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# WHY BAPTIST?

A Tool for CBOQ Churches  
Exploring their Unique Baptist Identity  
in 21st Century Central Canada



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# CANADIAN BAPTISTS OF ONTARIO AND QUEBEC

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The CBOQ is a family of churches, transformed by Christ, revealing God's kingdom. We work together with the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, Union d'Eglises Baptistes Francophones du Canada, Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec and Canadian Baptists of Western Canada. Our mission agency that also links us together nationally is Canadian Baptist Ministries. Each regional group works to extend Christian ministry and mission in its own territory, and we cooperate in national and international enterprises through Canadian Baptist Ministries. There are also several other smaller Baptist groups in Canada. We affiliate with churches worldwide through the Baptist World Alliance, joining with over 35,000,000 Baptist Christians.

The CBOQ family is diverse. Among our 350 churches, our congregations worship in 27 different languages each week. We are both rural and urban, traditional and contemporary in style, conservative and open theologically. We seek to transform our world in the name of Jesus Christ as we ourselves are reconciled to God through Christ. Our mission is to support and enable our member churches to become healthy, mission-minded congregations as we serve God together. We operate in four broad areas: resourcing churches, developing leaders, fostering partnerships and strengthening relationships and identity.

God's truths are foundational and unchanging. But the ways in which we express our calling is constantly shifting to be effective in the context in which we find ourselves at any particular time.

When our churches meet in Associations or at our annual Assembly, we are a group of congregations in a covenant gathering in which we make visible the Body of Christ. Our aim, whether as individual congregations or as a group of churches, is to find the Mind of Christ, not to enable the agendas of different power blocks. Though we operate through the democratic process of taking votes, the heart of the matter is not winning a decision, but in finding the Mind of Christ who is present among us. Local congregations gather with one another in fellowship and worship to discover the purpose of Christ for many matters of life and mission.

Our churches, associations and conventions gather, believing that God is at work in the lives of individuals, in history and in creation. Our opportunity is to work effectively to join with God's redemptive purpose as we cooperate together. Let us covenant together to pray that we will discover the Mind of Christ. Let us pray for wisdom and strength in fulfilling God's purposes for us.

# AN INVITATION

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**Have you ever wondered “why Baptist”?**

**Aren’t we all just Christians?**

**Don’t labels just tear down and confuse people?  
(often yes AND they are vital when looking in a medicine cabinet)**

**Why do Baptists have all these committees?**

Maybe you have wondered “why Baptist.” Could it be that our unique Baptist identity could actually help us navigate the complexities and uncertainties of life in 21<sup>st</sup> century, post-Christian central Canada?

These days Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec churches are dealing with complex situations. One of the ways that we can navigate the challenges before us is by knowing where we came from and re-envisioning what God might have for us.

We have a wonderfully rich Baptist heritage with a distinctiveness that has helped shape our common life in Christ and has propelled our mission and service to others. For many of our churches, the future will require us to solidify our convictions, prioritize our energies, and above all else, prayerfully and collectively discern how we can actively join in God’s ongoing mission.

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*The degree to which we are able to know our Baptists Identity will be the degree to which we are able to navigate the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with conviction and purpose.*

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The following materials can be used and adapted for multiple settings...

1. A board or committee  
*To evaluate and discern the health and mission of the church.*
2. A membership and/or baptism class  
*To facilitate dialogue around Baptist heritage and identity.*
3. An Association or Ministerial **group**  
*To talk about the challenges of navigating Baptist life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

I hope that you are able to utilize these resources. Please keep the discussion going by providing feedback.

In Christ,

**Dallas Friesen**

Director of Congregational Development,  
Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec

# BAPTIST “DISTINCTIVES”

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Baptists share many basic Biblical convictions with other Christians, including the belief in one God, the Trinity, the human and divine nature of Jesus Christ and the significance of his crucifixion and resurrection for salvation. Though they have many historic confessions of faith, Baptists are not a creedal people. They prefer simply to affirm the authority of the Scriptures for all matters of faith and practice, and allow each Christian the right to interpret the Bible for himself or herself. However, the distinctive combination of beliefs held among Baptists can readily be identified and have come to be known as Baptist “distinctives.” In true Baptist fashion, these “distinctives” are expressed with different nuances by various Baptist groups, and this graphic describes how the CBOQ would express these distinctives.



# 1. JESUS IS LORD

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Baptists believe that Jesus Christ, being eternally God, only begotten Son and the visible expression of the invisible God, effectively procured salvation for all creation through his death, burial and resurrection. He is the one assigned by God the Father to rule with authority over all of creation. Every area of the believer's life and the life of the church is to be subject to the Lord.

1. Place an X on the spectrum below to show how accurately this description applies to us.

Describes Us



Not Us

2. List three ways that we are living out “Jesus is Lord” and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.

| How are we doing this? | How could we do this better? |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1.                     | 1.                           |
| 2.                     | 2.                           |
| 3.                     | 3.                           |

3. What are some subtle things we might be doing that hinder us from living out “Jesus is Lord?”

4. What does it mean for us as a congregation to declare “Jesus is Lord?”

## 2. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE AUTHORITATIVE RULE OF FAITH & PRACTICE

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Baptists believe that God communicates his will through the inspired Word of God. For Baptists, the Bible is the final authority in matters of faith and practice. It is to be interpreted responsibly under the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit within the community of faith.

1. Place an X on the spectrum below to show how accurately this description applies to us.



2. List three ways that we are living out “The Sufficiency of Scripture” and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.

| How are we doing this? | How could we do this better? |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1.                     | 1.                           |
| 2.                     | 2.                           |
| 3.                     | 3.                           |

3. What are some temptations that we could fall into that would minimize the role of Scripture in our congregation?

4. Do we have open and orderly processes for faithfully and communally studying Scripture?

# 3. THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

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The Bible affirms the value of each person as having been created in the image of God, and also declares each person morally responsible for his/her own nature and behaviour. Baptists believe that inherent in the worth of each person is also the right and competency of each individual personally to deal directly with God through Jesus Christ. This principle also suggests our responsibility to serve other believers in intercession and nurture: we are priests to each other. Baptists believe that no group or individual has any right to compel others—forcefully or politically—to believe or worship as they do. Rather, Baptists have historically been champions of **religious liberty**.

1. Place an X on the spectrum below to show how accurately this description applies to us.



2. List three ways that we are living out “The Priesthood of All Believers” and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.

| How are we doing this? | How could we do this better? |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1.                     | 1.                           |
| 2.                     | 2.                           |
| 3.                     | 3.                           |

3. How are we doing at training, empowering and encouraging our people to use their gifts for the sake of the Kingdom of God?

4. One of the downsides of the professionalization of ministry (i.e. – Pastors, ministry directors, etc.) is that it can mean that people don’t use their gifts and talents for the sake of others. What could we do to champion the idea of “The Priesthood of All Believers”?

# 4. A BELIEVERS' CHURCH

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Baptists believe that Jesus Christ chooses to form his church by bringing together believers for the purpose of worship, witness, fellowship and ministry (both spiritual and social). Baptists recognize the church universal as all who truly profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. They also profess their understanding of the church as being visibly expressed in local congregations. Each local church must thus be made up of believers who, upon their profession of faith and their baptism (almost always by immersion), are incorporated into the local church through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Baptists believe that **Believers' Baptism** and the **Lord's Supper** are the **two ordinances** required by the New Testament and are to be administered by the local church.

1. Place an X on the spectrum below to show how accurately this description applies to us.



2. List three ways that we are living out “A Believers’ Church” and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.

| How are we doing this? | How could we do this better? |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1.                     | 1.                           |
| 2.                     | 2.                           |
| 3.                     | 3.                           |

3. How are we doing at developing deep community?
4. How are we doing at facilitating authentic worship gatherings?
5. How are we doing at forming people in Christian maturity?
6. How are we doing at empowering people for mission?

# 5. MISSION & EVANGELISM

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Government in a local church is controlled by the principles of the priesthood of all believers, the lordship of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Christ, present in the lives of congregational members, leads them corporately to discover and obey his mind and will. Such “congregational government” calls for and expresses the equality and responsibility of believers under the Lordship of Christ. Baptist churches also recognize the need to temper the exercise of their autonomy in order to “associate” with a larger body of churches. We covenant together in cooperative ministry and mission ventures and organize ourselves to work together to accomplish ministry that no single congregation could do alone. Our Baptist churches are linked regionally, nationally and internationally for support and fellowship.

**1. Place an X on the spectrum between how well you believe the above description describes us.**



**2. List three ways that we are living out “Mission & Evangelism” and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.**

| How are we doing this? | How could we do this better? |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1.                     | 1.                           |
| 2.                     | 2.                           |
| 3.                     | 3.                           |

**3. Do we make mission and evangelism a program or is it central to the life of our church? Why?**

**4. Do we believe that God is working outside of our church and in our neighbourhood and community?**

**If YES, what do we need to do to join in what God is doing?**

**If NO, how can we be more attentive to what God is doing and join in God’s mission?**

# 6. CHURCH AUTONOMY AND ASSOCIATION

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Government in a local church is controlled by the principles of the priesthood of all believers, the Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures and the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Christ, present in the lives of congregational members, leads them corporately to discover and obey his mind and will. Such ‘**congregational government**’ calls for and expresses the equality and responsibility of believers under the Lordship of Christ. Baptist churches also recognize the need to temper the exercise of their autonomy in order to ‘**associate**’ by linking regionally, nationally and internationally for ministry, mission, support and fellowship.

Place an X on the spectrum below to show how accurately this description applies to us.



1. List three ways that we are living out “Church Autonomy & Association” and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.

| How are we both <i>rooted</i> in our autonomy and <i>linked</i> with others? | How could we do this better? |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1.   | 1.                           |
| 2.   | 2.                           |
| 3.   | 3.                           |

2. How are we doing at developing structures, leadership, and processes that are strengthening the ministry and mission of our church?

3. How could we deepen our connections with other churches? Can we engage with other churches in mutual learning and mission?

# 7. FREEDOM AND EQUALITY

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Emerging from our convictions about the priesthood of all believers, we affirm that in Jesus Christ all people are equal. Each one is free to be in relationship with God and to express a faith that is not coerced. Faith cannot be predetermined by someone else, but is the right of and responsibility of each individual as they seek a relationship with God based on their own personal commitments. A further extension of the principle of the Lordship of Christ and the priesthood of believers is to be found in the Baptist conviction that there must exist a **separation between the church and civil governments**.

Place an X on the spectrum below to show how accurately this description applies to us.



1. List three ways that we are living out “Freedom & Equality” and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.

| How are we doing this? | How could we do this better? |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1.                     | 1.                           |
| 2.                     | 2.                           |
| 3.                     | 3.                           |

2. At the heart of Christianity is a tension between Christ’s welcoming invitation of grace and welcoming invitation to go deeper in faith and regeneration. How are we doing at fostering an environment where people are both welcomed to come as they are AND to be transformed into something new?
3. How are we encouraging the faithful to embody the call to communal discipleship rather than submitting to an intellectual, political, or social agenda?

# RESOURCES

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Available on [www.baptist.ca](http://www.baptist.ca)

- This We Believe: Resources for Faith with Baptist Distinctives (revised 2010)
  - A Baptist Study Guide
- Baptist History & Identity (2016)
  - Teaching course materials for local churches teaching Baptist Distinctives
- Why Baptist (2016)
  - A discussion guide about Baptist uniqueness
- Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America (1997)
  - reposted on [www.baptist.ca](http://www.baptist.ca)

## NEXT STEPS

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3. Sign-up for our e-newsletter



4. Call us at 416.622.8600



5. Contact us to discuss your church's needs



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