



## BAPTIST IDENTITY

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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? Could it be that our unique Baptist identity might actually help us navigate the complexities and uncertainties of life in 21st Century, post-Christian central Canada?

### STEP ONE

Have each person read out loud one of the Baptist Distinctives

#### Jesus is Lord

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.

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*Worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. 1 Peter 3:15*

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#### The Word of God is the Authoritative Rule of Faith & Practice

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.

#### The Priesthood of All Believers

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**.

## A Believers' Church

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.

## Mission & Evangelism

We have a story to tell that is mandated by our Lord in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. Our calling is to share God's message of love and salvation with each person. Each Christian has a duty to share their faith with others. Baptists continue to be very active in mission efforts, both in local and global contexts. We recognize that mission is not just evangelism, but also includes promoting justice, social welfare, healing, education and peace in the world. It is a holistic approach that expresses care for both the needs of the human soul and the social needs that affect all of life.

## Church Autonomy & Association

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.

## Freedom & Equality

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**.

## STEP TWO

Discuss the following questions:

1. Which of the Baptist Distinctives is our church best at living out?
2. Which of the Baptist Distinctives is a challenge for our church to live out well?
3. In many ways, the Baptist Distinctives are very similar to other Christian groups. What is the value of acknowledging and teaching these distinctives in the 21st Century?

### Group Reflection:

What is one specific item you can pray for your church related to this area?

### Personal Reflection:

While all of the distinctives are important, is there one that stands out as more important to you? Why?