

A tribute to the Hon. Ian Shugart

Many well-deserved tributes have been paid to the late Hon. Ian Shugart at his passing on October 25, 2023. It is only fitting that one should be written about his enduring work for the PSCF and many Christian groups, who sought to impact the policies of the Canadian Government.

I first met Ian when he was a teenager who attended Knox Presbyterian Church in Toronto, where his father was an elder. One day when I was visiting from Ottawa, his father asked if I would meet with Ian who was considering a career in the government but was not sure whether one could act and live as a Christian when in the service of the government. I assured him that he could be a Christian public servant, though it might not always be easy, and the history of the PSCF has proven.

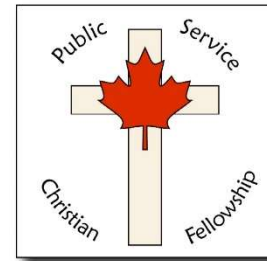
The motto of the PSCF was taken from Daniel 11:32b "Those who know their God will be strong and take action." Daniel's life in service to the King was a model to be followed as he was what today we would call a senior Deputy Minister.

After graduation, Ian came to work in Ottawa for the Hon. Jake Epp, who was himself a model of Christian leadership and a strong supporter of the PSCF. (He was also the keynote speaker at the first PSCF Conference.) Having done the requisite years of service as a political aide, Ian took advantage of the opportunity to laterally move into the Public Service.

His outstanding career in the public service has been well recognized and documented. What is less well known is his behind the scenes work on behalf of the PSCF. From time to time our PSCF groups found themselves being challenged for their existence as a Christian group and their use of government space for their meetings. Along with some other Christian ADMs, Ian offered advice on how to handle these situations with wisdom and tact. When the Parliamentary Staffers' Bible Study and Prayer Group had some challenges, Ian invited them to his home where, for a time, he personally and masterfully led their study of the Bible and later spoke often at their weekly gatherings on the Hill. Throughout his busy life, Ian remained a dedicated student of the Word and delivered several sermons in churches in Ottawa. He showed PSCFers that one did not have to have a theological or Bible college degree in order to draw out personal applications of the Word, leading to a meaningful spiritual life and public service.

He was also active, as were the PSCF executives, in helping Christian groups from outside the government to navigate the intricacies of Ottawa's political and bureaucratic systems. Two examples will suffice here. When the President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Brian Stiller, and Professor Paul Marshall, came to meet the Prime Minister, they were ready to present some philosophical arguments for their case. Before doing so, they had asked to meet with Ian and me to plan their strategy. We were able to show them that philosophical arguments would not be well received by the Prime Minister, and they would be wasting their time. Instead, they should try to reach him through heart-felt stories and illustrations. They wisely changed course and the new strategy apparently worked because the next night in a speech in Montreal, Prime Minister Mulroney quoted them extensively to. This was Ian at his best, a wise Christian providing appropriate guidance to those who sought to impact government policies through God-honoring suggestions.

A second example can be found in his helpful intervention in a dispute involving the organization, Concerned Christians in Canada, which had among its members prominent PSCFers. The organizers had raised money to take out a full-page ad in the Ottawa Citizen decrying a proposed piece of legislation that was being pushed through the House of Commons. The proposal was deemed to be odious to their Christian values. Some other Christians, however, instigated a nasty attack on the group. Just when the whole controversy was about to blow up and land in the courts which could become an embarrassment to the Christian community and their ongoing



witness, Ian took it upon himself to intervene and bring a resolution to the debacle. He did not have to do this, but he was concerned about preserving the good name of the concerned Christians. As with other issues, it was his wise counsel that brought about a peaceful resolution to the dispute.

In more recent years Prime Minister Justin Trudeau came to appreciate his wise counsel as the 42nd Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet. Note the affirming and laudatory words used in the Prime Minister's tribute to Ian. Italics added.

"Today, it is with great sadness that I learned of the passing of the Honourable Ian Shugart, a sitting Senator and a former Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to Cabinet.

"Senator Shugart *dedicated his life to the service of our country*. His *outstanding* career in the public service spanned over four decades, including roles as Deputy Minister at Environment and Climate Change Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Global Affairs Canada, where his *commitment to bettering the lives of Canadians always shone through*.

"Even in the face of unprecedented global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Senator Shugart was *a pillar of stability*. From 2019 to 2021, his *steady leadership and sound advice* as Head of the Public Service helped ensure that the Government of Canada was able to support Canadians when they needed it most. In recognition of his service, he was appointed as a Privy Councillor. His legacy as Clerk endures in his [Call to Action](#), which continues to guide us as we work to break down barriers to equity and inclusion across government by making our public service more representative of the country it serves.

"Senator Shugart's *commitment to making Canada a better place for everyone never wavered*. In 2022, he was appointed to the Senate, where he served until now, advancing the priorities of Canadians while managing health challenges.

"As we mourn the loss of a great Canadian, we also celebrate his life and *his tireless service to Canada*. Senator Shugart was *a role model for public servants, and indeed an inspiration for all Canadians*. *I owe him a great deal*, and my thoughts are with his family and friends during this difficult time."

Would that other PSCFers could be recognized for their dedicated service as Christians to the betterment of others. When the presiding pastor at Ian's funeral asked how many of the attendees had personally been impacted by Ian's life, almost everyone raised their hand. When he asked how many had received wise counsel from him, many hands went up again. What a legacy Ian has left us. We, in the PSCF, have lost a dear friend, advocate, mentor, and a Daniel-like figure whose Christian commitment and service never wavered. His life and career proved that one can be a vibrant Christian within the public service.

One of the speeches on the importance of faith in public life, that he gave to the PSCF, can be found on the PSCF website.

In writing this tribute, I am grateful for the affirming insights from another of Ian's longtime friends, Diane Scharf, who was a founding member of the PSCF and the Parliamentary Staffers' Bible Study and Prayer Group.