called the meeting to order and requested a moment of silence to honour Constable Michael Paul Hebert, of the Saint John Police Force who passed on April 20th, 2015. Condolences were extended to the family.

*The Mayor advised that moment of silence will also be observed at future meetings of Common Council to respect the Supreme Court of Canada decision, *Mouvement laïque quebecois v. Saguenay (City)* [2015] S. C. J. No. 16, rendered on April 15th, 2015.”⁵⁹*

⁵⁴ Town of Quispamsis. (2015 April 7). “Quispamsis Town Council Regular Meeting Minutes.” Available at <https://portal.laserfiche.ca/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=542100&repo=r-000187a6489a>

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ See for example *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ We were unable to confirm the precise date this practice began, but it is currently the practice as of the publication of this report.

⁵⁸ Town of Quispamsis. (2023 March 21). “Quispamsis Town Council – Mar 21/23.” [Video]. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyCCjvG_ZX0

⁵⁹ City of Saint John. (2015 April 13). “Common council meeting – The City of Saint John, City Hall – April 13, 2015, 6:00pm.” Available in City of Saint John. (2015 May 11). “Common council meeting – The City of Saint John, City Hall – May 11, 2015, 6:00pm.” Available at <https://records.saintjohn.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=58996&dbid=0&repo=CityofSaintJohn>, p.9.

The next meeting included a moment of reflection for the fire chief,⁶⁰ but subsequent meetings simply opened with a call to order and no mention of a moment of silence.⁶¹ No moments of silence were found in the earliest videos available, which date back to 2019.⁶²

The land acknowledgement followed by a moment of silence was introduced at the June 14, 2021, inaugural meeting.⁶³ Notably, this was the first meeting after the announcement of the discovery of suspected unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School.⁶⁴

Shediac

We were able to find meeting minutes for the Town of Shediac since 2015. For meetings up to, and including, the May 25, 2015, meeting (one month after *Saguenay*), the regular council meetings included the national anthem and a prayer ["La reunion debute avec le chant de l'hymne national et la priere speciale du conseil"].⁶⁵ At the subsequent meeting, this agenda item was changed to a special reflection of council ["La reunion debute avec la reflexion speciale du conseil"].⁶⁶ We could not locate any information on the reason for this change. The wording of the prayer/reflection is unavailable, so we cannot review how the content of the reflection was changed.

This language continued to be used in the minutes through 2021. At that point, we begin to see at some meetings there was no reflection, while at others the reflection was mentioned and included a territorial acknowledgement, a community announcement, or a moment of silence for a person who has died.⁶⁷ We cannot tell from the minutes how much this variation reflects an actual change in practice or if it is merely an inconsistency in the way the minutes were recorded. The 2025 meeting minutes consistently include a territorial acknowledgement under

⁶⁰ City of Saint John. (2015 May 11). "Common council meeting – The City of Saint John, City Hall – May 11, 2015, 6:00pm." Available at

<https://records.saintjohn.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=58996&dbid=0&repo=CityofSaintJohn>

⁶¹ City of Saint John. (2015 June 1). "Common council meeting – The City of Saint John, City Hall – June 1, 2015, 6:00pm." Available at

<https://records.saintjohn.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=59277&dbid=0&repo=CityofSaintJohn>

⁶² City of Saint John. (2019 January 28). "City of Saint John Common Council Meeting – January 28, 2019." [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrOQ0HYGaJE>

⁶³ City of Saint John. (2021 June 14). "Minutes – Inaugural regular meeting, common council of the City of Saint John, June 14th, 2021, at 6:00pm." Available at

<https://records.saintjohn.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=791891&dbid=0&repo=CityofSaintJohn>

⁶⁴ See for example, Dickson, C., & Watson, B. (2021, May 29). "Remains of 215 children found buried at former B.C. residential school, First Nation says." *CBC News*. Available at

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-eml%C3%B4ps-te-secw%C3%A9penc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778>

⁶⁵ Ville de Shediac. (2015 May 25). "Réunion extraordinaire du conseil." Available at

https://shediac.ca/images/reunions/Proces-verbaux_Minutes/Proc%C3%A8s-verbaux_2015.pdf

⁶⁶ Ville de Shediac. (2015 June 22). "Réunion extraordinaire du conseil." Available at

https://shediac.ca/images/reunions/Proces-verbaux_Minutes/Proc%C3%A8s-verbaux_2015.pdf

⁶⁷ See for example Ville de Shediac. (2021 January 25). "Réunion extraordinaire du conseil – Procès-verbal," through Ville de Shediac. (2021 December 22). "Réunion extraordinaire du conseil – Procès-verbal." Both available at https://shediac.ca/images/reunions/Proces-verbaux_Minutes/Proc%C3%A8s-verbaux_2021.pdf

the heading “Reflection and recognition of the territory.”⁶⁸ It is unclear if the ‘reflection’ is the territorial acknowledgement or if there is an additional reflection.

Shippagan

During the ‘Mot du marie’ (Mayor’s Word), Mayor Kassim Doumbia opens Shippagan council meetings with a moment of silence. For example, on February 2, 2026⁶⁹:

Avant de débiter, j’aimerais que l’on prenne une minute de silence pour les personnes qui nous ont quittés au courant des dernières semaines. [Minute de silence]	Before we begin, I would like us to observe a minute of silence for those who have passed away in recent weeks. [Minute of silence]
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Previous meetings also included the mayor ending with “Que la terre leur soit légère” [May they rest in peace].⁷⁰ This phrasing, while common and well-intentioned, has Christian origins and implies a spirit that continues after death.

Minutes were available dating back to September 2014; however, the Mot du maire only began in December 2015 and did not begin with a moment of silence.⁷¹ We have not reviewed the entirety of Shippagan’s records to determine when the moment of silence was introduced regularly.

Stealth Prayers

In some of our previous reviews, we have identified ‘stealth prayer’ whereby religious practices may be smuggled into a meeting under the guise of moment of reflection.⁷² Prescriptive moments of silence are a common form of ‘stealth prayers’. These occur when a moment of silence is introduced with additional instruction, such as encouraging those present to engage in a ‘moment of silent prayer,’ or by instructing those present to bow their heads or to rise as part of a moment of silence/reflection.

As we see from the follow examples and our past research, stealth prayers exist on a spectrum from the, perhaps unintentional, inclusion of religious music in an inaugural meeting, to efforts to find loopholes in the Saguenay decision. It remains an open question whether any of these individual examples would be found to breach the letter of *Saguenay*; however, we would hope

⁶⁸ Town of Shediac. (2025 January 20). “Town of Shediac – Regular Meeting of Council – Minutes.” Available at <https://pub-shediac.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=107>

⁶⁹ Shippagan. (2026 February 2). “Mot du maire.” Available at <https://shippagan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Mot-Maire-Fevrier-2026.pdf>

⁷⁰ See e.g. Shippagan. (2025 December 1). “Mot du maire.” Available at <https://shippagan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Mot-Maire-Decembre-2025.pdf> and Shippagan. (2024 November 4). “Rapport Novembre 2024.” Available at <https://shippagan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/20241104-Mot-Maire.pdf>

⁷¹ Shippagan. (2015 December 7). “Mot du maire.” Available at <https://shippagan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Message-maire-dec-2015-1.pdf>

⁷² Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Jensen, O., Chowdhury, P., & Bushfield, I. (2022 December). “Open for unconstitutional business: Prayers at municipal councils in Ontario.” *BC Humanist Association*. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/open_for_unconstitutional_business, p.52.

our municipal leaders would aim higher than strict compliance with the law and work to actively include and welcome diverse perspectives and belief systems at their municipal council meetings.

Dieppe

Since before *Saguenay*, Dieppe's municipal council meetings included an opening prayer read by the mayor at the beginning of the meeting. The debate around updating procedures following *Saguenay* provides insight into how some municipalities might try to circumvent the Supreme Court ruling, rather than adhering to the law of the land.

Prior to April 27, 2015, this element was described in the agenda as the "opening prayer" and the wording was: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."⁷³ This is known as the 'Serenity Prayer.' It is a Christian prayer dating back to the 1930s, and more recently has become associated with religious 12-step recovery programs.⁷⁴

At the first meeting after *Saguenay*, April 27, 2015, the agenda was updated to read "opening word."⁷⁵ Mayor Yvon Lapierre introduced the element in the following way: "Colleagues, please give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to tell the difference."⁷⁶ Lapierre had told CBC at the time:

*"We still want to keep essentially that moment where we bring everybody together. We will be saying something like, 'Colleagues please let's have the serenity to accept the things that we cannot change, the courage to change the things that we can and the wisdom to know the difference. That statement in and of itself, prayer or not, depending on the context, really says what the responsibility of the municipal council is.'"*⁷⁷

At that meeting, council passed a motion to change the procedural bylaw to rename the prayer as an "opening word." During the debate, councillors spoke to trying to continue the prayer, rather than an honest effort to ensure that meetings were welcoming to everyone, regardless of their faith or lack thereof.⁷⁸ From his comments to CBC and at the meeting, it seems clear that

⁷³ City of Dieppe. (2015 January 26). "Regular council meeting." [Video]. Available at

<https://www.dieppe.ca/en/hotel-de-ville/webdiffusion-archive.aspx?video=2015-01-26-EN>

⁷⁴ Paeth, S. (2025 March 13). "You've likely heard the Serenity Prayer – but not its backstory." *The Conversation*. Available at <https://theconversation.com/youve-likely-heard-the-serenity-prayer-but-not-its-backstory-250244>

⁷⁵ City of Dieppe. (2015 April 27). "Regular public meeting of Dieppe City Council, City Hall, April 27, 2015." Available at <https://calendrier-calendar.dieppe.ca/council/Detail/2015-04-27-1900-Regular-council-meeting/27f5ef9d-034f-453f-afcd-ae6e0009ec59>

⁷⁶ City of Dieppe. (2015 April 27). "City of Dieppe – Regular council Meeting (2015-04-27)." [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKmpOqRU2hQ&t=6s>

⁷⁷ CBC News. (2015 April 16). "Marilyn Kerton upset over top court's right-to-pray ruling." <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/marilyn-kerton-upset-over-top-court-s-right-to-pray-ruling-1.3036006>

⁷⁸ See transcript in Appendix B: Transcriptions

Mayor Lapierre viewed this as a minimal nominative change crafted to allow council to continue its tradition.

The Mayor proposed: "I would rather have a moment of silence. So, for those people who would like to pray silently, could do so, and people who would like to do other things with that time could do other things." Councillor Paul Gaudet suggested, "We could simply make reference to the 'great spirit' or a 'supreme spirit' rather than imposing on us the full burden of wisdom."

The record makes it clear that this was not a sincere attempt to follow *Saguenay*, but rather an obfuscation designed to allow the City of Dieppe to continue to fail in its duty of religious neutrality.

At the May 11, 2015, meeting, the second meeting after the *Saguenay* decision, the agenda still read "opening prayer"; however, the mayor introduced it as the "opening statement" and used the following wording: "Dear colleagues, let's have the serenity to accept the things that we cannot change, the courage to change the things that we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."⁷⁹ This wording continues to be used at the time of writing.

Given the historical context of both the Serenity Prayer and the (minimal) evolution of the practice in Dieppe, we have chosen to maintain its classification as a municipal council prayer. This is reminiscent of the Township of Russell, ON, who open their regular council meetings by reciting the *Charter's* preamble: "Whereas Canada is founded on principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law."⁸⁰

Fundy Albert

The Village of Fundy Albert is another example of a municipal council attempting to circumvent the spirit and intent of *Saguenay* through stealth prayer, though in this case the effort was ultimately abandoned.

Fundy Albert was formed at the beginning of 2023 through amalgamation of several smaller municipalities and unincorporated areas. Of these, only Hillsborough was large enough to be included in our initial dataset. Like Dieppe, Hillsborough council recited the 'Serenity Prayer' at the beginning of their regular council meetings prior to amalgamation. Notably, Bob Rochon served as the last Mayor of Hillsborough and the first of Fundy Albert.

The councillors of the newly formed Village of Fundy Albert took the oath of office at a separate ceremony on December 19, 2022. We could not confirm whether this ceremony included a prayer.

The first special council meeting on January 10, 2023, did not include a prayer, nor did the first or second regular council meetings on January 17 and February 6, 2023, respectively. During the February 6 meeting, Councillor Jeff Jonah stated that he had received "a letter from a

⁷⁹ City of Dieppe. (2015 May 11). "Regular council meeting." [Video]. Available at <https://www.dieppe.ca/en/hotel-de-ville/webdiffusion-archiv.aspx?video=2015-05-11-EN>

⁸⁰ Phelps Bondaroff (2022 December). p.52-53.

gentleman with regards to council prayers,” and he made a motion to reintroduce prayers in council meetings. Debate ensued (transcribed in **Appendix B.3**), in which Mayor Bob Rochan noted that:

“this has been contested right through to the Supreme Court of Canada, and essentially the Supreme Court has said unanimously that, and this is not my view, this is the actual wording of the Supreme Court decision, that the state has, that religion has no place in the operation of the state. And for that reason, the community of Saguenay in Quebec, they were ordered to stop, and remove any type of religious references within their council chambers. So that’s not to say that we can’t do it, but keep in mind that by doing that, we’re also going against a Supreme Court of Canada decision.”⁸¹

Councillor John Ereaux questioned whether “it’s legitimate and even within our code of conduct, to pass a motion that is deemed to be illegal.” Despite these objections, the motion passed by a vote of 4 to 2, with the mayor recording his vote against the motion.

The motion was discussed at a Committee of the Whole meeting on February 21⁸²: there was no opening prayer but there were two public presentations on the topic. At the March 7 regular council meeting there were an additional three public presentations, and the Village noted that they had received “multiple pieces of correspondence” on the issue.⁸³ The meeting was standing room only, with more people watching online, and was widely covered by local media.⁸⁴

At the meeting, one presenter quoted our 2017 *House of Prayers* report: “Demographic data for British Columbia can be used in order to determine the extent to which prayers delivered in the Legislature reflect the beliefs of British Columbians.”⁸⁵ He misinterpreted our arguments to suggest Fundy Albert base its prayers on the demographics of Albert County: “If 10% of the people here, in our county, identify as non-religious, then 10% of your council meetings can with instead a period of silence, moment of silence. But for the other 90% it ought to reflect whatever the rest of the community. And so, if we were, in the county, and I don’t think this is the case, but if 5% were Islamic then we could offer them that opportunity to have a prayer. And

⁸¹ See Appendix B.1.

⁸² Village of Fundy Albert. (2023 February 21). “Committee of the Whole meeting.” Available at <https://fundyalbert.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/february-21-committee-of-the-whole.docx>

⁸³ Village of Fundy Albert. (2023 March 7). “Regular council meeting.” Available at <https://fundyalbert.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/march-7-regular-council-meeting.docx>

⁸⁴ Moreau, V. (2023 February 13). “Fundy Albert to reconsider adding prayer to municipal meetings.” *CBC News*. Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/fundy-albert-prayer-council-1.6744488>

⁸⁵ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Bushfield, I., Marshall, K.E., Prasad, R., & Laurence, N. (2019 September). “House of Prayers: An Analysis of Prayers in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2003-2019.” *BC Humanist Association*. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/house_of_prayers_report, p.72.

if it happens to be that 9% identify from a Judeo-Christian ethic then that ought to be recognized.”

In Census 2021, 34.4% of Albert County residents declared “No Religion”, while only 63.7% identified as Christian.⁸⁶ Regardless, our point was merely that the prayers said in the BC Legislature were not reflective of the diversity of BC. We opposed the continuation of prayers in the BC Legislature, and it is clearly against the state’s duty of religious neutrality to open any government function with a sectarian prayer.

At that March 7 meeting, Council ultimately voted to amend the proposal, with Councillors Jeff Land and Jeff Jonah against, to replace the “council prayer” with “a moment of silent reflection” followed by this commitment:

“We, Fundy Albert, proudly promote a healthy, safe, vibrant, and inclusive community. We are dedicated to delivering excellent services and engaging meaningful public participation. Please allow us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to accept the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”⁸⁷

Notably, the second sentence is again the Serenity Prayer with the word ‘god’ removed, raising the same stealth prayer issue as in Dieppe.

The debate on this newly worded moment of reflection (transcribed in **Appendix B.3**) largely occurred between two councillors who wanted to keep the original prayer in the agenda, despite of the Supreme Court ruling, and four councillors and the mayor who supported the proposed language. No one expressed any concern regarding the rights of non-Christians that led to the ruling. Councillor Jeff Jonah gave a full account of his conversion to Christianity as an explanation for why he supported the motion.

This debate underscores the importance of judicial rulings on these matters, as political solutions often fail in the face of populist decision-makers. It was clear that the municipal council was not prioritizing protecting the rights of minorities, particularly given the presence of a substantial crowd of people in the audience representing Hillsborough Baptist Church.

Despite the amendment passing, because the prayer was still not in the procedural bylaw, it could only be recited with unanimous approval from Council. One councillor did not consent at the April 4, 2023, regular council meeting.⁸⁸ The beginning of the meeting is missing from the video for the following two meetings, and there was no mention of the reflection in the agenda.

⁸⁶ Statistics Canada. (2023). *Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001*. [Table]. Ottawa. Released November 15, 2023. Available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>. For a broader discussion of issues with how the Canadian Census asks people about their religion see BC Humanist Association. (2026 February 16). “Humanists launch Tick ‘No Religion’ on Census 2026 campaign.” Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/if_youre_not_religious_say_so

⁸⁷ Village of Fundy Albert. (2023b).

⁸⁸ Village of Fundy Albert. (2023 April 4). [Facebook]. Video no longer available (retrieved May 5, 2023).

As of April 2026, the procedural bylaw had not been updated to include the new reflection, and we did not find any evidence that it was recited in our reviews of randomly selected meetings.⁸⁹

Miramichi

Miramichi begins council meetings with the mayor directing everyone to “Please stand for a moment of prayerful reflection,” followed by approximately 30 seconds of silence.⁹⁰ Some videos begin with the moment of silence already taking place, so we cannot confirm that this wording is used at every meeting.

Directing that the reflection be “prayerful” excludes the portion of the audience that may not believe in prayer. Directing people to stand also coerces participation in this quasi-religious practice. This is a clear example of a stealth prayer.

⁸⁹ Village of Fundy Albert. (2026). “By-Law No. 2026-01 A By-Law Respecting The Proceedings Of Fundy Albert Municipal Council And Committee Meetings” Available at https://fundyalbert.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Final_Procedural-By-law.pdf

⁹⁰ City of Miramichi. (2024 December 17). “December 17, 2024 - Regular Council Meeting.” [Video]. Available at <https://www.miramichi.org/past-council-meetings/december-17-2024-regular-council-meeting>

THE IMPACT OF *SAGUENAY*

Of the municipalities studied, we identified 17 of 36 for whom data were available as having prayer in pre-*Saguenay* regular meetings: Bathurst, Belledune, Dieppe, Edmundston, Grand Bay-Westfield, Grand Falls, Grand Manan, Hillsborough, Minto, Moncton, Quispamsis, Saint John, Saint-Quentin, Salisbury, Shediac, St. George, and St. Stephen.

Table 10 summarizes the impact that *Saguenay* had on municipal procedures in New Brunswick. While there is a clear correlation between the decision's date and municipalities amending their procedures to remove opening prayers, we can not prove causation, except where council debates explicitly reference the decision. Three municipalities ended prayers when their bylaws were rewritten due to amalgamation. Two, Bathurst and St. Stephen, ended prayers outside of these time frames.

Notably, most municipalities ended prayers when bylaws were rewritten during the amalgamation process but only did so begrudgingly because of *Saguenay*. For example, in both Hillsborough/Fundy Albert and Salisbury, the debates centered around whether it was legal to continue prayers, not over whether the practice was inclusive or right. The municipal politicians involved appeared to have no concern for the rights of the citizens being forced to participate in religious practices. It was clear in each case that the councils had no interest in their duty of religious neutrality or ensuring that religious minorities felt welcome and equal at their meetings. Instead, even those voting against opening prayers often prefaced their arguments with efforts to shift the blame, noting how it was not *their* opinion, but that of the Supreme Court's. This is, again, something we observed in debates across the country. They were concerned only with following the minimum requirements of the law. Furthermore, as we have noted above, many of the perfunctory changes proposed would still fit our definition of 'stealth prayer.'

This demonstrates the importance of an independent judiciary being able to balance the arguments and rights at play to render decisions like *Saguenay*. The courts empower the *Charter* to protect the rights of minorities. Without this judgement, many municipalities would likely concede to the demands of vocal religious groups to impose their religion on others in a government meeting. On the other hand, as we have seen, this approach relies on individual citizens and public interest groups (like BCHA) to challenge unconstitutional practices. It took the threat of lawsuits to end municipal prayers in British Columbia, and our work is slowly reducing the number occurring in municipalities across the country.

Table 10– List of New Brunswick municipalities that updated its regular meeting practices.

Municipality	Date of last Prayer	Reason and notes
Bathurst	May 21, 2013 ⁹¹	Unknown. A bylaw restricting Sunday business hours was repealed at the same meeting.
Dieppe	Wording changed April 27, 2015, however prayer continues	The Supreme Court decision is directly mentioned in the debate over changing the wording in the procedural Bylaw.
Edmundston	March 17, 2015 ⁹²	Unknown
Hillsborough	Date could not be confirmed, ~December 2021	Amalgamation, see details in the “Fundy Albert” section and the transcript of the debate in Appendix B: Transcriptions.
Quispamsis	March 17, 2015 ⁹³	Unknown. The item was always “moment of reflection” in the agenda, but up until March 17, prayer was mentioned in the description, after this date it was removed.
Salisbury	December 12, 2023 ⁹⁴	Amalgamation
Shediac	May 25, 2015 ⁹⁵	Unknown
St. George	December 12, 2022 ⁹⁶	Amalgamation
Saint John	April 13, 2015 ⁹⁷	<i>Saguenay</i> is mentioned in meeting minutes ⁹⁸
St. Stephen	February 26, 2018 ⁹⁹	Unknown

⁹¹ City of Bathurst. (2013 May 21). “City of Bathurst – regular public meeting – Minutes.” Available at https://www.bathurst.ca/en/secure_document/104/meeting/minutes

⁹² City of Edmundston. (2015 March 17). “Réunion ordinaire publique d conseil municipal d’Edmondston.” Available at https://edmundston.ca/application/files/1116/3810/1387/2015-03-17_ProcesVerbaux_Minutes.pdf

⁹³ Town of Quispamsis. (2015 March 17). “Quispamsis Town Council – Regular Meeting – Minutes.” Available at <https://portal.laserfiche.ca/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=542112&repo=r-000187a6489a>

⁹⁴ Town of Salisbury. (2022 December 12). “Minutes of December 12, 2022 – Special Meeting.” Available at https://salisburynb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/MINUTES_Dec_12_Special_Meeting.pdf

⁹⁵ Ville de Shediac. (2015 May 25). “Réunion ordinaire du conseil.” Available at https://shediac.ca/images/reunions/Proces-verbaux_Minutes/Proc%C3%A8s-verbaux_2015.pdf, p. 84.

⁹⁶ The Town of St. George. (2022 December 12). “Regular Meeting of Council – Minutes.” Available at https://easterncharlotte.ca/wp-content/uploads/gov/minutes/tosg/2022/tosg_2022-1212_minutes.pdf

⁹⁷ City of Saint John. (2015 April 13). “Common council meeting – The City of Saint John – City Hall – April 13, 2015 – 6:00 P.M.” Available at <https://records.saintjohn.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=58901&dbid=0&repo=CityofSaintJohn>

⁹⁸ City of Saint John. (2015 April 27). “Common council meeting – The City of Saint John – City Hall – April 27, 2015 – 6:00 P.M.” Available at <https://records.saintjohn.ca/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=58902&dbid=0&repo=CityofSaintJohn>

⁹⁹ Town of St. Stephen. (2018 February 26). “Town of St. Stephen – Regular council – 73 Millstown Blvd., Suite 112 – Monday, February 26, 2018 @ 7:00 P.M.” Available at <https://town.ststephen.nb.ca/sites/default/files/2021-05/Council-Minutes-2018-02-26.pdf>

INTERPROVINCIAL COMPARISONS

To allow for interprovincial comparisons, we used the most recent inaugural meeting in each currently incorporated municipality, whether it was in 2021 or 2022. Using these criteria, we have data for 54 New Brunswick municipalities, of which six (11.1%) included prayer at their most recent inaugural meeting. Additionally, we identified four (5.9% of 68 for which data were available) municipalities include prayer their regular meetings.

In Saskatchewan, three (3.3%) municipalities included prayer in their most recent inaugural meeting, and two (2.1%) in their regular meetings. In Alberta, six municipalities included prayer in their most recent inaugural (3.5%) and six in their regular council meetings (3.4%). In BC, seven (4.3%) municipalities included religious content in their 2022 inaugural meetings and none in regular meetings.¹⁰⁰ In Manitoba, six (5.9%) municipalities included prayers at the start of their inaugural meetings in 2018, and four (3.3%) in their regular council meetings.¹⁰¹ And in Ontario, 156 (47.6%) municipalities opened their 2018 inaugural meetings, and nine (2.5%) opened their regular meetings with prayer.¹⁰²

It is difficult to compare the frequency of prayers in recent inaugural meetings between New Brunswick and the rest of the country due to the restructuring. The percentage of municipalities with prayer in 2021 was higher than any province other than Ontario, however, many of those municipalities no longer exist. The data from 2022 are similar to the prairie provinces; however, it only includes municipalities that underwent significant restructuring, and because many municipalities were only swearing in a handful of new councillors, not all of these meetings included as many ceremonial elements as they might in a typical inaugural meeting.

Comparisons between New Brunswick and other provinces are shown in **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**.

Using the numbers for the most recent inaugural meetings, New Brunswick had the highest percentage of municipalities with illegal prayers of any province other than Ontario. For regular meetings, *Saguenay* compliance in New Brunswick was the worst we have seen in any province so far. It is significantly higher than the only other Maritimes province we have thus far studied, Prince Edward Island. A deeper exploration of the socio-religious history of each province to understand these differences is beyond the scope of this work.

¹⁰⁰ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Bushfield, I., Jensen, O. (2023 November). "We yelled at them until they stopped: Revisiting prayers in BC municipal council meetings and the power of secular advocacy." *BC Humanist Association*. Available at

https://www.bchumanist.ca/we_yelled_at_them_until_they_stopped

¹⁰¹ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Thom, A., Prasad, R., & Bushfield, I. (2022 March). "In open defiance: Unconstitutional prayers at municipal councils in Manitoba." *BC Humanist Association*. Available at

https://www.bchumanist.ca/in_open_defiance

¹⁰² Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Jensen, O., Chowdhury, P., & Bushfield, I. (2022 December). "Open for unconstitutional business: Prayers at municipal councils in Ontario." *BC Humanist Association*. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/open_for_unconstitutional_business

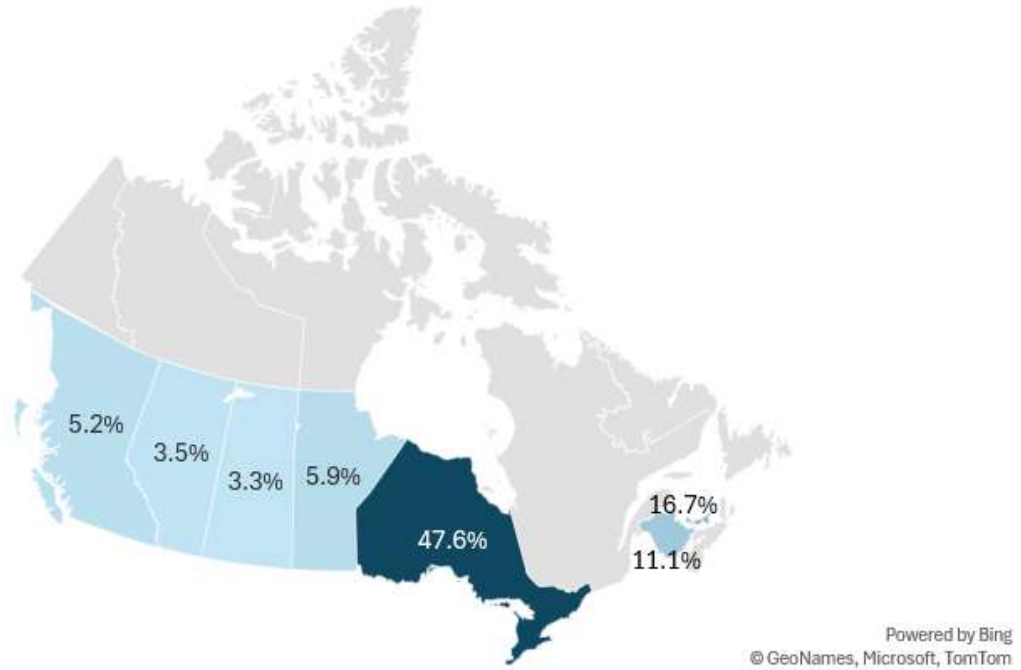


Figure 4 - Proportion of municipalities with prayers in their inaugural meetings, by province (New Brunswick 2021/22, PEI 2022, BC 2022, Alberta 2023, Saskatchewan 2020, Manitoba 2018, Ontario 2018).

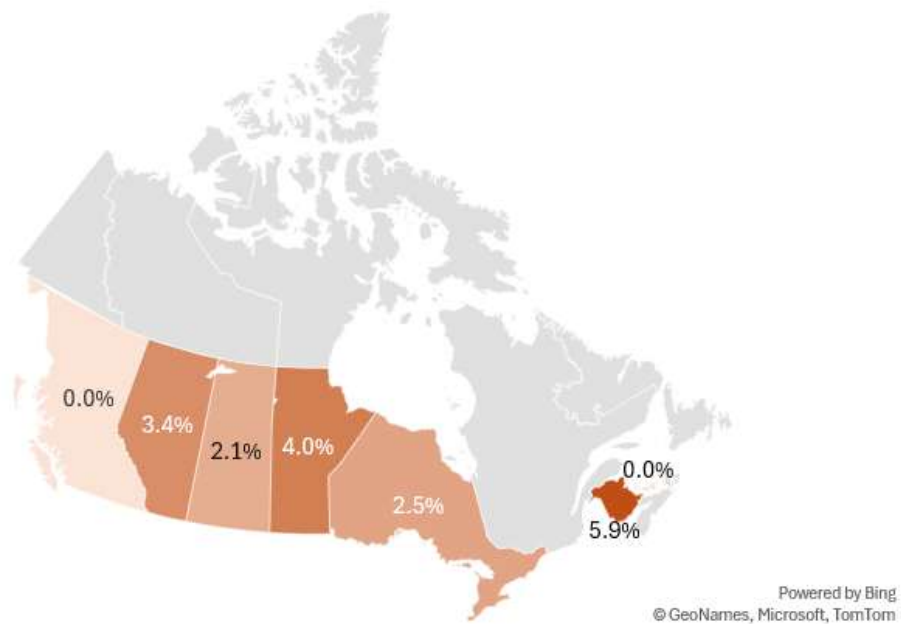


Figure 5 - Proportion of municipalities with prayers in their regular meetings, by province (New Brunswick 2021/22, PEI 2022, BC 2022, Alberta 2023, Saskatchewan 2020, Manitoba 2018, Ontario 2018).

INDIGENOUS CONTENT

There is a growing practice of including territorial acknowledgements at the start of community events, gatherings, and meetings events across Canada. These can play an important symbolic role in reconciliation. We have welcomed their increasing usage, while expecting that they are accompanied by concrete action towards reconciliation. As we have reviewed inaugural and regular council meetings, we recorded instances of the meetings opening with a territorial acknowledgement to better understand these practices and to track changes over time and across the country.

In New Brunswick, while we found data for 34 of 64 municipalities' 2016 inaugural meetings, none of those included Indigenous content. Six of 39 (15.4%), for which data were available, included territorial acknowledgements in their 2021 inaugural meetings: Dorchester, Fredericton, Memramcook, New Maryland, Riverview, and Saint John. In 2022, five (11.9%) of 42, for which data were available, included indigenous content in their inaugural meetings: Caraquet, Edmunston, Grand Bay-Westfield, Nackawic-Millville, and Saint Andrews. Finally, we found 19 (27.9%) municipalities that included indigenous content in their regular meetings, out of 68 for which we have data (**Table 11**).

Table 11 – New Brunswick council meetings featuring territorial acknowledgements.

2021 Inaugural	2022 Inaugural	2024 Regular	
Dorchester	Caraquet	Alnwick	Bathurst
Fredericton	Edmunston	Belledune	Campbellton
Memramcook	Grand Bay-Westfield	Cap-Acadie	Dieppe
New Maryland	Nackawic-Millville	Fredericton	Grand Bay-Westfield
Riverview	Saint Andrews	Memramcook	Miramichi
Saint John		Nackawic-Millville	New Maryland
		Quipamsis	Riverview
		Rothesay	Saint Andrews
		Saint John	St. Stephen
		Tobique Valley	

Again, for the purpose of interprovincial comparisons we have used the data from the most recent inaugural meeting in each modern municipality, whether that be from 2021 or 2022. Using these criteria, data were available for 54 municipalities, and 10 (18.5%) had indigenous content in their most recent inaugural meeting (**Figure 6**).

Notably, significantly more municipalities in New Brunswick include prayers in their regular council meetings as opposed to their inaugurals. This may simply reflect the growth in the practice after the inaugural council meetings of 2021/22. Similar trends can be observed in BC, Alberta and PEI.

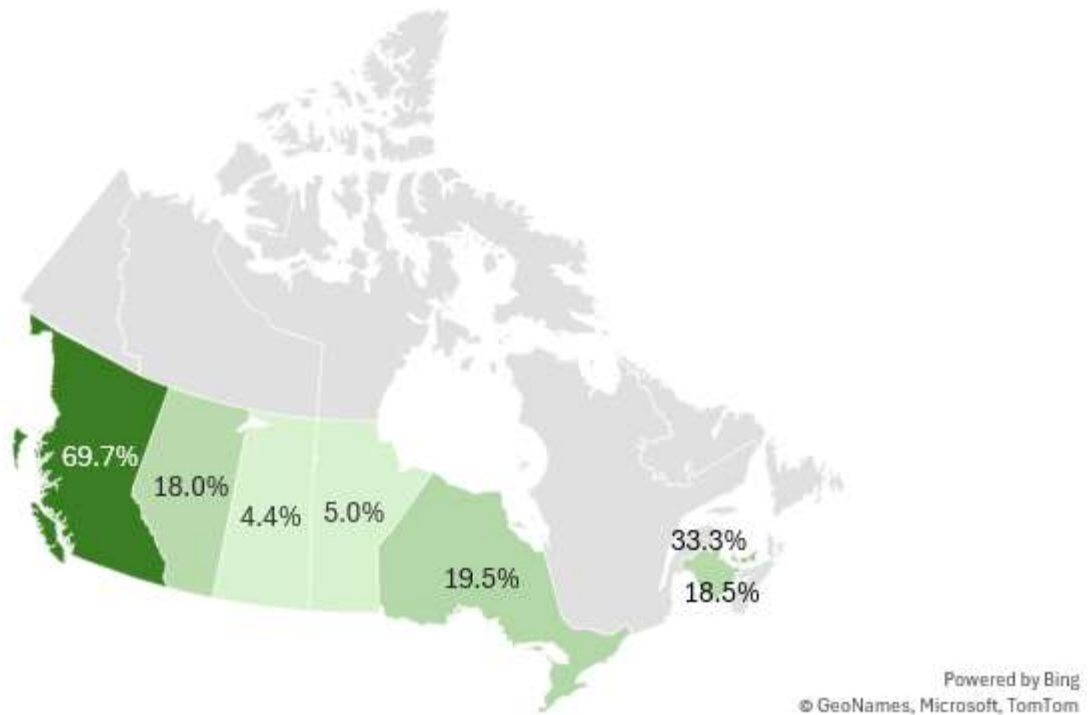


Figure 6 - Municipalities with Indigenous content in inaugural meetings (New Brunswick 2021/22, PEI 2022, BC 2022, Alberta 2023, Saskatchewan 2020, Manitoba 2018, Ontario 2018).

In our previous reports, we dedicated considerable attention to exploring the nuanced and often challenging balance between the state's duty of religious neutrality and the increasingly important inclusion of Indigenous practices within municipal council meetings.¹⁰³ We distinguished between Indigenous content, specifically designed to foster and strengthen nation-to-nation relationships on shared territorial lands, and traditional religious prayers offered by representatives of established faith communities. We have consistently refrained from categorizing Indigenous cultural expressions as prayers. Inviting representatives from local First Nations to share their knowledge, as well as the implementation of territorial land acknowledgments, represent symbolic, yet undeniably vital, steps toward reconciliation. We hope that the adoption of these symbolic practices continues to expand, and that they will be accompanied by tangible, substantive actions to advance the complex and ongoing process of reconciliation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ See for example Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Laurence, N., Prasad, R., Thom, A., Darveau-Morin, A. & Bushfield, I. (2020 September). "Duty of neutrality beyond Saguenay: Prayers at municipal councils in British Columbia." BC Humanist Association. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/municipal_prayer; and see also Phelps Bondaroff, Bushfield & Jensen 2023; Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2022 December; and Phelps Bondaroff et al. 2022 March.

¹⁰⁴ See Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., & Bushfield, I. (2025 April). "Prayer Free BC." *BC Humanist Association*, 1-41. Available at https://www.bchumanist.ca/prayer_free_bc, p. 18.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Potential Sources of Error

We found it particularly difficult to find information regarding the contents of historical inaugural and regular council meetings in New Brunswick. The restructuring and amalgamation process meant that many contemporary municipalities did not exist at the time of *Saguenay*, and many of the old municipalities no longer have websites.

For the jurisdictions where data were available, it is still possible that some prayers were overlooked. Since recordings of many regular and inaugural council meetings were unavailable, we may have missed prayers that were not included in the formal meeting agendas. This would represent another form of stealth prayer and one that would need to be identified by those attending meetings in person or watching livestreams of meetings. It is also possible that some councils included a prayer prior to their meetings but that this element was not explicitly referenced or itemized in the agenda or minutes of that meeting.

The 2016 inaugural meetings were the first held in New Brunswick post-*Saguenay*. A second round of inaugural meetings occurred in 2021. A third partial round of inaugural meetings occurred in 2022. Our review included all three sets of inaugural meetings, and we made our best effort to account for this complex and dynamic municipal environment. Nevertheless, it is possible that we missed some records over this period. Further, most New Brunswick municipal websites did not have minutes for meetings prior to *Saguenay*, so we could not compare practices that predated the decision.

The 2021 inaugural council meetings occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, however most restrictions on public gatherings had been lifted by this time, and even fewer would have been present in the 2022 inaugural meetings. None of the observed inaugural meetings were fully online. As a result, meetings likely had fewer restrictions on ceremonial elements than for provinces that had their inaugural meetings in late 2020.

Ultimately, our study was focused on formal practices. Informal or unofficial practices will always be difficult to identify and may come and go with each election or change with even greater frequency. Other than inaugural meetings, it is possible that our approach overlooked one-off prayers: situations where a council decided to include prayer in a meeting to respond to current events, such the death of Queen Elizabeth II or a local tragedy. These individual moments would not be identified by our approach. Councillors praying on their own or in a small group in private prior to a meeting may also occur, but as a largely private practice, this would not likely violate *Saguenay*.

Finally, we also recognize that municipal bylaws and procedures are constantly being updated. If you identify an error in our data, please reach out to us so that we may update our dataset and findings.¹⁰⁵

Future Research

There are certain aspects that we did not have the capacity to study fully, or that extended beyond the scope of our project. While a wide range of factors likely contribute to a municipality violating *Saguenay*, further research into the demographics, locations and other features could yield insight into broader trends and contribute to our understanding of why a municipality would choose to include prayer in a meeting post-*Saguenay*. Although, given the smaller number of municipalities with prayers identified in New Brunswick, this may not be possible.

Our goal in gathering and including data on Indigenous content was to contribute additional data to the literature on this subject. The practice of including Indigenous content in government functions is rising as Canada moves forward with reconciliation. This is important and something that we applaud. As this content becomes more common, questions will be raised. We have touched on some of these in our past treatments and further that consideration in our discussion above, but it is a live issue and one worthy of additional study and exploration.

Finally, New Brunswick municipalities are not the only place where one can find government prayer in Canada. The practice is unfortunately widespread, at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels: most provincial legislatures continue to open with overtly Christian prayers, as do the House of Commons and Senate.¹⁰⁶ Daily sessions of the New Brunswick Legislature, for example, begin with “now let us pray” followed by invocations for the Lieutenant Governor and Monarch, followed by the Christian Lord’s Prayer. This practice is not inclusive, and a recent request for a Hindu Prayer was denied.¹⁰⁷ The BCHA will continue to investigate legislative prayer in all these contexts.

¹⁰⁵ Email: info@bhumanist.ca

¹⁰⁶ Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Prasad, R., Laurence, N., Darveau-Morin, A., Bushfield, I. & Thom, A. (2023, December). "Legislative Prayer Across Canada." 3rd Ed. *BC Humanist Association*, 1-8. Available at <https://www.bhumanist.ca/prayer-across-canada>

¹⁰⁷ Brown, S. (2023 January 6). "New Brunswick Legislature turns down one-time recital of Hindu prayer." *Global News*. Available at <https://globalnews.ca/news/9392508/n-b-legislature-one-time-recital-hindu-prayer/>

CONCLUSION

As a result of *Saguenay*, we should expect to see all municipal councils across Canada adhering to the strictures established by the Supreme Court. Municipal governments remaining neutral on issues relating to religion is the law and a democratic imperative. It was promising to see that most municipalities in New Brunswick were following the constitution. However, it is disappointing that six (11.1%) municipalities included prayers as part of their most recent inaugural meetings, and four (5.9%) included prayers in their regular council meetings. All these municipalities are making their council chambers less welcoming to non-believers and people of other faiths by violating their duty of religious neutrality.

We noted multiple communities in New Brunswick seemingly attempting to skirt the law by simply dropping the word “god” from what is otherwise an explicitly Christian prayer. This practice undermines the duty of neutrality and fails to show a commitment to creating inclusive council meetings. On the other hand, some New Brunswick municipalities have chosen to open meetings with moments of reflection or secular poems. And a growing number are incorporating territorial acknowledgements in their practices.

We continue to encourage municipal governments in New Brunswick and across Canada to continue to end unconstitutional prayers and work with local Indigenous communities to craft meaningful opening practices for their meetings.

We hope that the findings of this study highlight the importance of verifying compliance with court decisions and the role for ongoing research into issues of secularism in Canada. This work will play a critical role in protecting our diversity and allow Canada’s government to remain free of the influence of harmful religious rhetoric, which has no place in the institutions that serve to uphold a community that represents all.

APPENDIX A: THE *SAGUENAY* DECISION¹⁰⁸

Section 2(a) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees Canadians the “freedom of conscience and religion.”¹⁰⁹ Through a growing body of jurisprudence, the Supreme Court of Canada has established that in order to protect this freedom, governments have a “duty of religious neutrality.”¹¹⁰ In 2015, the scope of this duty was delineated in *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)*. In its unanimous decision, the Court ruled that the City of Saguenay, Quebec breached its duty of religious neutrality by including the recitation of religious prayer at the beginning of council meetings. Writing for the majority,¹¹¹ Justice Gascon stressed the ‘democratic imperative’ for officials acting in positions of state power to maintain neutrality by not engaging in any form of religious practice.¹¹²

The Initial Complaint

Alain Simoneau was a resident of Saguenay, Quebec who regularly attended council meetings. He witnessed the mayor open council meetings by reciting a prayer after which the mayor would cross himself. Other council members and members of the public would follow suit. As an atheist, Simoneau felt ‘uncomfortable’ with the displays of religion while attending meetings and asked the mayor to stop the practice.¹¹³ After the mayor ignored his request, Simoneau, with the assistance of Mouvement laïque Québécois (MLQ), turned to the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (CDPDJ).

In March 2007, the Commission opened an investigation into the alleged discrimination on the basis of religion, in violation of sections 3 and 10 of Quebec’s *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*.¹¹⁴ The following May, the Commission concluded that the prayer was discriminatory. Simoneau and the MLQ filed a case with the Tribunal in July 2008.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Reproduced from Phelps Bondaroff *et al.* 2022 March.

¹⁰⁹ *Charter*, s 2.

¹¹⁰ *Saguenay*, para. 71; and see Boissinot, J. (2015 April 17). “The end of prayer in the councils of the nation.” *The Globe and Mail*. Available at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/the-end-of-prayer-in-the-councils-of-the-nation/article24010902/>

¹¹¹ Eight justices signed on to Justice Gascon’s decision, while Justice Abella wrote a concurrence, supporting the decision but disagreeing with the majority on the standards of review, see *Saguenay*, paras. 165–173.

¹¹² *Saguenay*, para.75.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 8 and 9. Section 3 of the *Charter* states that: “Every person is the possessor of the fundamental freedoms, including freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.” Section 10 states that: “Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap. Discrimination exists where such a distinction, exclusion or preference has the effect of nullifying or impairing such right.” See *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, CQLR c C-12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 11.

While the Tribunal was reviewing the case, the Saguenay Council passed a bylaw that codified the opening prayer, amended the wording of the prayer in a manner that was intended to make it 'non-denominational,' and provided a two-minute recess afterwards in order to allow those who chose to abstain from prayer and thus absent themselves, to join the meeting.¹¹⁶ This bylaw was added to the complaint.

The Tribunal's conclusions were unequivocal. They concluded that the "prayer was religious and was a breach of religious neutrality" and it was a 'substantial' infringement of Simoneau's rights "to freedom of conscience and religion without discrimination."¹¹⁷ Further, the bylaw was for a "religious purpose" and therefore also a breach of neutrality.¹¹⁸ The Tribunal ruled that the bylaw should be "inoperative and invalid" – the practice of opening meetings with prayer should cease, and that Simoneau be awarded \$30,000 in damages.¹¹⁹

The Appeal and Standards of Review

The City of Saguenay appealed the decision to the Quebec Court of Appeal, who agreed to review the case on the basis that it was a "matter of importance to the legal system over which the Tribunal did not have exclusive jurisdiction."¹²⁰ The three-panel Court of Appeal unanimously overturned the Tribunal's decision and found that Simoneau's rights were not infringed. It concluded that state neutrality "does not require the state to abstain from involvement in religious matters." Further, cultural and "religious heritage" could be reconciled. And finally, that the updated prayer under the bylaw was not overtly religious but rather "expressed universal values."¹²¹

The appellate court reached this verdict on the basis of a legal review that is called the 'standard of correctness.' The matter of the choice in the standard of review arose at multiple times during the journey of this case from the Human Rights Tribunal to the Supreme Court of Canada. While this is not the place for a detailed exploration of standards of review in Canadian jurisprudence, it is informative to outline the distinction between the two major standards in Canadian law.

In reviewing administrative decisions, Canadian courts rely on a framework called a standard of review to judge whether that decision should be upheld or overturned. The decision of "which standard applies depends on what kind of decision it is."¹²² The standard of reasonableness is a deferential standard, which means the reviewing court should defer to the expertise of the decision maker. It is the typical standard of review for most administrative decisions. It posits

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 15 and 16.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 15 and 16.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 18; and see Quebec Court of Appeal, (2013), QCCA 936, 363 D.L.R. (4th) 62, para. 37.

¹²¹ *Saguenay.*, paras. 20 and 21.

¹²² Supreme Court of Canada. (2019). "Case law in brief: The standard of review (taken from Vavilov in the 'Administrative law trilogy')." 2019, SCC 65 and 2019 SCC 66. Available at <https://www.scc-csc.ca/case-dossier/cb/2019/37748-37896-37897-eng.pdf>

that a ruling is reasonable so long as it falls within a “range of possible, acceptable outcomes” and can be supported by evidence and the law.¹²³ A decision that is ‘reasonable, is “based on a logical chain of reasoning. It must make sense in light of the law and the facts.”¹²⁴ As a result, there can be more than one outcome, so long as that outcome was arrived at reasonably.

The standard of correctness, on the other hand, is much stricter. This standard posits that “a ‘correct’ decision is the only right answer in light of the law and the facts.”¹²⁵ As a result, only one ruling could be made on the case, and the reviewing court essentially asks whether the law was applied correctly in making the decision. Thus, “when applying the correctness standard, a reviewing court will not show deference to the decision maker’s reasoning process; it will rather undertake its own analysis of the question.”¹²⁶ In other words, the reviewing court essentially ignores the decision made by the administrative tribunal and re-analyzes the case. This “standard is meant for cases where a decision was made that has important and wide-ranging legal consequences.”¹²⁷

The Supreme Court of Canada codified the test for which standard applies in its 2008 ruling in *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*.¹²⁸ In this decision, the Court delineated the following factors that would lead decision makers to be given deference, and for a reasonableness test to be applied:

- A privative clause: this is a statutory direction from Parliament or a legislature indicating the need for deference.
- A discrete and special administrative regime in which the decision maker has special expertise (labour relations for instance).
- The nature of the question of law. A question of law that is of “central importance to the legal system . . . and outside the . . . specialized area of expertise” of the administrative decision maker will always attract a correctness standard (*Toronto (City) v. C.U.P.E.*, at para. 62). On the other hand, a question of law that does not rise to this level may be compatible with a reasonableness standard where the two above factors so indicate.¹²⁹

The choice of standard of review in the case was explored in both the decision and concurrence, which are detailed below.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*. 2008, SCC 9, [2008] 1 SCR 190, Para. 55.

¹²⁷ Indi. (2016 April 29). “Indi’s *MLQ v Saguenay* review: What went wrong in the appeal?” *Canadian Atheist*. Available at <https://www.canadianatheist.com/2016/04/indis-mlq-v-saguenay-review-3-the-appeal/>

¹²⁸ *Dunsmuir v New Brunswick*; and see *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 55.

The Supreme Court of Canada

In October of 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada heard an appeal of the decision of the Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court ruled that the Tribunal was correct to order the Saguenay Council to “cease reciting a prayer in the municipal council chamber,” declared the bylaw inoperative, and awarded Simoneau \$30,000 in damages.¹³⁰ In reaching its decision, Justice Gascon concluded that the opening of council meetings with the recitation of a prayer “constituted discriminatory interference with Simoneau’s freedom of conscience and religion.”¹³¹ While the Canadian and Quebec *Charters* do not explicitly impose a duty for the state to remain neutral in matters of religion and belief, Justice Gascon found that in order to protect the “variety of beliefs” under the Canadian *Charter*, there is a need for “true neutrality.”¹³² Justice Gascon elaborated that

*True neutrality is concerned not with a strict separation of church and state on questions related to religious thought. The purpose of neutrality is instead to ensure that the state is, and appears to be, open to all points of view regardless of their spiritual basis. Far from requiring separation, true neutrality requires that the state neither favour nor hinder any religion, and that it abstain from taking any position on this subject. Even if a religious practice engaged in by the state is ‘inclusive,’ it may nevertheless exclude non-believers.*¹³³

Justice Gascon ruled that there was no way for the state to remain neutral while also engaging in a religious practice, because doing so creates a ‘hierarchy’ where those who share the expressed beliefs are ranked above those who do not share them. Justice Gascon also explained that true neutrality is a “democratic imperative” as it ensures that institutions, like municipal council meetings, are a “neutral public space that is free of discrimination and in which true freedom to believe or not to believe is enjoyed by everyone equally.”¹³⁴

In *Saguenay*, Justice Gascon concluded that the prayer was in violation of the state’s duty of true religious neutrality and an infringement upon “Mr. Simoneau’s right to exercise his freedom of conscience and religion.”¹³⁵ The prayer itself was expressly religious as denoted by the context (the content, the sign of the cross and the religious symbols) and by the admission of the mayor of Saguenay himself, who declared:

I’m in this battle because I worship Christ. When I get to the hereafter, I’m going to be able to be a little proud. I’ll be able to say to Him: “I fought for You; I even went to trial for You”. There’s no better argument. It’s extraordinary. I’m in this

¹³⁰ *Saguenay*, paras. 151, 155, 160, and 161.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, para. 23.

¹³² *Ibid.*, paras. 68 and 71.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, para. 137.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 73-75.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 120.

*fight because I worship Christ. I want to go to heaven and it is the most noble fight of my entire life.*¹³⁶

This supported the conclusion that the mayor and council used public powers to engage in a practice where they “adopted or favoured one belief to the exclusion of others” while acting on behalf of the state, and thus turning council meetings into a “preferential space for people with theistic beliefs.”¹³⁷

Although the Saguenay Council had also allegedly tried to accommodate those who chose to abstain from prayer through the introduction of a bylaw that amended the wording of the prayer and allowed for a two-minute recess, this had the opposite effect. It exacerbated Simoneau’s sense of “isolation, exclusion and stigmatization” by requiring that he either conform or reveal his non-belief by physically separating himself from others.¹³⁸

In addition to determining whether the state’s duty of religious neutrality was breached, Justice Gascon ruled that the Court of Appeal had erred by applying standards of appeal to the Tribunal’s decision, instead of standards of judicial review. Furthermore, the Court of Appeal erred in using the standard of correctness instead of the standard of reasonableness. Justice Gascon argued that as a specialized administrative decision-maker, the Court of Appeal should have deferred to the Tribunal. The Court should have limited the standard of correctness to the question of the scope of the state’s duty of neutrality and applied a reasonableness standard to other questions, such as “whether the prayer was religious in nature, the extent to which the prayer interfered with the complainant’s freedom and the determination of whether it was discriminatory fall squarely within the Tribunal’s area of expertise.”¹³⁹

The Court unanimously allowed the appeal and restored much of the Tribunal’s conclusions: the bylaw was declared invalid, the City and mayor were ordered to cease the recitation of prayers in council chambers, and the municipality had to pay \$30,000 in damages to Mr. Simoneau.

Justice Abella’s Concurrence

In her concurrence, Justice Abella objected to the use of different standards within a single review and noted that approach to selecting a standard strayed from the directives established in *Dunsmuir*.¹⁴⁰ Justice Abella wrote that “using different standards of review for each different aspect of a decision is a departure from our jurisprudence that risks undermining the framework for how decisions of specialized tribunals are generally reviewed.”¹⁴¹ Justice Abella insisted that *Dunsmuir* established “that questions of general importance to the legal system attract the correctness standard only if they are outside the tribunal’s expertise,” and that the

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 92 and 116, emphasis removed.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 113 and 120.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 120 and 121.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 50.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 166.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, para. 165.

question of determining whether discrimination occurred is well within the mandate of the Human Rights Tribunal, and is in fact its 'daily fare.'¹⁴² The concurrence questions why the ruling subjects "one aspect of freedom of religion to more rigorous scrutiny than the main issue of whether the right itself has been violated and there has been discrimination."¹⁴³ Justice Abella elaborated that "we have never dissected the right in order to subject its components to different levels of scrutiny."¹⁴⁴ Justice Abella elaborated, noting,

*My final concern is a practical one. What do we tell reviewing courts to do when they segment a tribunal decision and subject each segment to different standards of review only to find that those reviews yield incompatible conclusions? How many components found to be reasonable or correct will it take to trump those found to be unreasonable or incorrect? Can an overall finding of reasonableness or correctness ever be justified if one of the components has been found to be unreasonable or incorrect? If we keep pulling on the various strands, we may eventually find that a principled and sustainable foundation for reviewing tribunal decisions has disappeared. And then we will have thrown out Dunsmuir's baby with the bathwater.*¹⁴⁵

In Justice Abella's view, the decision was within the expertise of the tribunal and should be reviewed entirely within a reasonableness framework.

Justice Abella warned that "To extricate [the duty of neutrality] from the discrimination analysis as being of singular significance 'to the legal system as a whole', elevates it from its contextual status into a defining one."¹⁴⁶ This suggests a unique role for the duty of religious neutrality in Canadian law. Unlike the US Constitution, Canada's *Charter* does not have an establishment clause, but Justice Abella's view of the majority's decision suggests the duty of neutrality is "a transcendent legal question."¹⁴⁷

Consequences of *Saguenay*

The *Saguenay* decision has led to further development of the scope of the state's duty of neutrality by requiring the state to practice 'true neutrality.' In practice, the decision outlined that state officials, *acting in an official capacity*, must not profess or practice any religious belief. This includes the abstention of prayers at municipal council meetings. As summarized by Justice Gascon

By expressing no preference, the state ensures that it preserves a neutral public space that is free of discrimination and in which true freedom to believe or not

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, para. 167.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, para. 169.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 170.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 173.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 168.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

*to believe is enjoyed by everyone equally, given that everyone is valued equally.*¹⁴⁸

As such, beginning a municipal council meeting with prayer is strictly proscribed by law, and this prohibition is part of the democratic imperative of the state's duty of religious neutrality.

Since the *Saguenay* decision, many municipal councils across the country have amended their procedures to abolish prayers from meetings to comply with the ruling, but apparently not all. In her recent book, Lori Beaman documented several municipal officials who, commenting after the ruling, expressed an intention to violate *Saguenay*. For example, then Caledon, Ontario Mayor Allan Thompson declared that "personally I am disappointed, and I don't support it... Canada was built on a Christian law. We've shown tolerance to all faiths... and I am not about to erode our principles."¹⁴⁹ Along a similar vein, the mayor of Oshawa, Ontario announced that "I'm proud to be a Canadian, [and] I intend to continue doing the Lord's Prayer prior to the commencement of the council meetings."¹⁵⁰ This reticence to comply with the law underscores the importance of our research into prayer at municipal council meetings across Canada.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 74.

¹⁴⁹ Beaman, L.G. (2020). *The transition of religion to culture in law and public discourse*. London, UK: Routledge.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTIONS

This appendix consists of transcripts from council meetings of New Brunswick municipalities. These have been transcribed by BCHA volunteers from video recordings of the relevant municipal meetings. Each transcript includes the name of the municipality, the date, and the name and affiliation of the person conducting the prayer. Given our capacities, we were unable to transcribe words and sentences spoken in languages other than English, such as Indigenous languages, these have been flagged throughout the transcripts. We have also flagged situations where content was inaudible or could not be transcribed for other reasons.

1. Grand Manan

In Grand Manan, unconstitutional prayers delivered prior to meetings are delivered by either an invited guest or a member of council. To better understand this practice, we analyzed the opening prayers, and who delivered them, for meetings between June 9, 2023, and February 24, 2026.¹⁵¹ The results are as follows:

Table 12 – Prayers opening Grand Manan meetings, who delivered them, and notable elements.

Date	Representative	Gender	Church/denomination	Notable Phrases	Names Jesus and/or Christ
February 24, 2026	Wayne Sturgeon	M	Councillor	"We pray that you may give us the patience of Job and the Wisdom of Solomon to lead the people."	Y
February 2, 2026	Jayne Turner	F	Councillor	"Make us mindful of the decisions..."	N
January 12, 2026	Councillor Wayne Sturgeon	M	Councillor	"Lord, we ask for your wisdom Lord, in making decisions."	Y
December 1, 2025	Pastor David Smith	M	Anglican	"We thank you for our leadership, for the mayor and the council, and for the good work that they do."	Y
November 3, 2025	Pastor David Smith	M	Anglican	"Guide and direct their conversations and their discussions and plans, in Jesus's name we pray."	Y
October 6, 2025	Pastor Shea Linton	M	Lighthouse Church	"May your kingdom come and may your will be done on Grand Manan as it is in heaven."	N

¹⁵¹ Village of Grand Manan. (n.d.). "Council Meeting Minutes." Available at <https://www.villageofgrandmanan.com/document-type/council-meeting-minutes/>

September 8, 2025	Pastor Ruth Fair-Parker	F	Lighthouse Church	"We commit [council] to you and we give you all the praise for it's in your name we pray."	N
August 11, 2025	Pastor Dorin Seicaru	M	Seal Cove Baptist Church	"It is a duty and a privilege to pray for our authorities. As the Bible tells us in 1 Timothy chapter 2, we are urged to pray for them. And we thank you lord for this privilege. Lord, we also thank you because you are our god, our creator, and we thank you because this nation is created on Christian foundations, as our forefathers decided long ago to give you dominion from sea to sea."	Y
July 7, 2025	Councillor Wayne Sturgeon	M	Councillor	"God, we pray that uh you may give us each the patience of Solomon, I mean the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon, Lord God, and making decisions that are good for the for the people. And we ask in Jesus wonderful name."	Y
June 2, 2025	Pastor Shea Linton	M	Lighthouse Church	"Holy spirit, come have your way. We give you our evening and we give you this meeting."	N
May 5, 2025	Pastor David Smith	M	Anglican	"We pray your blessing upon their conversations, their planning and their work."	Y
April 7, 2025	Pastor John Lamos	M	Lighthouse Church	"Would you lead us in wisdom and in truth? Would your kingdom come and would your will be done in a place right here in Grand Manan as it is in heaven?"	Y
March 17, 2025	Councillor Wayne Sturgeon	M	N/A	"Lord god like Solomon of old we do pray for wisdom to lead the people lord god and your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven."	Y

February 3, 2025	Councillor Wayne Sturgeon	M	N/A	"We are truly thankful for the country that we live in, lord." "God, we pray that you'd be with us this evening, Lord, and like Solomon of old we pray for wisdom to lead the people."	Y
January 13, 2025	Pastor Ruth Fair-Parker	F		"We give you all the praise."	N
December 2, 2024	David Smith	M	Anglican	"... In Jesus's name."	Y
November 4, 2024	Shea Linton	M	Lighthouse Church	"Heavenly father" "Thank you for these men and women" "these men and women are called to this job" "lead them, guide them, give them the right answers where they need it"	N
October 7, 2024	Ward McComiskey	M	Immanuel Family Church	"thank you for the council" "grant wisdom as they make decisions" "In Jesus's name, Amen"	Y
September 9, 2024	Ruth Fair-Parker	F	Lighthouse Church	"pray for wisdom for them" "we commit them to you" "In Jesus' name amen"	Y
August 12, 2024	Andrew Duncan	M	Groundswell Church? Introduced as lighthouse in others, linkedin says groundswell	"In Jesus' name amen"	Y
July 8, 2024	Shea Linton	M	Lighthouse Church	"guide them and lead them" "I pray that your hand is guiding them and you're walking alongside them"	N
June 3, 2024	John Lamos	M	Lighthouse Church	"I keep coming back to the prayer of Jesus when he said your kingdom come your will be done" "amen"	Y
May 6, 2024	Michelle Duncan	F	Lighthouse Church	"in Jesus' name amen"	Y
April 8, 2024	Ward McComiskey	M	Immanuel Family Church	"wisdom" "in Jesus' name amen"	Y
February 5, 2024	Ruth Fair-Parker	F	Lighthouse Church	"give them wisdom"	N
December 4, 2023	Andrew Duncan	M	Lighthouse Church	"in Jesus' name we pray amen"	Y

November 6, 2023	Dave Phillips ¹⁵²	M	North Head Baptist Church	"In Jesus's name"	Y
September 11, 2023	Karl Ingersoll	M	Community Life Church	"in Christ's name, Amen"	Y
August 14, 2023	Dave Phillips	M	North Head Baptist Church	"continue to help this council" "in Jesus' name amen"	Y
May 8, 2023	Roger Fitzsimmons	M	Deputy Mayor	"In Jesus's name amen"	Y
April 3, 2023	Michelle Duncan	F	Lighthouse Church	"be with the leaders of this island" "give them wisdom, direction and clarity"	N
February 6, 2023	Andrew Duncan	M	Lighthouse Church	"in Jesus' name we pray, amen"	Y
June 9, 2023	Ruth Fair-Parker	F	Lighthouse Church	-	N

¹⁵² Note that a separate prayer was given by the Deputy Mayor at the swearing in ceremony an hour before the November 6 meeting.

2. Dieppe

Debate on how to respond to Saguenay Decision, April 27, 2015. Note that this meeting took place in French, and has been translated by BCHA.¹⁵³

Marc Melanson (City Manager):

“Item 10.2, proposed amendment to the procedural bylaw, following a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada that was rendered already almost two weeks ago, concerning prayers in the public forum at municipal council meetings. So we must adjust to this decision. So this evening, the ending of reflect...this change... which the council read this evening, the words of welcome, so it is to therefore to adopt the integration of these changes.”

Yvon Lapierre (Mayor):

For the resolution?

Ernest Thibodeau (Councillor):

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. That the Dieppe municipal council accept to proceed with the first and second readings of bylaw A-4(2015) entitled Procedural Bylaw of the Municipal Council of the City of Dieppe. I so move.

Yvon Lapierre (Mayor):

Moved by Councillor Thibodeau. Seconded by Councillor Cornier. For the question, Madam Dallaire.

Jody Dallaire (Councillor):

Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I was wondering why it was recommended that we should have a “word of welcome” rather than a “moment of silence.” Was there a particular reason for one rather than the other?

Yvon Lapierre (Mayor):

No, not really. I think it was a question of perhaps more custom with the prayer... that was at the beginning... the Serenity Prayer, but to change it into a word, a words of welcome... opening words for the meeting. To... that’s what’s been proposed.

Jody Dallaire (Councillor):

Personally, I would rather have a moment of silence. So for those people who would like to pray silently, could do so, and people who would like to do other things with that time could do other

¹⁵³ City of Dieppe. (2015 April 27). “City of Dieppe – Regular council meeting (2015-04-27).” [Video]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKmpOcrU2hQ>

things. This would respect the cultures of everybody. For me it would... I would recommend this most mentioned method, rather than a word of welcoming.

Yvon Lapierre (Mayor):

Thank you for the comments. Mr. Gaudet.

Jean J. Gaudet. (Councillor):

I agree that we keep the... the challenge that falls on us to accept the things that we cannot change and then the courage to change the things we can. And certainly the wisdom to know the difference, but I would prefer that we keep the... a certain nobility of spirit, if we could call it that, rather than give us all the wisdom that we can think like the First Nations, the Indigenous peoples, used to speak of the great spirit. And we could simply make reference to the great spirit or a supreme spirit rather than imposing on us the full burden of wisdom. We're not that wise [smart] but we do our best.

Yvon Lapierre (Mayor):

Thank you for your comments. Mr. Belliveau.

Paul N. Belliveau (Councillor)

I can understand with my colleague councillor Gaudet, on the question of wanting...not necessarily... wanting to mention to someone individually who we can think of as being something that we hold dear in our hearts.

I think that the Supreme Court... it's in charge of the supreme... The Supreme Court is pretty supreme. I think the changes that we've made are appropriate, and bring with them a value to make recognition in a loud voice that we are looking to want to be adopting measures to be making good decisions.

And in response to Councillor Dallaire, I think that... I think that it's up to each one of us to arrive for our deliberations at 17h [5pm] to take a moment to say that we are going to do a good thing this evening and that we are really going to represent all the interests that are in front of us. So from where I sit, I shall support this resolution. I think that we should pronounce, in a loud voice, at the beginning of our meetings. Thank you Mr. Mayor.

Yvon Lapierre (Mayor):

Thank you. If there are no other questions or comments we will go to a vote. All those in favour signify by saying "Aye" [many councillors say 'Ate']. Those opposed by a "No" [Councillor Dallaire says no]. No, Madam Dallaire. The resolution is carried as presented.

In the following meeting, the bylaw was read by title only. The only discussion was regarding an amendment to a different section of the procedural bylaw and it passed.

3. Fundy Albert

Debate on adding council prayer

Village of Fundy Albert Council Meeting special meeting February 6, 2023 (Part 2) (1:11)¹⁵⁴

Councillor Jonah:

"We have received a letter from a gentleman with regards to council prayers [inaudible] I am in full support of that, and it's something that should be strongly considered."

Mayor Rochon:

"OK, well if you are so inclined, I would need a motion."

Councillor Jonah:

I will make that motion [inaudible].

Mayor Rochon:

"It's moved by Councillor Jonah, seconded by Councillor Land. Any questions on the motion? Councillor Jonah first."

[Inaudible]

Mayor Rochon:

"Councillor Land?"

Councillor Land:

"Nope. It's a great idea."

Mayor Rochon:

"Any questions Councillors?"

Councillor Ereaux:

"I thought I'd had some conversations with Hannah in the background. It seemed to me that there's already been a Supreme Court decision on this subject. So although I'm in support of supporting my other Councillors in this, it seems like Municipalities are being advised not to engage in this, as it's really counter to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the country as

¹⁵⁴ Village of Fundy Albert [Facebook]. (2023 February 6). "Regular council." [Video]. Available here <https://www.facebook.com/villageoffundyalbert/videos/491282433205325>; and for agenda and minutes, see Village of Fundy Albert. (n.d.). "2023 Council Meetings." Available at <https://fundyalbert.ca/governance/council-meetings/2023-council-meetings/>

stated by the Supreme Court. So I'd prefer not to get into a debate about this. I'm curious to know your position on it."

Mayor Rochon:

"Councillor Elderkin any comments?"

Councillor Elderkin:

"No."

Councillor Russell:

"Just curious, is it something we're going to do, or maybe clergy coming in, how is that going to work?"

Mayor Rochon:

"It's an approach that whatever council wants to adopt can be done. In the former municipality of Hillsborough it varied. We would have, basically, a prayer at the beginning of each council session, when it was called to order, and we've also had people come in and say a prayer. I will confirm what Councillor Ereaux is saying, this has been contested right through to the Supreme Court of Canada, and essentially the Supreme Court has said unanimously that, and this is not my view, this is the actual wording of the Supreme Court decision, that the state has, that religion has no place in the operation of the state. And for that reason, the community of Saguenay in Quebec, they were ordered to stop, and remove any type of religious references within their council chambers.

So that's not to say that we can't do it, but keep in mind that by doing that, we're also going against a Supreme Court of Canada decision. The option, we can certainly have the vote here this evening, the option is always to refer to staff to do a more in-depth review of what the implications are. That's the decision. So we now need to vote on the issue, because a motion has been moved and passed, to be on the record for the motion. So, on the motion, on the question, all in favour of instituting a council prayer, signify by stating 'Aye'."

[Some Ayes]

Noting that Councillor Jonah has voted aye, Councillor Land has voted aye, Councillor Elderkin has voted aye, so there's 3 ayes. Opposed, if any? Nay?"

Councillor Ereaux:

"I think until we've established that it's legitimate and even within our code of conduct, to pass a motion that is deemed to be illegal."

Mayor Rochon:

“So you want to vote yay or nay?”

Councillor Ereaux:

“I’m voting nay, until such time.”

Mayor Rochon:

“Councillor Russel? Nay? Councillor Coates? Yay? The yays have it.”

[*Inaudible*]

Councillor Ereaux:

“What’s your vote mayor?”

Mayor Rochon:

“My vote is nay, for the reasons specified. I’m not opposed to a council prayer, but I am not in favour of saying...”

Councillor Ereaux:

“That’s the same with me.”

Mayor Rochon:

“I would be open to revisiting it, as long as there was some type of an analysis. And for that reason I’m voting nay.”

Debate on keeping Council Prayer

Committee of the Whole meeting, February 21, 2023, at 8:20¹⁵⁵

[*This meeting did not begin with a prayer*]

Public presentation by Mr. James Wilson [Mr. Wilson spoke on several other issues, we only transcribed the portion relevant to prayer]

“The Monarchist League of Canada has no opinion on council prayer, but I would like to make a quick observation. The primary purpose of council prayer is to remind council of their duties and their obligations to behave ethically. Even if council prayer is not reinstated, such a reminder should continue to exist.

In one famous study, participants who were reminded of ethics before being given a task involving opportunities to behave dishonestly for financial gain behaved in a more ethical

¹⁵⁵ Village of Fundy Albert [Facebook]. (2023 February 21). “Committee of the Whole.” [Video]. Available at Part 1: <https://www.facebook.com/villageoffundyalbert/videos/1362694394495208>; and for agenda and minutes, see Village of Fundy Albert. (n.d).

fashion. This included a group of atheists who were asked to swear on the Bible before performing their tasks.

If I may suggest a couple of alternatives. A modified version of the privy council oath, which I have included in here, or a relevant quote or selection of quotes made by Canada's monarchs since 1867, pertaining to leadership. A couple of examples from Queen Elizabeth the second: We may hold different points of view, but it is in times of stress and difficulty that we most need to remember that we have much more in common than there is dividing us. Our modern world lays such a heavy hand on our common attention that the need to remember our common responsibilities to others is greater than ever."

Public Presentation Mr. Norman Woodworth [The beginning of Mr. Woodworth's presentation is missing from the video]

"...500BC, so it's got nothing to do with Christianity. The words God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change literally means, coming out of that Sanskrit language, literally means surrender to your higher power. To people of faith, and I mean all faiths here, all the faiths, that means god as you understand god to be. To people of no faith, that higher power can become anything they want it to be. That is why AA has adopted it as a part of their twelve step program. Personally, I do not think that the serenity prayer should probably be offensive to anyone. So what are my final thoughts on this? Whatever council decides at a future meeting tonight, and I want you to listen to this. Whatever council decides at a future meeting, this is not a win for some and a loss for others. It's not a win for some and a loss for others. This is something bigger than that.

When that young man Omar Hamlin dropped on the field during the Buffalo games, 70,000 people in the stands and the thousands who watched online, had only one thing in mind. People of faith and/or people of no faith, they were either praying for or wishing the well-being of this young man. So, since there has been this issue about prayer prior to a council meeting, I know that this council has been prayed for more than ever before. And that's a good thing. We all know that you've been given a difficult task, and all of us want you to succeed. And that's true. Everybody does. Everybody I talk with. Whether you're a praying person or not, they want you to succeed.

So, a story comes to mind, and I always have a little story in the things I usually say. A story comes to mind, a little boy was invited by his friend to stay for a meal. He accepted. Used to hearing grace before a meal he hesitated, and he was asked why. And he said, well, you're just like my dog, you dig right in. Well, my personal prayer is this, it would be this, that you would not just dig right in before your meetings. I like to believe that prayer makes the difference, and I know that it does, and I thank you for letting me take the time to share these thoughts."

Regular Meeting of Council March 7, 2023

*The room was at capacity. The mayor began with instructions reminding the public of proper behavior. The meeting did not begin with a prayer.*¹⁵⁶

Public Presentation by Pastor Paul Steeves (10:15)

“Mayor, council members. I’d like to say I’m here as a speaker on behalf of a good number of people that you see here tonight. And I was asked to come and to share. Before I get into anything I want to let you know that I’ve been a native of Albert County all of my life. I was only outside of Albert County living four years of my life, the rest of the time has been here. Out of my lifetime being here, 33 years I’ve served in this area, Albert County. Serving people to the best of my ability in my ministries. And I need to let you know that in all of the difficulties that I’ve run into over the years, that we’ve found that one of the strongest points there was to bring community together to help people grow and overcome the difficulties in life, was through prayer.

I just want to share that with you. So I want to say, after that, I want to say thank you to you folks. I really appreciate you folks, for stepping up to the plate. You guys are pulling in, you know, as council members and as mayor. We need people. We need people in your position. And we want to say thank you for stepping up and being willing to take this job. We know there’s many challenges, lots going on... on your plates and you need to know that we’re behind you on this. We appreciate you’re here. But at the same time, we request that you wouldn’t maybe throw away something that is good. Something that’s been helpful over a lot of years, something that’s been very beneficial.

We always need to be asking for wisdom, right? We need to be asking for wisdom, seeking out ways to really better ourselves, to better our community. And many times we say isn’t it good to go to seek in areas where we could really find the wisdom. You know, we discovered that one of the greatest things is when it comes to wisdom when a group of leaders, a group of people, get together and they begin to pray a little bit, and ask for that one question. We need help. We need wisdom. We need help in our direction, in our guidance, because we have great responsibility, we serve communities that we care for. And in that process, you need to know and I believe, that prayer has proven itself, over the years, to be very helpful in providing unity and wisdom, you know, in the leadership of our counties, of our villages, and even our country.

We think that, maybe, when we consider prayer, and we’re hoping that you folks would feel it’s a necessary part of who you are. Maybe there’s ways that we can look at having prayer, and it could be part of not only council but maybe even part of your lives. We know that many people here in our community strongly believe in prayer. Not at all out of order, if I would ask that those that believe in prayer to maybe raise their hand.

¹⁵⁶ Village of Fundy Albert [Facebook]. (2023 March 7). “Regular council.” [Video]. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/villageoffundyalbert/videos/206970431981696>; and for agenda and minutes, see Village of Fundy Albert. (n.d.).

[Hands raised include the mayor and four Councillors, and a number of people in the audience]

I know that you folks have a lot on your plate. There's many challenges, you know, that have come before you. There's been rulings, there's been threats. There was all kinds of things that come, that cause great concern. It raises many questions. You know but when it comes to prayer, I struggle in my own mind, and think, how come prayer, how can it be so unlawful? Or so unruly?

When we stop and think about one of the highest governments in our land, the House of Commons, gather and pray each morning before they start. How is it that we feel we're not able to have prayer, when our provincial government pray each time they meet, before they meet? If it's such an unlawful thing, if it's such an unruly thing, how come the leaders of our country choose to go in that direction? I would ask that maybe you would consider what I'm saying. I would ask that you would please consider prayer. I believe it's something that we all need, no matter what level of government we're in, no matter where we are in society. Prayer is an important part of life. Please keep prayer in this council. And last but not least, on behalf of myself and on behalf of many here tonight, you guys need to know, you folks need to know, that we respect you, and that we will be praying for you.

Todd Geldart (15:30)

Good evening councillors. Good evening Mayor Rochon. I've got two minutes so I better get at it. I respect Paul, I've known Paul a long time. I'm the black sheep on this whole thing. This country was founded on a principal that recognizes the supremacy of god. That's a fact. You can't remove that fact. It's in our national anthem. It's in our constitution. So, whether you're of whatever denomination that you are, it is irrelevant. And I'm hearing a lot of people talk about them and us, and us and them, and this county has got a long standing faith-based family, from Riverview right straight through to Alma.

And it doesn't matter what denomination it is, they're there for our kids, for our graduation class, they're there for our fire department, they're there for our police department. They put on food drives, they help the needy, they help the you know. All of that stuff. And this idea that it is against the law to open a council meeting with prayer is false. It is not against the law. There was a court case, case number 35496 in Quebec, which was the actual Quebec secular movement versus Saguenay City.

And what it was... was the gentleman was an atheist, that's fine, I've got friends that are atheists. All kinds of friends that are atheists. Heretics and everything else. And I've got lots of friends that are spiritual people. They believe in god. And if you look at the specifics of that court case, that is not what we're dealing with here at all. You need to look at the Supreme Court's ruling, and that ruling, when you break it all down and look at all of the facts, I sort of see the point of view of the gentleman that was there. What he was being subjected to was nothing short of a religious service right there minutes before they started their council meeting.

Mayor Rochon:

Mr. Geldart, I'd ask if you'd wrap up please.

Mr. Geldart:

OK, so, no that's fine, so I mean getting back to the basics of this whole thing, you cannot come in here and say that we want to remove a prayer from council meetings and that I'm not here to change your traditions or your heritage. Cuz that's false. That will change our tradition. It will change our heritage. Because of the faith based family that is in this county. So thank you for your time, I appreciate it.

Dean MacDonald (18:30)

Mr. Mayor and Councillors, friends, I thank you for this privilege of being able to speak. I wish I'd known about the five minute mark but I can do it short.

Mayor Rochon:

It's two.

Mr. MacDonald:

I agree with what our brother Paul has said. And Todd. And I hope all these people that believe in prayer are going to be in their churches praying soon. And I haven't seen all of you. But I want to make this point. Because I believe in prayer and I feel it should be part of a council meeting, but I know our council may also need some kind of off ramp here. So I found it in an odd place, and that's in a paper on thoughts on prayer and analysis of prayers in the legislative assembly of British Columbia, which is written by a humanist association which is a non-religious group, probably related to the group that was in Quebec. But none the less in their article they mention this.

Demographic data for British Columbia can be used in order to determine the extent to which prayers delivered in the Legislature reflect the beliefs of British Columbians. Or we could do it for Albert County. The demographic data for Fundy Albert can be used in order to determine the extent to which prayers delivered in the council meeting reflects the belief of Albert County. So we have our own culture. We live in a country where we're encouraged every day to be culturally sensitive, to accept diversity, but I think it also includes being sensitive to the culture here in Albert County. Without ignoring others.

So this is my suggestion. Once you do your demographic study and it's all done already by Stats Canada, look at those stats, if 10% of the people here, in our county, identify as non-religious, then 10% of your council meetings can with instead a period of silence, moment of silence. But for the other 90% it ought to reflect whatever the rest of the community. And so if we were, in the county, and I don't think this is the case, but if 5% were Islamic then we could offer them that opportunity to have a prayer. And if it happens to be that 9% identify from a Judeo-Christian ethic then that ought to be recognized. But do it on the basis of demographics, not on the basis of our personal feelings and so on. That way you identify, recognize our cultural sensitivity, you

recognize what we're being called to do across the country, is to be culturally sensitive. Let's be culturally sensitive. Thank you.

Council Debate

Mayor Rochon:

I am first going to address an issue that's generated considerable controversy. That of the reciting of council prayer. At the February 6, 2023 regular meeting of council, a resolution to institute a prayer during council meetings was adopted. The motion to recite a council prayer was not specific in terms of the nature and form it would take. Since that time, our local government has received requests asking to revisit the motion. There have been many who indicated support for a prayer, and many who oppose it. Inquiries have been made in relation to this issue, including reaching out to New Brunswick municipalities to determine the approach that they use. Some municipalities do nothing, some observe a moment of silent reflection before calling the meeting to order. So council must now decide what it will do. So here are some options.

Council may choose to take no action. If no motions are introduced this evening, the resolution adopted on February 6th will continue to have effect.

Number two: Council may choose to introduce a motion to rescind the motion passed on February 6th. If council chooses to introduce a motion to rescind, a debate will occur, where councillors will be provided the opportunity to provide their views, and indicate whether they plan to support the motion to rescind or not. In the end, a majority vote will be required to rescind the motion adopted on February 6th.

Council may not introduce a motion to reconsider the motion that was passed on February 6th, as the motion to do so would have had to have been made on February 6th. This is by virtue of Robert's Rules of Order. If a motion to rescind the motion of February 6th is not introduced, or, if a motion to rescind is defeated, a motion could be in order to amend the motion adopted on February 6th. The wording of such a motion would need to be specific.

A separate motion that can be introduced after any motion is introduced, we're getting kind of complicated here but this is the process, is that after any motion is moved and seconded and prior to any vote on that question, there would be an opportunity to introduce a separate motion to table the question before the vote. Such a motion would effectively postpone the vote on the motion to allow for clarification such as obtaining further information on the matter or to obtain legal advice. Are there any questions or are there any resolutions to present at this time?

Councillor Elderkin:

I would like to make a motion to amend the motion that was passed on February 6th, 2023 meeting by removing the words "council prayer" and replacing it with a moment of silent reflection followed by this council commitment:

"We, Fundy Albert, proudly promote a healthy, safe, vibrant, and inclusive community. We are dedicated to delivering excellent services and engaging meaningful public presentation. Please allow us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to accept the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

And furthermore, suggesting that the *Reflection & Commitment* be completed following the Call to Order of our monthly council meetings.

Mayor Rochon:

So moved by Councillor Elderkin. Is there a seconder on that motion? Moved by councillor Ward-Russel. Any discussion on the motion? So this is the opportunity that councillors have to cite their position and whether or not they would support that particular motion. I will provide Councillor Elderkin as she made the motion to provide some information or her views first.

Councillor Elderkin:

This came from reflecting over the last month or so of the continuous outpour for both for and against. I understand it's not my personal preference, necessarily, but I do understand that we represent everybody here in this community, and we have to come to a common ground. And I am suggesting that this would be my common ground.

Mayor Rochon:

Anyone else? Yes, Councillor Land.

Councillor Land:

My personal preference would be to leave the prayer as it was, we did it in Hillsborough. With the serenity prayer. With the motion on the floor, it... the serenity prayer is basically there with the word god taken out of it. My personal views, and I've done a little homework, the City of Winnipeg says a prayer every morning, they do their council meetings. As well as the Parliament, the Provincial Legislature does it, the Indigenous Bands in this province do it, it's in their agenda. If it's so illegal, why is all of this still being done? I'm not quite seeing that, and I want to put that in there. But I know we look after a lot of different faiths and people don't like church and state, but this small prayer I don't think causes any conflict going forward, and that's my personal views.

Mayor Rochon:

And our procedural bylaw requires you to indicate whether or not you will support that motion or not.

Councillor Land:

I will not.

Mayor Rochon:

You will not. OK. Councillor Jonah.

Councillor Jonah:

Like Councillor Land, I would like to see the serenity prayer stay. I just.... I never thought this would take on this face. I truly didn't. I never thought that we would be here tonight over prayer, something that's been done in Hillsborough since 1994. But I want to say something to the people that are against this. And, I get it. I truly get why there is some people against this. I'll tell you why. Up until a few years ago, I myself was an atheist. I didn't believe, I couldn't imagine some man up in the sky looking down and watching us. I couldn't sit down and tried to read the bible and it just seemed like it was a comic book, I couldn't get nothing out of it. A few years back I was going through some pretty dark times in my life, and the darkest day of my life, my knees hit the floor, and I said God, if you're real, let me know. And I haven't looked back since. That is why I support the serenity prayer.

Mayor Rochon:

So your position on the motion that's on the floor is? Yes or no?

Councillor Jonah:

No.

Mayor Rochon:

OK. Thank you. Councillor Coates.

Councillor Coates:

I support this motion. Not that I disagree with any of the other councillor's wisdom, but I feel that by dragging this out as long as we have, it'll end up costing the taxpayers of Albert County, Fundy Albert, considerable money. From going to the Supreme Court, if it goes there, which it probably will, if it's pushed by the nos that say no prayer, \$100,000 would not even get us in the front door of the Supreme Court. So mine is a yes, I'll support it.

Mayor Rochon:

Councillor Ereaux.

Councillor Ereaux:

Yes, I would support this motion. The reason why I would support the motion, is the reason why I did not support the motion to have a prayer that was clearly a prayer, was not because I'm against a prayer. And clearly we have many in our community who supported the prayer, and believed that it was a beneficial aspect to our meetings. And we had many people in the community who didn't want prayer to be a part of proceedings of our meetings at all. And to me, it wasn't really about that, it's about the fact that as far as we can tell from the Supreme Court ruling, that is a different case but the subject matter is very similar, it was an amalgamated community, recently amalgamated community, for which some parts of the previously amalgamated community had prayer, previously, and some didn't.

That's the same as Fundy Albert. Alma hasn't had a prayer for at least 25 years, just as an example. We know that Hillsborough did. Riverside Albert I don't think did. So that was a similarity. And the fact that it was a prayer that was argued to be non-denominational or somehow non-descript in one way was considered by the court, but in the end it was ruled that that didn't matter. So it's the part about having a prayer in the council meeting to me, is the fact that it's not an essential element of a council meeting. Otherwise all council meetings across the country would be doing and would have to be doing it. In a way it's an optional element. And I could live with that, really, as an optional element, except for, what's not an optional element is any local government or any government at any level is to conduct its business in a manner that is not considered lawful.

And so on the basis of the Supreme Court decision on a similar, but not the same situation, I feel going down the road that we were going down was not sustainable. I believe that what councillor Elderkin is proposing here is a good compromise. It's allowing us to have this moment of reflection, where each of us can use this in the way that's best for them, to seek guidance if they need to or just to be still, before our proceeding starts, and there's a, I would actually like you to read it again if you could, what you're proposing, but I understood that there's to be this moment of silence, and then I believe what you called a commitment. And the commitment statement had some, again I would like to see it, but some nice values and aspirations that we as a council are leaning towards for the community.

Because we're trying to build a harmonious community that is inclusive and is able to deal with all the challenges that we're facing, and we have many. And then it does conclude with essentially the root elements of the serenity prayer. I would hope that we would at least get some opinion from a lawyer to make sure that the root elements that are still there would pass the bar. I think they would. That's my gut feeling, so yes, I would support this.

Mayor Rochon:

Councillor Ward-Russel.

Councillor Ward-Russel:

Thank you mayor. I guess just a quick statement, I want to thank everyone for being here tonight and for the numerous e-mails that we have received. So I do personally thank you for that. With regards to if I support the motion that's on the table, I absolutely do. So my answer to that would be yes. Just to end my comments, it's not that – I do believe in prayer, but I don't believe in mixing church and state. So that's where I stand.

Mayor Rochon:

Thank you very much. So I will provide a few comments and I think it's important for everyone here to understand where I'm coming from on this, because I do have a say in what transpires. It's not by choice, it's because our procedural bylaw has changed, and it requires me to have a position on this particular issue. To those of you that aren't aware, I come from Quebec, I'm a

Roman Catholic, I was born, I was baptised Roman Catholic, and I happen to believe in prayer. But that's not the issue for me.

So councillors, council has received many comments on this particular issue. Many for and many against I have said. There were some who questioned why I even cast a vote. They were saying that the mayor should only cast a vote if there is a tie on a particular issue. While this may have been the case in a former municipality that I served on, the procedural bylaw that was developed by our transition facilitator, without any of our involvement, requires that I pronounce myself.

The Village of Fundy Albert Procedural Bylaw, which is available for everyone to view on the Fundy Albert website, defines a member of council as a duly elected member of the council. And I fall within that definition. The procedural bylaw then makes several references to voting where it states that members shall vote. So for this reason, nowhere in the procedural bylaw does it state that the mayor can break a tie. And it will remain that way until such time as this council changes that procedural bylaw...

[Discussion on procedural bylaw is not relevant to this report and has been omitted from this transcription]

So on the question, I've given this matter a lot of thought. I've read the many comments that have been submitted to council, every one of them. I've spoken with community residents on both sides of this issue. I've also read the April 2015 Supreme Court Ruling on the issue of the state's obligation to religious neutrality. I've read it twice and I've paid attention to almost every word that's in that. And I've even had folks that have reached out to me that were very adamant that we needed to keep prayer. But the issue is not whether or not I believe in prayer or not. In its ruling on the issue of prayer the Supreme Court of Canada said, and this is not a law, per se, that you break and you get fined, it is rather a ruling from the highest court in the land. And it said, by expressing no preference, the state ensures that it preserves a neutral public space that is free of discrimination and in which true freedom to believe or not believe is equal.

A neutral public space does not mean the homogenization of private players in that space. This is the Supreme Court that's saying this. Neutrality is required of institutions in the state, but not of individuals. On the contrary, a neutral public space free of coercion, pressure and judgement on the part of public authorities in matters of spirituality is intended to protect every person's freedom and dignity. Section 27 of the Charter requires that the state's duty of neutrality be interpreted not only in a manner consistent with the protective objectives of the Canadian charter, but also with the view of promoting and enhancing diversity. Some have suggested that the Parliament of Canada and the Parliament of New Brunswick's Legislature begin their sessions with a prayer, and I believe they do. And so we should be allowed to do the same.

In response to this, I refer to the same Supreme Court of Canada decision which touches on the comparison with the Parliament of Canada. And they quote "as for the proposed analogy to the prayer recited by the Speaker of the House of Commons, in the absence of evidence concerning

that prayer it would be inappropriate to use it to support a finding that the City's prayer is valid. And that's in reference to the finding for the City of Saguenay, Quebec. My understanding of the Supreme Court decision is that the State, our local government, must adhere to principals of religious neutrality. That is, not favouring one belief over another. Unless provided a legal opinion to the contrary, and I've offered that option a number of times, I feel I must do what's in the best interests of this community.

And there was mention of financial interest, that is a huge factor. I've looked for examples in other communities in New Brunswick that include a prayer as part of their meetings, and have found none. In New Brunswick. That doesn't mean they don't exist, that means I've found none. There are communities that have opted to incorporate a moment of silence for personal prayerful reflection prior to calling the meeting to order. My role as mayor includes communicating information and recommendations to this council. On issues of local government finances and administrations and government. The New Brunswick local governance act requires me to do that.

So my advice and recommendations to members of council is this. In the absence of legal advice to the contrary, I would urge that we not take any action that might be interpreted as a gesture of defiance of the Supreme Court of Canada ruling. My recommendation is to seek legal advice on this matter if we were ever to go down that road. We have a motion before us that does not, it's not in my view, kind of deviates from an actual prayer, but carries forward the spirit and intent of it, which is to ask for serenity, to make proper decisions and so on. So for that reason, I will be voting in favour of the motion presented, the amended motion presented this evening. So. Are there any other comments to provide?

Councillor Ereaux:

Well again, I would like to hear the actual wording one more time, and does this, the amended motion, include the idea that, like one of the things I thought we as council didn't quite have right on the last motion is if we introduce anything that is an element of our meeting procedures, the place to describe what it is we're introducing, the what, the text, the when, what point in the meeting this happens, who is doing it and how they're doing it, should be in the meeting procedures bylaw.

Mayor Rochon:

That would need to be...that would require that the procedural bylaw be amended to include that in it. But until such time as that happens, we can make a motion each time the meeting comes to order to include that particular aspect.

Councillor Ereaux:

OK but those questions about what exactly, who, when and how, I believe

Mayor Rochon:

Perhaps it would be timely to have Councillor Elderkin reread her motion. Because we will be voting on that particular motion...

Councillor Elderkin:

...motion that was passed on February 6th, 2023 meeting by removing the words "council prayer" and replacing it with a moment of silent reflection followed by this council commitment:

"We, Fundy Albert, proudly promote a healthy, safe, vibrant, and inclusive community. We are dedicated to delivering excellent services and engaging meaningful public presentation. Please allow us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to accept the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference." And furthermore, suggesting that the *Reflection & Commitment* be completed following the Call to Order of our monthly council meetings.

Mayor Rochon:

OK, that's pretty specific.

Councillor Ereaux:

And who does this? It would be the mayor?

Mayor Rochon:

It would be us together. We'd be recited, or one person can do it, it's up to us to make that determination. So, any other questions on the motion? If not, then we will record the various votes. All in favour, signify by stating "aye."

Councillor Elderkin votes aye, Councillor Coates votes aye, Councillor Ereaux votes aye and Councillor Ward-Russel votes aye. And I will vote aye.

Against the motion, signify by stating nay. Let the record reflect that councillor Land and councillor Jonah voted nay. So the motion is passed. So thank you very much. So in the event that folks, you're more than welcome to stay, but I doubt, most of you were here to listen to this. We can, if you would like to leave, take a 2 minute recess to allow folks to leave, or we can continue on. It's up to you. So I will call a recess of 2 minutes.

[MOTION CARRIED (Nay Votes: *Councillor Land, Councillor Jonah*)]

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