Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Christian Communities
A Backgrounder

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Key Points

- Social isolation and loneliness are challenging societal problems with significant impacts on the health and well-being of those affected, including higher rates of mortality and morbidity.

- Social isolation refers to an objective lack of social networks and connections, which can be measured by examining the social relationships in someone's life, whereas loneliness refers to the perception that one's social connections are lacking, whether in quantity or quality.

- Social isolation and loneliness also interact with and exacerbate inequities within society, with vulnerable or marginalized groups, such as older Canadians, at an increased risk. Data from Statistics Canada point to women, Canadians living with disabilities, recent immigrants and non-permanent residents, and Indigenous Canadians reporting loneliness at higher levels.

- The introduction of euthanasia and assisted suicide as "medical assistance in dying" (MAiD) also heightens the urgency of the situation. While evidence is contested as to the extent to which isolation and loneliness are driving requests for and receipt of MAiD, Health Canada reports show that many Canadians receiving MAiD are identifying isolation and loneliness as a source of their suffering.

- Importantly, research has found that spirituality and belonging to a faith community are associated with experiencing *less* social isolation and loneliness. Religion and spirituality can help to protect against social isolation and loneliness, as well as to support healthy responses in situations of isolation or loneliness.

- However, despite research on the positive role that religion and spirituality can play regarding social isolation and loneliness, our understanding of how faith communities address these issues is limited—particularly in the Canadian context. This backgrounder sets the stage for Cardus's upcoming survey of Christian communities, which in turn seeks to map out the infrastructures that may contribute to lessening social isolation within churches and in their broader communities.

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For the full publication, see Vachon, Rebecca, and Micah Allatt. "Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Christian Communities: A Backgrounder." Cardus, 2025. https://www.cardus.ca/research/health/reports/social-isolation-loneliness-and-christian-communities/.