

# How faith meets the public square

There are a lot of stories these days challenging us to look at how faith meets the public square.

A young Muslim soccer player who recently was banned from a soccer tournament for not removing her hijab brings this question into sharp focus before us. Even more than this, the current 39th parliament in Ottawa, brings faith and public service together in an interesting way.

Those who are fans of the Rick Mercer Report probably saw Liberal MP Ruby Dhalla giving Canadians an up-close look at her devotion to her Sikh religion. Many may also know that Liberal MP Yasmin Ratansi and Conservative MPs Rahim Jaffer and Wahjid Khan not only celebrate their Muslim faith but do so in part to draw Canadians of faith into the political process. Some may even know that the longest current serving MP in the House, NDP MP Bill Blaikie, is not only Deputy Speaker but an ordained United Church Minister who encouraged



## commentary

Essex MPP Jeff Watson

young Canadians, at a recent event called the Siege (hosted by My Canada) to keep on praying.

And most folks in these parts know, after three years as their MP, I am a Christian. And I don't mean that in just a traditional values or I'm pro-life, pro-traditional marriage kind of way. Rather, that my faith is central to my desire to serve.

It allows me to stand up on parliament hill and join like-minded Canadians and as an adopted child in saying I believe all life has dignity. It means I can stand on parliament hill's steps,

as I did last July, and pray for our nation, for its leaders and its leaders-to-come.

It allows me, too, to speak to a leadership class in an area Catholic High School and talk to students about this leader around whom all of history in the Western world is marked: Jesus Christ. And I can challenge them to lead as He did: by abandoning selfishness and serving others.

After the Gomery Commission's exposure of the Sponsorship program's dark underbelly to public scrutiny, Canada's New Conservative Government brought in the toughest piece of anti-corruption leg-

islation in our nation's history when we passed the Federal Accountability Act. But as our Prime Minister has said that there is no law that can make us perfect. That's where I say faith comes in.

In my Ottawa office I have this plain white wash basin that sits on my shelf and forms a focal point for the room. And it has a story to it. When the twelve followers of Jesus were gathered in a room one day they started talking about what life was going to look like when they were leaders after Jesus was gone. Imagine bragging about who would be the best when Jesus was in the room right in front of them!

How did he respond? He got up quietly, got a wash basin and towel, and started washing the sand-crusted calloused feet of each of His followers. No press conference. No fanfare. No "hey look at what I'm doing!" That is service above self! And that's the kind of example of service as an MP that I seek to emulate.

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