



Unity and Peace: O’Gara Ecumenical Essay Contest

Call for Papers

2026-2027

Introduction

[The Canadian Council of Churches](#) (the Council) is a broad and inclusive ecumenical body, now representing 26 member churches including Anglican; Eastern and Roman Catholic; Evangelical; Free Church; Eastern and Oriental Orthodox; and Historic Protestant traditions. Through its member churches, the Council represents approximately 85% of Canadian Christians. Our mission is to respond to Christ’s call for unity and peace, seek Christ’s truth with affection for diversity, and act in love through prayer, dialogue, and witness to the gospel.

[The Commission on Faith and Witness](#) (CFW) is a body of the Council that creates a forum for theological reflection to foster greater understanding of the faith we hold in common and to provide an ecumenical witness to Christ’s mission in Canada and around the world.

In 2026, the Council created an annual *Unity and Peace: O’Gara Ecumenical Essay Contest* to engage students in robust theological reflection on pressing issues that have a bearing on the ecumenical movement in Canada today. Each year winning essays are eligible for cash awards, as well as inclusion in an event celebrating the work of all winning submissions and showcasing it in Canadian ecumenical and theological networks. This essay contest is fully bilingual; submissions written in English or French are invited. The Commission on Faith and Witness takes leadership in organizing this essay contest, with the support and participation of all other bodies of the Council.

Unity and Peace: O’Gara Ecumenical Essay Contest honours the internationally renowned Canadian ecumenist, theologian, and educator, Prof. Margaret O’Gara (1947-2012). A graduate of Trinity College in Washington, D.C., Yale Divinity School, and University of St. Michael’s College in Toronto, Professor O’Gara taught systematics at the University of St. Michael’s College, including several courses on ecumenical theology and ecumenism. She was also an active participant in the Canadian and global ecumenical movement, serving as a Roman Catholic representative on official national and international dialogues. In honouring Margaret’s life and service through this Ecumenical Essay Contest, the Council and its Commission on Faith and Witness gratefully acknowledge the generous support of her husband, Professor Michael Vertin, for our mission and work.

2026-2027 Themes

Two current major themes under discussion within the Council include ‘Theology of Christian Citizenship’ and ‘Confronting Racism within the Church’. Essays that touch on one or the other of these themes – especially insofar as they may be relevant to issues of Christian division and to the search for Christian unity in Canada – are particularly invited. However, submissions on a wide range of topics (theoretical and/or practical) that are relevant to justice, peace, ecumenism, and ecumenical relationships will also be gladly received.

Eligibility

Entries from persons who meet the following criteria are welcomed:

- Authors must be Canadian citizens *or* permanent residents studying in Canada or internationally; *or* international students studying in Canada.
- Authors must be enrolled as full- or part-time students at the time of submission, or up to one year post-graduation.
- Authors must attend a theological college or seminary (or your academic work must address a theological issue/topic/question) in one of the following programs or their equivalents: certificate in theological studies, MA, MDiv, MTS, ThM, DMin, ThD, PhD.
- Each author may submit one essay per year for consideration. Each author is eligible for one cash award per a three-year period.
- Authors do **not** need to be a member of the Council’s member churches or affiliates.

Essay Requirements

Essays submitted for this contest must meet the following criteria:

- The essay topic may focus on any broadly theological theme, but the essay must demonstrate its ecumenical application. Essays touching on this year’s themes of ‘Theology of Christian Citizenship’ and ‘Confronting Racism within the Church’ are particularly invited.
- The essay’s content and argument may arise from outside the Canadian theological context, but the essay should address issues pertinent to Canadian ecclesial life.
- The essay may be written in either English or French.
- The essay must be an original piece of work, written within the last three years.
- The essay must not have won, or received recognition in, another contest or have been submitted for publication elsewhere.
- The essay **may** draw on the author’s original work that has been submitted to fulfill requirements for an academic course or that has been produced for a graduate-level thesis or dissertation, as long as the author has **not** published it, or submitted it for publication, elsewhere.
- **Use of AI policy:** Authors **may** use generative AI to research ideas or provide proofreading and grammar assistance. Authors **may not** use generative AI to create content or substitute original thought in their essays. If AI is the subject of research, authors **may** include excerpts

from AI-generated conversations strictly as supporting material within their argument. To uphold intellectual integrity, all AI usage must be **explicitly** disclosed within the submissions. Failure to do so will result in disqualification. **By making a submission, the author agrees to abide by this policy.**

- The essay must not use offensive, defamatory, or obscene language, or any other material that may be deemed unsuitable.
- The essay length must be a minimum of 3,000 and a maximum of 5,000 words (exclusive of title page, abstract, keywords, footnotes, and bibliography).
- The essay must be submitted in a PDF format.
- The essay must include a title page, an abstract, up to 10 keywords, and bibliography.*
- Each page, except the title page, must have a **running header with the full title of the essay** (do **not** include your name or educational institution on this header).*
- Each page, except the title page, must have page numbers at the bottom centre of the page (beginning with the abstract on page 1).
- The title page should include (1) the essay title; (2) the author’s full name and contact information, including postal mailing address, phone number, and email address; (3) the name of the author’s educational institution, program, and year in program.*
- The first page of the essay must include an abstract (up to 150 words) and keywords (up to 10).*
- The essay’s cover page and body text must be in black 12-point Times New Roman *or* Calibri font, double-spaced. The abstract and bibliography must be in black 12-point Times New Roman *or* Calibri font, single-spaced.
- All citations must be in Chicago/Turabian style (Notes/Bibliography form).
- Footnotes must be in black 10-point Times New Roman *or* Calibri font, single-spaced.
- A short biographical paragraph about the author – including his/her/their institution and program of study, as well as full contact information of the author (mailing address, phone number, email address) – must be submitted as a *separate* PDF document.*
- By making a submission, the author agrees to permit his/her/their name, school affiliation, and essay to be published, in full or in part, in any digital or print publication of The Canadian Council of Churches. The author also agrees, if selected for an award, to promptly provide The Canadian Council of Churches with his/her/their high-resolution photograph.

**Note: The Unity and Peace: O’Gara Ecumenical Essay Contest will be judged through a ‘blind review’ process. The information provided on the title page of the essay and in the short bio submitted with the essay will not be available to the jury.*

Submission Deadlines and Instructions

- Essays and short bios must be received via email by Bailey Bjolin, CFW O’Gara Program and Research Assistant (bjolin@councilofchurches.ca) no later than 11:59 pm ET on January 15, 2027.
- The body of the email should contain the author’s full contact information.
- Essays and short bios must be submitted in PDF format and conform to all the ‘Essay Requirements’ listed above. Failure to conform to these requirements will result in disqualification.
- All entries will be acknowledged by email.

Awards

Essay submissions will be judged by a panel of three Canadian theologians invited by the Commission on Faith and Witness.

Authors of winning submissions will be contacted by March 15, 2027.

First place will receive a cash award of \$1,000 CAD, second place \$500 CAD, third place \$250 CAD.

The winning essays will also be honoured through a presentation at a public event and award ceremony in the spring of 2027 and may be considered for publication through the Council’s communication channels.

The first-place winner will also be invited to attend the April 5-7, 2027, meeting of the Commission on Faith and Witness in person to present their essay and engage in dialogue (at the expense of the CFW); the second- and third-place winners will be invited to attend virtually.