

Churches unhappy with Good Friday polls



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They're supposed to make voting easier, but next weekend's advance polls aren't getting a warm reception from some Island clergy.

With the May 2 election drawing closer Elections Canada has scheduled its advance polls for April 22-23 and April 25 to give people a chance to vote before election day.

The problem is one of those days falls on the holiest day for Christians.

April 22 is Good Friday and Rev. Douglas Rollwage of Zion Presbyterian Church isn't very happy with the decision to have polling stations open that day.

"I think it's a sign Elections Canada didn't put a lot of thought into when the advance polling date would be when they scheduled the date of the election," he said.

In 2007 the federal government amended the Elections Act to set fixed election dates on the third Monday in October every four years.

That means our next fixed date election was scheduled for October 2012 and well clear of the religious day.

But when the Conservative government fell to a non-confidence vote last month that threw the election date out the window and left us with the May 2 trip to the polls or, as is the case with the advance polls, the possibility of voting on Good Friday or Easter Monday.

Rollwage said a few minutes of thought would have led to a different date for election day because it's pointless to send people to vote on Good Friday without a good reason.

"Well it's too late to change it now. I don't think it was malicious. I think it was thoughtless," he said.

The week leading up to and including Easter is the most important week of the year for Christians and holding advance polls on Good Friday shows a lack of respect for the church, he said.

"It's a weekend of great spiritual significance to many people and to have it on a day when an election is happening it's not necessary to have it happen on that day any more than you would have an advanced poll on Christmas Day."

Rollwage said culturally people are more aware of Christmas, but for him Easter is the more important day.

"The fact that Easter is a moveable feast doesn't help the brain trust at Elections Canada either."

Diocese of Charlottetown chancellor Eric Dunn said the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has already made it known it isn't happy with the advance voting day and the diocese agrees.

"Of course our position would be in accordance with that and we take offence to one of the holiest day of the year, as far as Christianity is concerned the crucifixion of our lord, that a political event of that significance would be allowed on that particular day," he said.

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