

WHY BAPTIST?

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



Canadian Baptists
of Ontario and Quebec

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CANADIAN BAPTISTS OF ONTARIO AND QUEBEC



CBOQ is a family of churches, transformed by Christ, revealing God's kingdom. We work together with the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, Union d'Eglises Baptistes Francophones du Canada 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.

FAMILY OF CHURCHES

DIVERSE

The CBOQ family is diverse. Among our 308 churches, our congregations worship in 26 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.

*We are a family of churches,
transformed by Christ, revealing God's kingdom.
Together, we are equipping churches and their leaders
to engage in their mission from God in their community.*



GROUNDING IN GOD'S WORD

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.

PARTNERSHIP

When our churches meet in Associations or at our annual Assembly, we are a family of churches 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.

PART OF A LARGER STORY

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

Have you ever wondered “Why Baptist”?

Do denominations even matter anymore today?

What is the benefit of being “Baptist” and what are the drawbacks?

Are all “Baptists” the same?

Maybe you have wondered “why Baptist”?

I hold the belief that our distinct Canadian Baptist identity offers a remarkable opportunity for us to walk hand in hand, both in our churches and in our local communities. Together, we can guide one another and those around us towards the life transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Our history is a tool to be celebrated and honoured and the future is one of possibilities and imagination. Our traditions are a rich heritage to learn and draw from and they provide a foundation of faith for us to continue to live out the great commandment and the great commission. The future can be exciting and daunting, but God has always invited us to engage in the processes of prayer and discernment and to actively participate in His Kingdom’s work.

We hope you will use this resource to look back to what makes Baptists unique, to look forward with hopeful anticipation to what God is doing, to look around and see God at work in your local context and to look up and praise God for who He is, what He has done and what He continues to do.

Feel free to adapt this resource to your local context or need.

For example, you can use this for:

- A board or committee *to assess and discern the overall health and mission of your church.*
- A membership and/or baptism class *to foster meaningful dialogues concerning Baptist identity and polity.*
- An Association or Ministerial group *to address the unique challenges associated with being Baptists today.*

Our distinct Canadian Baptist identity offers a remarkable opportunity for us to walk hand in hand, both in our churches and in our local communities.

We hope that you find this resource helpful and adaptable to your specific needs and we are open to your feedback and continued dialogue.

In Him,
Ken Foo
Director of Church Life and Leadership,
Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec



BAPTIST “DISTINCTIVES”

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 we have many historic confessions of faith, Baptists are not a creedal people. We 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 CBOQ would express these distinctives.



1. 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.

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 “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

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.

Describes us ←————→ Not 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

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.

Describes us  Not 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 equip people to be “The Priesthood of All Believers”?

4. 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.

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 developing deep community?

4. How are we facilitating authentic worship gatherings?

5. How are we forming people in Christian maturity?

6. How are we equipping people for mission?

5. MISSION & EVANGELISM

We have a story to tell that is mandated by our Lord in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. 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.

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 “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 & 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.

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 "Church Autonomy & Association" and three ways we could sharpen our focus in this area.

How are we both rooted in our autonomy and linked with others?	How could we do this better?
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

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

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

7. 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.

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 “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.

3. At the heart of Christianity is a tension between Christ’s welcoming invitation of grace and transforming 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?

4. How are we encouraging the faithful to embody the call to communal discipleship rather than submitting to an intellectual, political, or social agenda?

RESOURCES

THIS WE BELIEVE: RESOURCES FOR FAITH WITH BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

A Baptist Study Guide
(revised 2010)

BAPTIST HISTORY & IDENTITY

Teaching course materials for local churches teaching Baptist Distinctives (2016)

Available on baptist.ca

QUESTIONS?

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