

A Study of

Core Values

Shared by Christians within the

Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

At the 1999 Assembly of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, the Planning Committee presented a document entitled **Future Directions** that attempts

“to establish the key central values which we all share (a centred set, not a bounded set) to give us a focus which will permit the development of future action to achieve the goals which we have set for our Convention.”

The following study is concerned with the section of that document entitled **Our Core Values** which lists a number of assertions that Christians within the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec commonly hold dear. **Future Directions** is a work in progress. This study reflects the September 1999 version of that document.

The Planning Committee wishes to express its appreciation to the Rev. Kathryn Root Parr who diligently worked and developed this study for use in our congregations. The purpose of this document is to provide a study guide for adults who wish to examine in greater depth the issues expressed in the Core Values presented. Also attached is a section of Leadership Tips to assist leaders of group study. All documents are provided in electronic and print format, and may be copied without restriction. We trust that God will bless their use within our churches, helping to reaffirm our commitment to the Canadian Baptist expression of our Christian witness.

January 2000



Baptist
Convention
of Ontario
and Quebec

OUR CORE VALUES

1. FAITH

1.1 We are committed to the adoration and worship of God.

So many of our best loved hymns, songs and carols feature the word “adore”. “O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord”; “Father, we adore you, lay our lives before you, how we love you” are only two examples of the way we sing about our “adoration” of God. Any English language thesaurus will list a number of synonyms for “adore” including cherish, love, honour, praise, respect, revere, and idolize; concepts that are reflected in our songs of adoration. There is a sense in which we love and cherish God. We praise God for all that God is and for all that God has done for us. We show honour, reverence and respect for God because our Creator is greater and wiser, more powerful and more loving, merciful and forgiving than we can ever be and that inspires awe within us.

We find clear reference to adoration in the original words in the Scriptures that have been translated into English as “worship.” The Hebrew and Greek words that have been rendered “worship” (*shachah, segid, proskuneo, and sebo / sebasma*) include such meanings as “to bow down”, “to do homage”, “to do reverence” or “to serve”. However, the most common translations of the word “worship” from both Hebrew and Greek all mean **worship in the sense of adoration**. God is great! We are small. God is the Creator! We are the creatures. And it is right for us to acknowledge the difference between God and us and adore God for who and what and how wonderful God is.

But there is another aspect to worship that is reflected in the Hebrew word *abad* and the Greek words *latreia* and *latreuo*. They speak of **worship in the sense of service**. These words for worship express the kind of service a slave provides a master. Serve the Lord... follow the Lord's commands. Carry out the will of the Lord. Live in a way that is pleasing to God. The whole focus of a servant is on doing the master's will from the moment they wake up in the morning to the instant they go to sleep at night. They belong to the master and live to do the master's bidding. The kind of worship expressed by *abad* and *latreia / latreuo* really has to do with the way we live our lives day by day. Worshipping God this way is something we have to choose to do. Wandering into worship for a short time each week without paying much attention isn't real worship. We can not serve God and at the same time serve something else. If we are going to worship God in this way, we have to worship God and God alone.

- Worship in the sense of **adoration** (*shachah, segid, proskuneo, and sebo / sebasma*) is found in the following representative passages of scripture. (See Exodus 20:2-6, Exodus 34:6-10, I Samuel 1:1-18, Psalm 29:1-11, Psalm 66:1-7, Revelation 4:1-11)
- Worship in the sense of **service** (*abad* and *latreia / latreuo*) is found in the following representative passages of scripture. (Sometimes these words are translated “serve” instead of “worship” so look carefully at the English verses.) (See Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Joshua 24:14-18, I Chronicles 28:9, Psalm 100:1-5, Luke 2:36-38, Romans 12:1-2)

1.2 We cherish a personal and growing experience of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord as the heart of our faith.

We call ourselves Christians because Jesus Christ is the heart of our faith - he is our example, our Saviour and our Lord and we are invited to have a personal relationship with him. “Jesus” is really his name; “Christ” is a title that is equivalent to the Hebrew word “Messiah” - or the Anointed - God's Chosen One. Jesus shows us what God is like more clearly than we ever understood before simply, not just because of who Jesus is but also by the things he taught, by the power God wielded through him when he healed people, and by the way he treated the people he encountered during his ministry on earth, especially the ones who were ignored, shunned or oppressed. God invites us to be like Jesus, to claim **Jesus as our Lord** and follow his way of living. We can begin to experience the life God has in mind for us by paying attention to Jesus' words, actions and attitudes toward ourselves and others and by following his example.

But we don't only need Jesus to be our Lord, we also need **Jesus to be our Saviour**. For as long as we have a record of our relationship with God, human beings have chosen to turn our backs on God's way and follow our own.

That is sin - disobeying God, falling short of the standard God has set for us. Making us in God's own image included giving us the right to choose how we will live and God's respect for that is enormous. So we have responsibility in the matter of sin. We have to choose to turn to God and make up our minds to obey God with our whole being.

But to complicate matters more, people have always had the idea that nothing comes for free; a price of some kind had to be paid in order to clear our debt of sin with God. For a long time people offered animal sacrifices in an effort to compensate for individual sins but it was never enough. Then, at the right time according to God's plan, God offered the ultimate sacrifice, a sacrifice made on behalf of all people, a sacrifice that could not be outdone by anything anyone else could offer. God sacrificed his own Son. The body and blood of Jesus were offered to pay the debt in full for everyone, once and for all.

The choice is still ours: accept God's gift of forgiveness through Jesus and enjoy life in all its fullness or hold onto our sin and let it continue to drain the life out of us. Our experience of Jesus Christ as **Saviour and Lord of our lives is a growing, personal relationship**. The abundant life God wants each of us to enjoy can only really come into being if we invite Jesus to live in our hearts. It is Jesus' Spirit living inside us that enables us to follow his example. It is the Spirit that assures us of our salvation and makes it possible for us to experience life in all its fullness. It isn't good enough simply to know about Jesus; we have to really know him and be a part of him as he is a part of us. It doesn't happen all at once. It takes our whole life to develop this kind of relationship with Jesus but it is the only way to have life in all its fullness.

- The following passages of scripture describe who Jesus is. (See Philippians 2:6a, John 1:1, 14a, 18, Hebrews 1:3a, Colossians 1:15)
- Parables are stories that Jesus told to help people understand their faith by comparing it to things that were already familiar. Instead of saying, "God takes care of you," he would give them a picture like this: "You've seen how a mother hen gathers her chicks and hides them under her wings when she senses danger; God takes care of you with the same determination" (Matthew 23:37). People would remember the picture and learn something about what God is like and the next time they saw a bird protecting her babies they would think, "that's how God takes care of me." Each of the following parables provides a description of God or an insight into His character. (See Matthew 18:12-14, Matthew 22:2-14, Luke 15:8-10, Luke 15:11-24)
- The following passages describe God's power demonstrated through Jesus. (See Matthew 4:23-24, Matthew 15:30-31, Acts 2:24, Romans 6:4b)
- The following passages give us an insight into the mind of Christ by the way he treated other people. If we claim **Jesus as our Lord, we need to follow his example**. (See Philippians 2:4, Luke 19:1-10, Mark 1:40-42, John 4:1-30, John 8:1-11)

Jesus made some simple statements to help us know how to behave in life-giving ways. In Luke 10:27b, he gave us The Royal Law and Luke 6:31 he gave what is called The Golden Rule. These are two of the teachings that make Christianity different from other religions. Other religions teach the idea that "if you don't want someone to do that to you, don't do it to them." Christianity goes a step further, If you want someone to be your friend when no one else will, look for people in the same situation and go out of your way to be their friend. If you want someone to comfort you when you are sad, go out of your way to comfort someone else when they are sad.

- Jesus also told the following parables to help us know how to behave like him, giving us principles to live by. (See Matthew 13:24-30, Matthew 13:31-33, Matthew 18:21-35, Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 10:30-37)
- We need to reflect on the choices that we have to make, on God's gift of forgiveness and on the need to invite Jesus into our hearts. These verses can direct us. (See Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Psalm 103:2, Isaiah 1:11, 15-17a, 43:18-19a, 25, Micah 7:19, John 1:29, John 14:15-17, Romans 3:21-26, Colossians 2:13-14, I Peter 2:24)

1.3 We depend on the leading of the Holy Spirit in our corporate decision-making and seek the Spirit's empowering of our ministries through prayer.

Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit to his disciples after he returned to heaven. Jesus said the Spirit would be among them forever, reminding them of the things Jesus taught, teaching them everything else God wanted them to know, enabling them to speak about Jesus with confidence, and guiding them through the times

that were to come. Jesus' promise was fulfilled 50 days after his crucifixion on the Day of Pentecost. The events of that day are recorded in Acts chapter 2.

The Book of Acts is not the first place where the Bible makes reference to the Holy Spirit. Starting in Genesis we see that the Spirit of God was present from the beginning of creation and has moved among people throughout history. And the Holy Spirit's activity hasn't really changed. God promised that the Spirit would be present forever. The Spirit has always spoken the truth from God about sin and righteousness and judgment. And the Spirit has always told the truth about things that are to come. The big difference now is that the Holy Spirit's activity is focused on Jesus - who Jesus is, what Jesus taught and did to bring people into the Kingdom of God, and how we can follow Jesus' example.

There are many benefits for those who invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts:

- from the way we live our lives in the here and now, to what happens to us after we die;
- from being assured of our salvation to expressing our faith in Jesus to others;
- from discovering and developing our God-given gifts to displaying the presence of God in our lives through the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Part of being made in the image of God is having the freedom to choose how we will live. God takes that freedom seriously. If we choose not to accept God's way, He will let us go our own way. But for those of us who welcome God's Spirit and choose to work together for God, the Holy Spirit moves powerfully among us, enabling us to do together what we could never do by ourselves.

I Corinthians 12 speaks of a group of believers as a body and explains that every member of a community of believers is important. Each person has a part to play in our overall ministry and each ability is as vital to the whole as any other. We all have a responsibility to use our gifts. None of us should feel good about sitting back and letting someone else do the work. Using our God-given abilities in such a team setting is one of the ways the Holy Spirit empowers our missions and ministries. Another way is through prayer. The Book of Acts is full of stories of believers in the early church who learned to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in the ministries they did together. Their devotion to prayer in seeking direction for their individual and corporate ministries is remarkable. We endeavour to do the same in our missions and ministries.

- The following passages of scripture record the promises Jesus made about the Holy Spirit. (See John 14:15-17, John 14:25-26, John 15:26-27, John 16:7-14)
- These passages describe some of the benefits of having the Holy Spirit active in our lives. (See Matthew 10:19-20, John 6:63, John 16:8-15, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:4b-6, 9-16, 26-27, I Corinthians 6:9-11, Galatians 3:4-7)
- The following passages demonstrate the importance of the Holy Spirit and prayer in individual and corporate ministries. (Acts 1:15-26, 3:1-10; 4:1-31, 6:1-7, 9:1-19q, 10:1-48, 12:1-19, 16:1-15, 16:16-34)

1.4 We value our distinctive combination of beliefs, which helps to identify us as Baptists.

While many Christians wholeheartedly accept the things that have been said in this document about God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, there are a number of other assertions that Baptist Christians hold dearly; principles that distinguish our denomination from others.

First, a bit of history: The Baptist denomination of Christians came out of the Protestant Reformation (1500-1650 A.D.) after the invention of the printing press and the translation of Scripture into the common languages allowed people to read the Bible for themselves. As people began to study the Bible, they noticed inconsistencies between what the Bible said and some of the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church - the official church. Some church leaders and lay people "protested" particular points of Roman Catholicism so strongly that, when the Church refused to change, these people broke their ties with the official Church and began their own congregations based on their own understanding of scripture. These were called "Protestant Churches" and were led by such people as Martin Luther (Lutherans), Huldreich Zwingli (Reformed), Conrad Grebel (Swiss Brethren), Menno Simons (Mennonite) and many more. In the midst of all this turmoil, it is difficult to sort out exactly what influenced the development of the Baptist denomination.

In a history of the Baptists in Canadaⁱ written by Harry Renfree, the author notes that the Reformation was at full steam on the continent of Europe when Henry VIII was King of England. Henry, eager to divorce one of his wives, directed Parliament to make him head of a new state church - the Church of England. He made a few doctrinal adjustments, but his young son, under the influence of Protestant advisors began to make more significant changes. Unfortunately, he died just six years later and his sister Mary then became Queen. She reinstated the Roman Catholic Church in England and persecuted many hundreds of religious leaders so cruelly (she did earn the name "Bloody Mary") that they fled to the European Continent. Mary's reign was also brief and when her sister Elizabeth took the throne in 1558, the Protestant cause was allowed to develop again. Many of the religious leaders who had fled now returned to England and brought with them what they learned from the reformers in Europe. They hoped to "purify" the Church of England from within and so formed the Puritan Party. When the Queen and other officials of the state church refused to implement their suggestions, many of the Puritans realized they could not accomplish their goal from within. If they wanted a church built on New Testament principles, as they understood them, they were going to have to separate from the Church of England and start over. And so these Puritans became known as Separatists. Elizabeth died in 1605 and James became King. The religious struggle that had been simmering the entire previous century was really boiling now and King James wanted to bring some order out of this chaos so he called together a number of religious leaders with the hope that they could come up with some practical ways of addressing the situation. The most useful suggestion that came out of that conference was to prepare a translation of the Bible, in common but proper English, that could be used by all Christians in the kingdom. James stipulated that the work must be done by the finest biblical scholars in the land. And so began the careful preparation of the King James Version of the Bible. It was released in 1611ⁱⁱ and within 40 years, this translation had replaced all other English versions. Meanwhile, James continued the persecution of people who would not conform to the state church and by 1608, life had become so difficult for the Separatists that many of them fled the country.

John Smyth (pronounced Smith) was one of the religious leaders who made the journey from Church of England to Puritan Party to Separatist. He was minister of a little Separatist church in Gainsborough when the persecution became more than his congregation could bear. With the help of another Separatist, Thomas Helwys (pronounced hell-wheeze), John Smyth moved his congregation to Amsterdam. It was during their first year in Holland that John Smyth, after many discussions with other expatriate Separatists, came to the conclusion that infants are not to be baptized. Since he was trying to establish a New Testament church, baptism of believers by immersion was the only way he could accept. He baptized himself, Thomas Helwys and other members of his congregation and so this group of believers is considered to be the **very first Baptist Church**, established in 1609 in Amsterdam, Holland. In 1612, Thomas Helwys and some members of the Amsterdam congregation decided to return to England, taking with them their understanding of what a New Testament church ought to be. So now there were Baptists in England as well as Holland. These early Baptists adopted many of the views of the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius, who emphasized three main points:

1. that we are free to choose whether or not we will live for God;
2. that Christ died for all people, not just "the elect" as John Calvin asserted; and
3. that it is possible to fall from grace.

Expanding upon ideas he had learned from John Smyth, Thomas Helwys began to call for religious liberty in England. He wrote the following words in "A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity,"

*Our lord the king is but an earthly king, and he hath no authority as a king but in earthly causes, and if the king's people be obedient and true subjects, obeying all human laws made by the king, our lord the king can require no more, **for men's religion to God is betwixt God and themselves**; the king shall not answer for it, neither may the king judge between God and manⁱⁱⁱ.*

The logical next step in this line of thinking was to separate the church from the state, but this presented too bold a challenge to the King. Thomas Helwys was thrown into prison where he died. King James still felt threatened by this new religious movement and he encouraged people who wanted to be free of the Church of England to go to the New World. Since the alternative was to conform to the state religion, many Puritans, Separatists and Baptists set sail for North America in 1620.

Jerry Zeman, in his book entitled Baptist Roots and Identity^{iv} writes,

The Baptist movement ¼can be pictured as a river. Like all large rivers, it drew its initial strength from several springs and streams, and was later enlarged by numerous tributaries in its flow through the centuries. Continental Anabaptism; English Puritan Separatism; the Great Awakening in the

American colonies; the democratic ideals of the young American Republic, the later evangelical revivals; the modern missionary thrust; the spirit of pioneer societies; the sectarian dissent in the Soviet Union; these and other spiritual and cultural influences have contributed to the formation of the Baptist tradition as we know it in its manifold expressions around the world today.

Baptists eventually came to Canada from the United States, Europe, England, wherever there were Baptists interested in this new land and they, of course, brought their own variations on the denomination as it had developed in their congregations. These variations often led to controversy and division. Jerry Zeman describes it this way:

The early churches in Southern Ontario were the fruit of missionary labour by American ministers of the Regular Baptist persuasion, with a strong emphasis on closed communion. In the Ottawa-Montreal region, the Scottish Baptist immigrants imported a heritage of revivals ¼ while newcomers from England brought with them English Baptist traditions. At Grande Ligne, French Baptist work was established by Madame Henrietta Feller, an immigrant from Switzerland. Most Baptists of British origin as well as the French-speaking Baptists practiced open communion. The protracted communion controversy was thus an unfortunate combination of theological and ethnic differences, and was further aggravated by the rivalry between the Ottawa-Montreal region in the East, and the area dominated by Toronto in the West. The issue disrupted closer denominational cooperation for most of the nineteenth century. In the 1920's, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, led by T.T. Shields (1873-1955), resulted in a major division. About one-seventh of the churches left the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec ¼. most of them now belong to the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, organized in 1953. v

Despite the differences among individuals and whole congregations on particular points of faith and practice, churches that remain in the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec all center around a core of assertions. These principles are expressed in the following nine distinctives. But first, Ronald F. Watts offers a few words of caution in the pamphlet that he prepared in 1982:vi

What we share with other Christian denominations is more important than our disagreements! Our distinctiveness does not lie in our holding to some doctrines which other Christians do not hold, but rather in our attitude towards these basic doctrines, and in the fact that we emphasize a particular combination of beliefs.

1.4.1 The Lordship of Christ.

During the first century AD the Roman Government tried to stop this new religion called Christianity from spreading. One of the reasons was that the Christians refused to say "Caesar is Lord." They would only say, "Jesus is Lord." They were going to live by Jesus' rules, not Caesar's. Many of the Christians in the days of Emperors Nero and Domitian lost their lives because of their stubborn stance. It was serious business declaring "Jesus is my Lord."

Believers developed a secret sign to identify themselves to one another. It was the sign of a fish. Drawing the sign of the fish was a safer way of making that declaration than speaking the words out loud in order to find out who else served the same Lord. This was how it worked: The Greek word for fish is *ἰχθύς* (lower case) or *ἰχθύς* (uppercase), pronounced *ick-thoos*. Each letter stands for a word as follows:

Greek Word	Pronunciation	English Translation
Ἰησοῦς	E-ay-soos	Jesus
Χριστός	Kris-toss	Christ
Θεοῦ	Theh – oo	Of God
υἱοῦ	Hwee-oss	Son
Σωτῆρος	So-tare	Saviour

Together they form the phrase: *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour* which clearly identifies the Lord they claim. You may have noticed the presence of the fish in the logo of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec.



The logo also contains the empty cross because Jesus died for us and rose again. Death was not strong enough to hold him. The cross and the fish are there because we believe they express important things about the people who belong to the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ). We believe Jesus is our Saviour because he died for our sins and our Lord who lives in our hearts and we want to make our stand so clear that we have expressed it right in our organizational symbol.

Jesus is Lord is something we claim as individual believers, as local churches and as groupings of local Baptist churches in Associations, Conventions or Unions and across our country in Canadian Baptist Ministries. We have placed Christ in charge of our individual lives, our faith community and our mission and ministry and we follow his example and teaching. He is the supreme authority over individual Christians and the church.

- These two passages help to form the basis for claiming Jesus as Lord. (See Colossians 1:15-20, Philippians 2:5-11)

1.4.2 The Authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice.

We claim the Bible as our authority in matters of faith and practice. Part of the respect we hold for Scripture is reflected in the different names we give to it.

- Sometimes we call it the Word Of God. We believe the Bible tells us the things God wants us to know. We talk about the Bible being "inspired" by God. It is not just a human-made book. Behind it and its writers is God who had a role in the events the Bible records, and then moved people to write down their experiences with God so that we and future generations might benefit from their understanding of God and deepen our own.
- Sometimes we call the Bible Scriptures. The word "scripture" comes from the Latin word "to write" but we use this word to remind us that these are not just any old writings; they hold a special place in our lives. However, we must not forget that the words of the Bible were written down by human hands so the human mark of each writer is upon them. We can see that in their use of the language of their time, their individual styles and vocabularies that reflect their own language skills their culture and the knowledge of their day.
- The Bible is also called the Book of Books both because it is considered to be more precious and important than any other book that exists and because it is made up of several small books. The Bible is a collection of Books or a Book full of Books. The Greek word for books is "biblia."

There are sixty-six books in our Bible, written by writers of many different nationalities over a period of about 1,000 years. They were written mainly in two different languages - Hebrew and Greek with a little Aramaic included. Many of the stories were written down hundreds of years after they had actually occurred, remembered orally from one generation to another. There are adventures stories about people as they learn to follow God's way; there are poems and psalms; there are words of wisdom and hope and there are some letters written to particular people in specific situations and there are more general letters written for many people to read. The Old Testament is the story of how God prepared His people for the coming of Christ, and the New

Testament tells us of the change that Christ's Coming has made. We believe it is vital for Christians to read the Bible because it is our primary source of information about our faith. It gives us all the knowledge we need to live as children of God.

We must approach the Bible with open and active minds, using the resources God gave us, but at the same time looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance as we seek to understand God's Word for our own lives, for the Church and for the world. It is Jesus Christ who is "The Word made flesh"; and He is our supreme authority within the Bible.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all believers are expected to read the Bible for ourselves with the intention of applying what we learn to our own lives, sharing those lessons with others and enabling our community of believers to follow the Word of God as we engage in mission and ministry. The Bible is central to our understanding of who we are; so important that we have included it as well in the logo of the BCOQ.

- These are some of the scripture passages that help us understand the role the Bible must have in our lives. (See Deuteronomy 5:22, Exodus 20:1-17, II Timothy 3:16)

1.4.3 The Priesthood of all believers.

We believe that each individual Christian has direct access to God through prayer. The Bible, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, describes Jesus as the great high priest so we don't need any other person to mediate between God and ourselves. However, that privilege comes with the responsibility of taking an active role in mission and ministry. The apostle Paul illustrated God's intention with a picture: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (I Corinthians 12:27) We do employ specially trained pastors in our churches whose job it is to help us understand scripture, guide our spiritual development, enable us to discover our gifts and employ them in service for God. But these "professionals" are not above anyone else in the church. Our clergy work side by side with other believers using their own special gifts in mission and ministry. **We are -- clergy and laity -- all ministers.** Every one of us represents Christ in the world. We are all expected to introduce others to Jesus and to live as servants who call him Lord. We are all members of the body of Christ. Each of us has been given gifts to use for the good of all. If any believer fails to do his/her part, something important will be missing from the work God calls us to do together.

The Bible also tells us that all believers are responsible for ensuring that it is God's lead we are following. Each individual Christian is to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God." (I John 4:1) We are not to follow blindly the lead of people in positions of authority over us; our primary authority is to be Jesus Christ, and the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit enables us to understand it.

- The Bible describes Jesus, our high priest, in these passages. (See Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 7:26-28, I Timothy 2:5-6a.)
- The Bible also says that all Christians are priests. (See I Peter 2:9-12, Ephesians 3:20-21.)
- When Scripture compares a community of believers with a body, it provides a list of gifts that are given to enable individual Christians to play their part. (See Romans 12:6-8, I Corinthians 12:28-31, Ephesians 4:11)

1.4.4 A believers' church - the church which consists of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, visibly expressing their faith in local church membership, upon profession of faith and baptism.

We understand that the church is made up of people who, by their own choice, believe in Jesus as their personal Saviour and are committed to serving him as Lord of their lives. We encourage new believers to make a public profession of their faith through baptism in front of other Christians and to take on the privileges and responsibilities of membership in their local congregation. In the Book of Acts, the Bible links belief and baptism very closely which is then followed by participation in worship, learning about the faith, interacting with other members of the community and doing the work of Christ.

- These stories are told in the following references. (See Acts 2:37-42, Acts 8:4-13, Acts 16:11-15, Acts 18:5-8.)

1.4.5 Two ordinances: believers baptism by immersion and the Lord's supper, which are symbols of spiritual realities.

Ordinances are symbolic rituals we are “ordered” to observe. Jesus told his followers to perform two ceremonies - baptizing disciples and celebrating the Lord's supper.

Believer's baptism.

The word “baptize” comes from a Greek word that simply means to immerse something under the water. In the English, the word “baptize” tends only to be used in a religious sense but it still contains a great deal of the literal meaning of that word - to immerse under the water. Water is one of the main ingredients in baptism. The idea of washing to make something clean runs all through the Bible and it plays a big part in the religious use of the word “baptism”. The Bible often uses the picture of washing our body with water as a symbol of purifying our thoughts and our behaviour. The scripture says that we can begin to make ourselves clean by changing our actions and attitudes but we can't take our sins away - only God can do that

At the beginning of the New Testament, we find John the Baptist using water and “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Notice that it is not the baptism, not the immersing in water, which leads to the forgiveness of sins; it is the “repentance”, the change of heart and way of living that leads to the forgiveness of sins. John baptized people who had already made up their minds to change their ways. It was a statement that they had decided to live for God. John would stand in the river and the people who came to be baptized would wade toward him until the water was up to their waist. John would put his hand on their head and ask God to bless them. Then they would crouch down until they were completely covered by the water - they had to be fully immersed to symbolize God making them completely clean. Then they would stand up again and walk back to the shore. This was not a private thing. There was a crowd on the riverbank. It was an opportunity for people to take a public stand. Jesus himself came and was baptized by John (see Mark 1:4-5, 7-11). And Jesus instructed his followers to observe believer's baptism in this passage. (See Matthew 28:18-20). That's what makes it an “ordinance”.

Our practice of baptism has been altered only a little to express even more things than John the Baptist had done.

- First, the candidate is laid down on their back under the water and then brought up again in a sort of a re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus; a way of expressing what Jesus had done to save them from sin.
- Second, this form of immersion illustrates the concept of dying to their old sinful self and being raised to a new and better life.
- Thirdly, baptism is done in the name of the Father, Son (sometimes in the name of Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. In this way, the candidate demonstrates that they have decided to live for God and to follow the example of Jesus, who they now claim as Lord of their life, counting on the Holy Spirit to help them do it. (See Romans 6:3-8, 10-11)

This is the form of baptism most of our churches have maintained. Baptism is performed with each believer once and only once. God understands that our Christian faith is a journey and we are bound to make mistakes and continually have to go to God to confess our sins and ask forgiveness; to put our old desires and ways of life to death. We don't have to be re-baptized each time we recommit ourselves to Christ. We do it once and we do it publicly to tell other people that we have decided to follow Jesus. Believers are baptized in a public service because we are becoming part of the community of believers. Other Christians who watch our baptism have a duty to help us develop our faith, and to walk with us on our Christian journey. We are now committed to the body of Christ and will begin to take on some responsibilities in the life of the church. Once we are baptized, it is important for us to show our determination to follow God's way and Jesus' example in the way we think and speak, in our attitude to life and the way we



treat other people, and in every other aspect of our day to day living. Again, the logo of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, includes waves that signify water, to represent our commitment to adult baptism.

- Scripture passages that are related to Baptism include the following. (See Psalm 24:3-5, Isaiah 1:11, 15-18, Ezekiel 36: 25-27, Psalm 51:1-17, Romans 6:3-8, and 10-11)

The Lord's supper or communion.

The second ordinance Jesus commanded his followers to observe was the Lord's supper. This ordinance has as historical background the celebration of the Passover, which Israelites and the Jewish people celebrate to this day. When God was preparing to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and lead them into the land that had been promised to them, He instructed Moses to tell the Israelites to take a lamb for each household, kill it and paint the blood of the lamb around the entrance of their home. Noting the blood, God would have the effects of final plague sent upon Egypt to "pass over" them. Then the people were to roast the lamb and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. This meal was to be celebrated each year (at Passover) from that day forward so they would never forget God's ability to save the people who put their trust in God and to fulfill the promises made to them. Later, in the time of Isaiah, (about 700 BC) God promised to send someone whom Isaiah compared to a lamb. This person would be offered as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could be made whole. John the Baptist, identified Jesus as that person when he pointed to him and said, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (See Exodus 12:1-13, Isaiah 53:4-12 John 1:29)

In the first century AD, when Jesus celebrated the Passover at what we call the Last Supper, he made a connection between the bread and his own body, and the wine and his own blood. He invited his followers to eat and drink them explaining that his own body and blood would soon be sacrificed for all people. He had already explained (John 6:53-57) that this was the only way they could ever have eternal life - full and abundant life now and forever. (See Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:14-20)

When we share communion, we celebrate four different events:

- the far past at the first Passover when God saved a group of people who were identified by the blood of a lamb;
- the nearer past at the Last Supper when God was about to save all people who believe their sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb;
- the present, where we celebrate Christ living within us and signify that by eating the bread and drinking the wine that are symbols of his body and blood;
- the future when we are promised a feast with Jesus in heaven;
- Jesus ordered his followers to observe this meal or communion or Eucharist in these passages. This is why it is an "ordinance". (See Luke 22:14-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26);
- The Scriptures describe how Jesus' blood was like the blood of the lamb in Moses' time, and gives evidence of God's love. (See Romans 3:21-26 and Romans 5:6-10);
- The Bible also tells us how we should approach communion; why we need to take it seriously. (See 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 1 Peter 1:18-21 1 John 1:6-9.)

1.4.6 Soul liberty and freedom of conscience.

Part of being made in the image of God is having the freedom to make choices about our faith and our behaviour. God is the only one who has the right to define what is proper when it comes to our faith, our worship and the daily conduct of our lives; no human being has the right to dictate these things to us.

We believe in individual freedom of conscience in matters of faith and conduct, with our conscience held in check by the teaching of the Scriptures as led by the Holy Spirit:

This means;

- freedom to worship or not and freedom in the form of worship,
- freedom to apply the Christian faith in daily living,
- freedom to interpret the Scriptures according to one's own understanding of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the guidance of the living Spirit of Christ is present within His Church, a guidance inspired, confirmed and held in check by appeal to the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament. The final court of appeal is neither to church pronouncements, nor to history or tradition as such, but to the conscience of the church inspired by the Holy Spirit as a result of our study of the Bible.

Baptists believe that all people must be free to hold any religion they think is right and must be free to practice it (as long as this does not interfere with the freedom of others,) and to teach their religion to others.

These freedoms put a great deal of responsibility on individual believers. We take this stand with the understanding that each person is accountable to God for our own actions and attitudes in life; therefore we need to make certain that our choices are informed ones. It also requires us to stand up for others when it comes to their right to choose their faith and behaviour under the same proviso. Sometimes that means going into a place where there is no choice and offering the Baptist understanding of Christianity as an alternative. Archibald Reekie, BCOQ's first missionary to Bolivia, went in 1898 at a time when "the constitution specifically stated that anyone who tried "to establish in Bolivia any other religion than that of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church shall suffer the penalty of death."^{vii} But in 1905, the Bolivian government passed a Bill granting religious liberty in the country. Renfree, in his history of Baptist work, writes;

"Our Canadian missionary martyr Norman Dabbs was later to write: 'It is highly probable that the granting of religious liberty would have been long if not permanently postponed had it not been for the presence of the resolute band of Baptist missionaries.'" (p.198f)

Canadian Baptist Missionaries continue to offer Christianity, as Baptists understand and practice it, to many people from many different cultures and in countries where we are not invited and are only tolerated as long as we carry out our work within specific guidelines. At the same time people from many different ethnic and religious backgrounds are flooding into Canada. Our position on soul liberty and freedom of conscience demands that we help to make it possible for people to hold and practice any religion they think is right (as long as this does not interfere with the freedom of others) and to teach their religion to others while we offer ours to them as an alternative we believe is worth considering.

- The following passages of scripture determine the basis for holding this core value. (See Genesis 1:26-31, Jeremiah 17:10, and 31: 31-34, John 8:31-36, Romans 14:10-13, Revelation 20:12-13)

1.4.7 Autonomous and interdependent local churches who together constitute the body of Christ as part of the church universal.

We believe that each local church has everything it needs to determine the will of God for us in our community setting. Together, church members ask God to guide us as we investigate the needs that surround us and to lead us into mission and ministry in our own neighbourhood. The members of each local church make decisions in a democratic manner.

We do realize that there are some needs in our communities and in our world that are too demanding for us to meet on our own and so we look for like-minded groups of believers to work with us, sharing our monetary and

human resources to accomplish particular missions and ministries together. Just as autonomous individual believers are interdependent as part of the body of Christ, so autonomous local churches can work interdependently as part of the body of Christ. Often we work with Baptist churches and churches from other denominations in our neighbourhoods.

We recognize that all Christians are part of the church universal; part of the Body of Christ. Just as with the human body, so distinct individuals can come together to do things in concert with one another that we cannot do by ourselves. We believe that individual congregations working together in larger groups do not lose their autonomy. However, we take our responsibilities seriously. When we agree to take part in mission and ministry together, we are agreeing to be accountable to one another and promising to do our part to the best of our ability.

Early in our history, some Baptist churches in Ontario and in Quebec decided to work interdependently with each other in small groups known as Associations. Each Association determines for itself the projects its member churches will embark upon together. These commonly include such things as inducting and ordaining ministers, providing programs and resources for groups of men, women and young people, supporting local, national and foreign ministries and many more concerns. There are presently seventeen Associations. Sixteen of them are organized along geographical lines and one, Amherstburg, was formed because of cultural similarities. (A listing of these Associations is found in the Leadership Tips section of this document.)

In 1888, the English-speaking Baptist churches in Ontario and Quebec formed another organization, the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, designed to enable us to do even bigger projects together by combining our resources. Each local church maintains its autonomy and participates in the Convention by appointing delegates to each annual meeting where decisions are made regarding particular missions and ministries we enter together and how we spend our pooled resources. With an annual operating fund presently greater than 3 million dollars, we are able to do remarkable things together.

1.4.8 The local church as a community of persons who covenant together how they will walk in obedience to Christ.

Each local Baptist church is free to determine how it will govern itself under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Many develop their own constitution. Some are incorporated as legal entities. Some churches do not have a formal document but all congregations develop a procedure of some sort for self-government so that member understands how their church makes decisions and determines the missions and ministries they will pursue together. Some congregations form a covenant.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties in which each has responsibilities to fulfill. God has been making covenants with people throughout history. (See Genesis 6:11-22, Genesis 9:1-17, Genesis 17:1-21, Matthew 26:20-30) Making covenants with one another in a Christian community is a way of taking our privileges and responsibilities as followers of Jesus seriously. When a person becomes a member of our church, that new member and the rest of the congregation promise to be accountable to one another for our Christian walk individually and as a community of believers. The promises we make to each other is our covenant. A similar covenant may be made when parents present their children and dedicate themselves to raise their sons and daughters in the knowledge of God and a lifestyle that reflects their desire to follow Jesus. The members of the congregation promise to support the family in their endeavours and help to demonstrate, by their words, actions and attitudes, what it means to be Christian.

The Manual for Worship and Service prepared by Canadian Baptist Ministries for our churches has a suggestion for the wording of a church covenant^{viii}

1.4.9 The independence of church and state.

Ever since the time of Thomas Helwys, Baptists have believed that the church and secular government should not try to exercise control over one another. Remember Jesus' confrontation with some scribes and chief priests where he drew their attention to the picture on a coin and told them to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God? He made it clear that the state and church have different jobs to do and we should pay proper attention to both. (See Luke 20:19-26)

Our belief in soul liberty and freedom of conscience means that we cannot dictate to our society how things should be run nor would we accept secular advice on how we practice our faith. At the same time, we are called to make a positive difference in our world; we can be an influence for righteousness in our governments at all levels and in our world. Sometimes loving our neighbour as ourselves involves making changes in the way our society takes care of people in need of physical, psychological and social care. Sometimes doing justice requires us to encourage our lawmakers to reconsider how we respond to criminals and victims of crime, how we settle civil disputes and ensure safe and fair labour practices. Finding a balance is important because we believe the church does not have the right to make society's decisions for them any more than we want our government to interfere in religious affairs. (See James 2:8, Micah 6:8)

2. COMMUNITY

2.1 We value our sense of community in Christ in our Convention, in Associations and other groups, in local churches and with other Christians as God's people, recognizing our accountability to each other.

Choosing to work together with like-minded believers, pooling our resources and creativity enables us to accomplish together things that a local church could not possibly do on our own. We have already considered how local Baptist churches work together in Associations and as a Convention but there are many other ways in which we work with other Christians in accountable relationships.

Eleven years ago, our Associations were clustered into Areas and an Area Minister was selected for each of these to support and encourage local churches and their personnel in the work we do together and separately. Each Area determines for itself how it will support and enable the ministries of its local churches. At present there are 5 Areas:

- SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO includes the Associations: Amherstburg, Guelph, Middlesex-Lambton, Owen Sound and Western;
- N.E.O.N. comprises Niagara-Hamilton, Elgin, Oxford-Brant and Norfolk Associations;
- NOR-ONTARIO covers Georgian Bay, Northern and Northwestern Associations;
- TORONTO Area includes: Toronto East, Toronto North-Central and Toronto West;
- LAKELANDS & EASTERN Area encompasses Canada Central, Ottawa, Quebec and Trent Valley Associations.

Within (or associated with) our Convention are a number of other organizations and resources:

- The **Baptist Leadership Education Centre** a residential training centre for youth;
- **McMaster Divinity College**, the pastoral educational arm of the BCOQ;
- The **Baptist Women's Missionary Society** and its magazine, the **Link and Visitor**, have been major partners in mission and ministry linked with the BCOQ for well over 100 years;
- **Canadian Baptist Ministries** brings together the Baptist Union of Western Canada, The Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, Union d'Églises Baptistes Françaises au Canada (i.e. Union of French Baptist Churches in Canada) and The Union of Baptist Churches in the Atlantic Provinces to work in areas that involve the local Baptist churches across our nation. CBM includes such organizations as **Canadian Baptist Volunteers** and **The Sharing Way** and cares for our national missionaries at home and overseas;
- The **Baptist World Alliance** has become the largest Protestant grouping of Christians in the world who consider issues in the global arena.

At every level of organization, our local church remains autonomous while at the same time, participating in responsible and accountable ways with other believers for the glory of God. Back at the local level, many congregations work with other churches of different denominations in their neighbourhood to meet the needs of the people who live directly around them.

2.2 We value a community shaped by:

2.2.1 Our Baptist distinctives.

Our Baptist distinctives were described in section 1.4 and we seek to apply them in our community relationships. We believe in the Lordship of Christ. We accept the authority of scripture in matters of faith and practice. We assume the priesthood of all believers. We value a believers' church and celebrate the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. We believe in soul liberty and freedom of conscience and we recognize the autonomous and interdependent nature of local churches who together constitute the body of Christ as part of the church universal. We consider the local church to be a community of believers who covenant together how they will walk in obedience to Christ and we uphold the independence of church and state. (See Galatians 3:26-29 about our approach to community).

2.2.2 Our shared experiences and relationships.

Human beings were meant to be in relationships. One of the reasons we become part of a faith community is to work with one another toward common purposes. Each member of a community is important. Living with broken or strained relationships interferes with our ability to accomplish meaningful things together. Developing and maintaining healthy relationships begins with an attitude of forgiveness. When we decide to follow Jesus, we are expected to live each day in a spirit of forgiveness. And when relationships do break, we need to mend our relationships.

God wants us to live with perfect assurance that we are completely forgiven and treat others the same way. God forgave us long before we ever asked for it. (See Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:1-3, 22-32) He has forgiven us for all the things for which we will never ask forgiveness. We need to forgive others in the same way. We cancel their debt to us because God has cancelled our debt to him. (See Genesis 2:18-25, Ecclesiastes 4:7-12, Matthew 18:21-35)

2.2.3 Our common mission.

Our common mission as local Baptist churches was expressed by Jesus himself in both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. (See Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 12:28-34) At the 1999 Assembly of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, we adopted the following mission statement for our Convention as a whole:

- The Convention exists - to assist our churches to carry out their individual mission for Christ, and
- to do that which we believe God calls us to do together.

2.3 Our faith community is characterized by a deep concern for:

2.3.1 The sanctity of life.

We believe that God gives life to each person and every living creature and that all life is precious. The Bible tells us that God knows each one of us intimately and has known us since we were being formed in our mother's womb. Life is a gift and we are called to protect and nurture it. Believing in the sanctity of life is actively enabling life to be as full and wonderful as God intends it to be. It means providing nutritious food, clean water, medical care and exercise for people's brains as well as their bodies. It involves educating people in physical, mental, sociological and spiritual health so that whole people and entire communities are cared for. It requires teaching people to read and write, cook and plant and harvest, clean and disinfect, build and work together so they can care for themselves. It involves providing safe and secure environments in which to work and learn.

- These are some passages of Scripture referring to the sanctity of life. (See Genesis 1:1-31, Exodus 20:13, Psalm 139:1-16, Matthew 6:25-33, Luke 12:6-7, Luke 15:1-10, Colossians 1:15-20, I Peter 1:18-19, Revelation 4:11)

2.3.2 Care for the vulnerable.

From the beginning of our relationship with God we have been told to care for the people who are the most vulnerable among us: those who are poor in status, poor in health, poor in things, poor in soul, poor in friends, poor in emotional support, poor in mental or physical abilities, poor in relationships, poor in education - poor.

The Bible lumps them all together in “the poor, widows, orphans and strangers.” These were people who had little or no status within Israelite society and God’s people were instructed to pay special attention to see that they were cared for. They are to be treated with respect because God made them too. They are part of our community and part of ourselves because we are “members one of another.” (See Ephesians 4:25)

- These are passages of scripture which reflect “caring for the vulnerable”. (See Deuteronomy 14:27-29, Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Isaiah 3:14-15, Isaiah 57:5-11, Psalm 113:11-9, Zechariah 7:9-10, Proverbs 22:2, Luke 4:18-21, Matthew 25:31-46, James 1:27)

2.3.3 Family integrity.

The family was the basic social unit in the Israelite community from its very beginning. Everyone belonged in some way to a family. That way no one was in danger of becoming vulnerable; everyone’s life was protected. The family was the place where people learned what God is like and how God wants us to behave in order to get the most out of life. The family provided food; shelter; nurturing for children, elderly people and anyone else with special needs. In those days the family lived together, worked together, played together and grew old together. At the same time, individuals were also called “children of the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 14:1) People who committed themselves to live as God instructed them were considered to be members of God’s family. As time went on and biological family members began to move away from one another, this built-in support system faltered and some people began to fall through the cracks. Vulnerable people came to be in real danger and many suffered even though they continued to be “children of the Lord.” By New Testament times God’s people had developed new relationships within the “family of faith.” (Galatians 6:10) In the Book of Acts we see the believers in the church caring for people in need.

The biological family continues to be important and the Bible teaches many things designed to keep the family strong so the community will be strong and no one will be left in a vulnerable position. But, unfortunately, we live in a broken world with broken people and broken relationships and while our desire is to maintain the integrity of the family, sometimes families fall apart, and they need the compassion and support of people who are not biologically related to them. Fortunately, we can still become part of a “family of faith” and we can be certain of our status in the family of God.

- Consider some of the responsibilities God gave to the biological family. (See Deuteronomy 4:5-14, Deuteronomy 11:18-21, Proverbs 22:6, Colossians 3:16-21, Hebrews 13:4, Ephesians 5:21-33, I Timothy 5:1-8)
- These verses tell us what it is to be a part of the family of faith. (See Galatians 6:10, I Peter 2:17)
- These verses define what it means to be part of the family of God. (See Deuteronomy 14:1a, Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 12:46-50, Matthew 25:40, John 1:1-5,12-13, Romans 8:28-29, Galatians 3:25-26)

2.3.4 Careful stewardship of God’s creation.

When God created the earth and everything in it, God said it was good. And when God created people and gave them the task of caring for all creation, God said that was very good too. God believes that we have the ability to be careful stewards of creation. Unfortunately, humankind is also capable of destruction, waste, neglect and downright ignorance and we have allowed our water, soil, air, and ecosystems to be badly damaged. People who choose to live for God become caretakers of the earth because that is part of what God wants, that was God’s original design, and we have got a lot of work to do. God gave the task first to Adam and Eve as tenders of the garden of Eden; the task is still our role as “caretakers of the earth.” (See Genesis 2:1-25)

2.4 Our community honours the diversity that exists amongst us.

The local churches that are a part of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Assyrian, Chinese, Czechoslovakian, Estonian, Filipino, French, Hungarian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Middle Eastern, Polish, Portuguese, Slavic, Spanish, Ukrainian and many others are all represented among us. We worship in 27 different languages and we earn our living in many different ways. There are rich and poor and middle-income people among us as well as various levels of literacy and education. We worship

God in numerous ways using a variety of resources and physical arrangements. But, we treasure every member of our community and honour the diversity that exists among us.

No one is better equipped to share with another person the difference Jesus makes in their life than someone who has a common experience of life. Who better than an actor can tell another actor about the abundant life God has in store? A steel worker is more likely to listen to the gospel from another steel worker because both people face similar challenges day by day. Students can introduce other students to Jesus. The Holy Spirit relies upon homemakers, lawyers, office staff, vendors, hockey players, fire fighters, shippers, receivers, postal workers, caretakers, homeless people, single adults, families, everyone, no matter who we are or what we do, to share with others the difference it makes to ask Jesus into our heart. We believe that God has a place in his family for everyone and that the Lord expects His servants from wherever they may come, to invite others to experience the abundant life God intends every person to enjoy. The variations that exist among the churches of our Convention add colour and interest and power to our ministry and mission in Jesus' name. We cherish our diversity! (See John 1:1-13, Romans 8:14-17, Romans 10:12-13, Ephesians 2:11-22)

3. MISSION

3.1 Our unifying purpose is to glorify God through reaching individuals for Christ through our witness to Christ's presence, love and saving power. We recognize the imperatives of the Great Commission to go and make disciples and the Great Commandment to serve others through social care, and to strive for justice and peace for all people.

We are the body of Christ. We are to serve as the hands and feet and eyes and ears and arms and voice of Jesus in the world today. God touches other individuals and groups of people through us. When Christ is present in our lives, we provide a physical expression of what God is like in the way we think and speak and behave. Jesus' emphasis on social care and peace and justice for all people went hand in hand with his determination to help people realize God's love for them. The idea of caring for a person's body and the spirit at the same time wasn't a new concept. The Word of God had always made this point. But Jesus demonstrated it more clearly. And now God expects us to keep that balance in mind when we invite other people to become children in God's family. Sharing our faith with others in words, actions and attitudes is a reflection of our interest both in our relationship with God and our responsibilities toward other people.

Justice is something in which believers are to take an active interest. Working for fairness, restoration, healing, atonement, compensation, etc. for victims and perpetrators of injustice is part of our job as children of God. Paying attention to the laws of the land and speaking out when we conceive ways of improving legislation for peace and justice in our community. These are good things. The Bible has always combined social care with soul care. (See Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Micah 6:8, Matthew 5:9)

The Biblical concept of "peace," which comes from the Hebrew word "shalom," expresses much more than the absence of war or trouble. Shalom has to do with the general well-being of every member of a community; a combination of everything good in the life of a person. It includes contentment, security, freedom, fairness, feeling accepted, loved and worthwhile. Jesus is the Prince of this kind of Peace and members of his kingdom are expected to work toward achieving it. Making peace doesn't have to be a great diplomatic endeavour. Max Lucado describes it^{ix} as "sowing seeds of peace... by planting a word of love heart-deep in a person's life".

3.2 We acknowledge that the local church undertakes mission at home and around the globe. It is the Convention, Associations, and mission organizations such as Baptist Women, and Canadian Baptist Ministries that provide assistance and support to local churches to make choices and establish direction for mission.

Organizations of Baptist Women have been major partners in mission and ministry with the Baptist churches in Ontario and Quebec since 1876. Then A.V. Timpany invited the women of St. Catherine St. Baptist Church in Montreal and Jarvis St. Baptist Church in Toronto to support mission work in India. The present organization - Baptist Women's Missionary Society of Ontario and Quebec, commonly known as Baptist Women, was formed in 1953 bringing together four missionary societies that had evolved in central Canada over the previous seventy-seven years. Its purpose has been "to unite the women of the church in a fellowship that will provide for spiritual enrichment and through worship, study, and involvement will encourage commitment to the mission of the church

in the home, the community, the nation and the world.”^x With more than 4,000 members in over 240 groups across our Convention, Baptist Women are presently working toward four goals:

- to revitalize our missionary links;
- to share our faith with others;
- to form cross-cultural partnerships; and
- to mentor other women as we all seek to deepen our faith together and embrace a Christian lifestyle.



Canadian Baptist Ministries exists to facilitate the mission and life of the 1,200 churches that make up The Baptist Union of Western Canada, The Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, L'Union d'Églises Baptistes Françaises au Canada and The United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces. Its purpose is “to unite, encourage and enable Canadian Baptist churches in their national and international endeavours to fulfill the commission of our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaiming the gospel and showing the love of God to all people.”^{xi}

Canadian Baptist Ministries is involved in:

- Evangelism and Church Planting in Canada and around the world;
- Relief and Development through **The Sharing Way**;
- Education and Support Ministries outside of Canada;
- **Canadian Baptist Volunteers** in mission situations across Canada and around the world;
- Resourcing churches in Canada through;
 - the **Public Affairs Committee** on issues of public concern,
 - **Canadian Baptist Youth** providing a national forum for cooperation in youth ministry,
 - the **Chaplaincy Committee** providing a national forum that brings together Baptist chaplains,
 - working in prisons, hospitals and other institutions.



Through **Partners in Mission**,” the local church can be connected with a particular CBM specialist in evangelism, church planting, leadership training, health or development. The church can then provide funds directly for their salaries and expenses and receive regular updates on their work and the kind of focused information that lets the congregation pray for them intelligently and specifically. Reaching the world takes a partnership between people who go and people who send.^{xii}

4. CHURCHES

4.1 We place importance on the local congregation as the body of believers established for worship, spiritual growth, fellowship and mission.

Ever since the Christian Church began, believers have realized the importance of gathering together for worship, spiritual growth, fellowship and mission. The Book of Acts is full of references to this. Being people who claim scripture as our authority in matters of faith and practice, Baptists try to model our churches upon the New Testament example. Worshiping God through adoration and service are central to our reason for being. Growing in our faith through education and prayer is essential for Christians who hold to the priesthood of all believers. Sharing our lives with other members or our church is the only way we can be an effective body of Christ, suffering when others are hurting and rejoicing when others are celebrating. And knowing what a difference Jesus makes in our lives, we can't help but want to share his love with others in our community, our country and our world and invite them into the family of God with us. We believe all four of these components: worship, spiritual growth, fellowship and mission, must be present in order for us to be the church God calls us to be; they fulfill both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. (See Psalm 95:6-7, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 4:8, Acts 5:12-29, 42, Ephesians 4:11-16, Philippians 3:17-4:1)

4.2 Churches minister to those within the body and lead in mission to those outside the body, promoting trust and love amongst both, and striving for spiritual wholeness and health, in a safe environment.

When Jesus talked about building his church, he said “gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18) Jesus was not concerned about evil breaking into the church, but rather making the point that the church is not supposed to close itself off from the rest of the world inside walls of protection. We are meant to be like Jesus, going into the places where sin is draining the life out of people and inviting them to become part of God’s family so that more and more people may enjoy the abundant life God has in mind for everyone. We are intended to make a positive difference to people within and outside our community of believers so that we may all become spiritually whole and healthy. We know the One who is able to bring light into people’s darkness and it is our job to let that light shine on others. We have something to share and we are expected to share it under the direction of the Holy Spirit. (See I John 4:4, Romans 3:23, Romans 5:16-19, Acts 8:26-39, Acts 10:1-48, Acts 16:6-33)

4.3 We recognize the autonomy of the local congregation to act according to its understanding of God’s will.

We have already considered the great value Baptist Christians place on the concepts of the priesthood of all believers; a believers’ church; soul liberty and freedom of conscience; the autonomy and interdependence of local churches; and the local church as a community of believers who covenant together how they will walk in obedience to Christ. All of these positions together lead us to recognize the autonomy of the local congregation to act according to its understanding of God’s will.

5. COOPERATION

5.1 We promote voluntary partnerships with others to do things which individual churches can accomplish more effectively together.

Our Convention has joined together with Christians of other denominations in two large organizations to work together on particular issues because our Christian voice is often stronger when spoken together. As Baptists, we have much to contribute to the wider church in Canada.

Our unique voice can be heard at the national level through two major Christian organizations:

- **The Canadian Council of Churches.** In the 1940s, denominations and communities of believers entered a period of growing cooperation. In 1943, our Convention designated its General Secretary “to attend the organizational meeting of a proposed nationwide chamber of religious bodies, to be called the Canadian Council of Churches” and thus we became one of the founding denominations. The Council’s initial report emphasized that one of its objects was “to give expression to that fundamental unity of the Christian communions, which is the outcome of their faith in Christ Jesus.^{xiii}”

Today, the Council is concerned with many national and global issues such as debt-relief for the Third world, the elimination of child poverty, the strengthening of family life in Canada, improving the status of women, and seeking ways to make a Christian presence felt in Canada.

- **The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.** More recently, at the 1999 Assembly, the BCOQ delegates voted to join the EFC. The EFC is a public advocate in Canada on behalf of evangelicals and provides an identity to express Biblical Christian views before the courts and governments; to assist in the advancement of Christian values and to assist churches and denominations in renewal and revitalization; and to develop and evangelical forum.

At the local level, many Baptist churches have entered into partnership with other organizations in their community, to sponsor projects such as crisis centers, food banks or breakfast programs. Others take part in joint national or international relief and development programs. We do value our sense of community in Christ with other Christians as God’s people and we take our part in such cooperative efforts seriously, recognizing our accountability to each other.

5.2 We value our associations with others in mission, spiritual growth and fellowship.

Recognizing that the churches of the BCOQ represent only a portion of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world, there is every reason to enter into mission, spiritual growth and fellowship activities with other believers in our community and beyond. The clergy of many local churches belong to ecumenical ministerials that are concerned with the spiritual health of their community. Christians in many villages, towns, and cities meet from time to time with Christians in other denominations for worship and fellowship that sometimes focuses upon a particular mission. Local projects such as “ALPHA Groups”, the “March for Jesus” and the “Jesus Video” are examples of recent community mission, spiritual growth and fellowship projects.

5.3 We strive to build trust through establishing relationships and undertaking joint equal endeavours; committed to carrying out our responsibilities and obligations.

Sometimes Baptists are guilty of flashing our “autonomy of the local church” card when it comes to our responsibilities in group endeavours. Although we do believe that no other human being or group of people can tell our church what to do when it comes to following the will of God, we often agree with another group of believers to work together on particular missions and ministries. When we make such agreements, we work to fulfill our responsibilities and obligations, thus building mutual trust. (See Matthew 5:33-37, James 5:12)

6. LEADERSHIP

Baptist Christians recognize the priesthood of all believers and accept the authority of the scripture that reminds us that our pastors, teachers and leaders are all members of the body called to use their gifts and abilities for the good of the whole. They have no higher status than any other part of the body. Christ is the head and the Holy Spirit is available to all believers who are seeking guidance and direction. Our leaders seek a balance that recognizes Christ as our Leader, acknowledges their own gifts and abilities to lead and still shows great respect for the followers.

- Jesus spoke about leadership on more than one occasion. (See Mark 10:42-45, John 12: 25-26, John 13:3-15). The model of servant-leadership is described in these passages. (See Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16, Ephesians 5:21, Hebrews 13:17)

6.1 We recognize, as a priority focus, the development, training and support of pastoral leaders.

In 1881, building upon an earlier history of commitment to theological education, Baptists established the Toronto Baptist College. The idea was that students training for ministry could add studies at the University of Toronto to their education allowing them to earn a full BA degree. In 1887, a charter was granted to establish a Baptist University in Toronto, independent of the University of Toronto and named after Senator McMaster, who had been providing support and direction for the education of Baptists since the early 1860s. In 1930, McMaster University was relocated to Hamilton where it grew and continues to thrive today. In the beginning, the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec had the exclusive right to name the board of governors of McMaster University. That changed in 1957 when our denomination relinquished control of the University. Although McMaster University grows with many other faculties, yet the BCOQ continues to elect representatives to the Board of Trustees of the theological faculty, called the McMaster Divinity College which remains directly affiliated with the Convention.



The Christian roots of McMaster University are indicated by its motto “In Christ all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:17) which still appears on the University Coat of Arms in New Testament Greek, (not in Latin as is the case for most schools) It is also on the Divinity College Crest. McMaster University proudly proclaims its Baptist Christian heritage on its web site (www.mcmaster.ca).

Throughout the whole period of Baptist history in this part of Canada the need for an educated ministry has been recognized and supported by our churches. It has been the aim of the Divinity College to keep the needs of the churches and their members in mind and to develop those skills that meet the needs of the constituency

Regardless of where our leaders receive their training, the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec has a standard that we ask our clergy to meet in order to be recognized as accredited ministers within our denomination. We value education in our leaders and we want our clergy to have earned a Bachelor degree and a Master of Divinity degree (or equivalent) so that they may be equipped to offer an excellent quality of ministry to whatever congregations they

may serve. A person may still be called to a particular church without these credentials - local churches have that prerogative - but BCOQ will not recommend them for ministry until they meet the minimum standard and have been approved by a Credentials Committee. We value the training of our clergy!

Continuing education for pastoral leaders is also encouraged in our denomination. There is far more to learn about people and ministry and group dynamics and leadership and Bible Study and preaching and Christian Education and Youth Ministry than can be gained in only six years of university training. And the more experience a pastor gains, the more he/she discovers what more they need to learn.

6.2 We place equal importance on the training of the laity for effective Christian service and witness.

The word “laity” comes from the Greek word “laos” that simply means “people” -- the folk who are a part of all congregation. Since Baptists believe in the priesthood of all believers and don’t give particularly special status to our ministers, it is also vital for the members of local churches to be educated.

If congregations are to determine the will of God for us in our own communities, we require tools to be able to assess our situation, discover the needs we feel called to address, form strategies by which to meet them, and develop the gifts God has given each of us to use to accomplish the goals of the whole body. Those tools come through learning; about theology, bible study, sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, science, cultural studies, literature, etc. All higher learning is valuable and can enhance our mission and ministry.

For many years, the BCOQ has maintained a one-year residential program for youth at the **Baptist Leadership Education Center** in Whitby, Ontario. The Centre’s program is focused on preparing lay people for effective Christian service and witness, since education enhances mission and ministry no matter what place we occupy in the body of Christ! A believers’ church needs all members to be at their best.

6.3 We place emphasis on identifying, developing, training and supporting individuals (often working in teams) to provide effective pastoral and lay leadership to churches, Associations and the Convention.

It takes a very large team of ordained and lay leaders to support and enable the many and varied missions and ministries of a local church, Associations and Convention. Our belief in the priesthood of all believers supports people working together in the body of Christ, using their particular gifts for the good of the whole. There are opportunities for lay people to serve on Association and Convention executives and committees as well as within each local church. We also discover people who are called and suited for ministry as ordained clergy or commissioned workers. “The Blue Book^{xiv}” published in 1998 by BCOQ to provide guidelines for the accreditation of ordained ministers and commissioned workers, has the following preamble:

“We believe that God, by His Holy Spirit, sets apart specific members of His Church to the special office and function of equipping members, God’s people, for works of service and to special and unique ministries on behalf of the Church. We believe that individuals engaged in these special offices and ministries are to be given recognition and respect.”

Baptists believe that some members of the church should be ordained, and have identified three necessary elements:

- a **call of God** to Christian service;
- **affirmation of a local congregation** of one’s gifts for ministry; and
- **recognition of ministry** in the larger church (i.e. by the Association, the Convention and national Unions.)

Baptists have understood a “call” to involve a conviction and assurance of an individual that God has invited, perhaps urged, one to serve in a special way among the people of God. A call presupposes acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and willingness to become His disciple. Affirmation of gifts for ministry in one’s local congregation is a significant stage in the process of validating the call to ministry. Candidates for ministry have usually had adequate opportunity to give evidence of their gifts and to interact with congregational leaders who can attest to the nature of the candidate’s gifts and commitment to ministry.

Baptists have followed a New Testament pattern of ministerial recognition. First and foremost we believe that Ordination is the rite by which a local church recognizes and commissions a Christian believer whom God has

called, equipped and trained for the work of Christian ministry. Thus we believe that a candidate for Ordination must have experienced a personal sense of calling, which has resulted in a process of discipleship during which the candidate has been trained and equipped to fulfill his/ her calling. Secondly, we believe that the authority to ordain resides with the local Church. The recognition and commissioning of an ordinand to a particular form of Christian ministry occurs on the initiative of the local church. Thus it is the local church that ordains. This has always remained foundational to our Baptist understanding of congregational autonomy. Finally, it has been the tradition among English Baptists since the late 17th century, and Canadian Baptists since the early 19th century, to give to sister churches within the ordaining church's Association and Convention an active role in discerning the advisability of ordaining a given candidate. We believe that it is in association with sister churches that a local congregation seeks the Holy Spirit's discernment prior to proceeding with ordination. It is through this cooperative process that sister churches declare their willingness to recognize and affirm a candidate's ordination as meeting the requirements expected of an Ordained Minister by member churches. Upon acceptance by the Association Council, a public service is held in which the laying on of hands takes place, and a certificate of ordination in the name of the Convention is granted. (See Acts 13:1-4, Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-13, I Thessalonians 5:11-13, I Timothy 5:17-18)

Accreditation is another important part of the process. The churches of the BCOQ have agreed upon a list of minimum qualifications we believe ought to be expected of an Ordained Minister. Accreditation affirms that a person has indeed met these standards and assures that their ordination will be recognized within the BCOQ.

Our congregations rely on lay people to provide leadership in all areas of our mission and ministry: in our local churches and the ministries we share in our communities; in our Associations and the projects we embark upon with other Baptist churches; in our Convention and the missions and ministries we choose to carry out together; as well as the undertakings in which we participate across Canada and around the world. Our strength is in our laity as much as it is in our ordained leaders.

- The Bible lists a number of gifts that are necessary for the smooth operation of a community of believers. (See Romans 12:6-8, I Corinthians 12:28-31, Ephesians 4:11)

7. LEARNING

7.1 We place special importance on each individual learning to be a disciple, a lifelong process which involves studying scripture, reflecting on and practicing faith, engaging in personal and corporate mission, and discerning and using spiritual gifts.

Learning is a fundamental part of being a Christian. Jesus' followers were called "disciples" or "learners" because they were learning the "discipline" of living with God as their King. Christianity is not just a set of beliefs, it is a way of life and we will never be through our educational journey until we die. Our respect for the priesthood of all believers means that we count on every Christian in our community to be a disciple of Jesus. That means that each one of us must spend time, regularly and often, studying the word of God. We believe that all members of our church are responsible for discerning and develop their gifts; without all of our gifts, we are bound to have weak spots in the mission and ministry we do together. We can help each other because together we are the body of Christ. (See Matthew 7:24-27, Luke 6:46-49, I Corinthians 12:26-27, I Thessalonians 5:11, James 1:22-25)

7.2 We place emphasis on the local congregation as a place for both personal and corporate learning.

The early church placed a great deal of emphasis on believers learning about their faith from teachers who were well trained. Some of the letters in the New Testament were written to help churches correct misunderstandings that had crept into their midst. We rely on our local churches to provide this kind of Christian Education. And it is not just for children; it is a lifelong process. Teaching, a vital part of the work of the early church, must have a prominent place in our churches as well.

These verses talk about the importance of learning and reinforcing our faith through scripture and teaching. (See Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Psalm 119: 10-18, 33-42, 89-93, 103-106. I John 1:1-2:7)

-
- ⁱ Renfree, Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story In Canada. (Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1988)
- ⁱⁱ The Holy Bible: Authorized (King James) Version. Nashville, Memorial Bibles International Inc., 1974
- ⁱⁱⁱ A.C. Underwood, A History of the English Baptists. (London: 1947) p.47)
- ^{iv} Zeman, Baptist Roots and Identity Toronto: Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, 1978), p 1-2
- ^v Zeman, Baptist Roots and Identity (Toronto: Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, 1978 p.33)
- ^{vi} R.F. Watts, Baptist Distinctives, Toronto, Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, 1982
- ^{vii} Zeman, Baptist Roots and Identity Toronto: Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, 1978),
(A Manual for Worship and Service p. 107f)
- ^{viii} Max Lucado, The Applause of Heaven
- ^x Link and Visitor , April 1999 pv. vi
- ^{xi} Mission Now, 1998/1999 p.2
- ^{xii} Mission Now, 1998/1999 p.3
- ^{xiii} Renfree, Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story In Canada. (Mississauga: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1988)
- ^{xiv} The Blue Book, Baptist Convention of Ontario & Quebec, 1988