

## **FAQ's:**

### **What is the nature and role of the Assembly?**

Just as local Baptist churches meet as a congregation to prayerfully discern the will of God for the local church, the Assembly does likewise. We practice a unique ecclesiology. We believe that the people of God, the Word of God and the Spirit of God work together in our midst through prayerful discernment, to reveal the will of God. When the Assembly gathers, we do so in an atmosphere of prayer and praise, yielded to the Word and the Holy Spirit, to discern the will of God for those ministries and missions we hold together. The Assembly and its representatives have the final word on things like approval of ordination, credentialing for ministry, budgeting for ministries, and affirming our common understanding of things like marriage, membership, and the protocol of ministers and churches. As such, Assembly decisions are the 'final word' for our family of faith as to what we collectively believe the will of God is for us.

### **What is the nature and purpose of delegates to the Assembly?**

Delegates are there as representatives of their local church to join the journey of discernment with the larger family of faith. As representatives, their role is dependent on what the local church desires. They may come with a very specific directive and vote to communicate on a specific topic from their church, or they may be sent to simply join in the journey of discernment with the rest of the delegates. To agree to be a delegate at the Assembly is to commit to pray, attend, be informed, engage, discern, and even report back to their local church what was discussed and discerned.

### **Why was the Identity Statement created?**

What is the tie that binds us together as the CBWC? Is it simply our relational history in how churches were planted? Certainly, we are Baptist, but what kind of Baptist and which values specifically mold and shape us? Are these values strong enough to keep us working together for God's mission in each church's particular context?

These questions led the CBWC leadership to create a brief document that might summarize an agreed upon identity or values statement. It is meant to describe who we are today, based upon Assembly approved statements and resolutions. The Statement of Faith included is one Carey Theological College adopted and was later also adopted by Canadian Baptist Ministries and has appeared on our website and been used with our ordination candidates but never officially adopted at a CBWC assembly. It has not been altered.

It is not the intention of the Identity Statement for each CBWC individual or church to agree fully with the content but rather affirm that it accurately represents our relationship.

Every year our CBWC staff interacts with churches from other backgrounds who are exploring joining our CBWC family, as well as pastors who are new to our CBWC churches and are needing an orientation to who we are. If affirmed by the Assembly, the Identity Statement will be used in all new ministers' orientations, ordination preparation workshops, and in conversations with churches exploring affiliation with us.

Note: this FAQ document is dynamic and will be updated in the coming months.

### **What process was used to create the ID statement?**

CBWC Staff and Board members were tasked with determining our core values and beliefs based on our Assembly decisions, long standing practices, and the materials currently used in ordination prep and new ministers' orientations. The initial statement was then tested in a wide variety of ministerial clusters across Western Canada. Feedback with repeated common themes led to adjustments and rewording. Some parts of the document use the wording of Assembly decisions, or the exact wording of the statement of faith that has been used at ordination examining council for decades. The task force chose to repeat the wording of those pieces even though some feedback suggested that changes be made. The Board believes that in Baptist ecclesiology, Assembly decisions and faith statements should only be overturned or changed by another Assembly.

### **What is the hoped-for outcome if the ID statement is voted on and passed?**

Currently we have a variety of materials that are used to orientate new ministers, church plants, and established churches exploring affiliation, and are also occasionally used to mediate some conflicts. These materials have never been voted on by the Assembly, and as such have been challenged or ignored by some leaders and churches. The CBWC Board believes that we need an identity document to reduce the time being consumed by mediation processes without a clear framework for discussion. If the Assembly affirms the identity statement it may simplify and clarify some conversations.

### **Why now during COVID-19?**

While the timing of this important conversation is not optimal due to the COVID restrictions, the CBWC Board had put forth this motion in January 2019: *"that the CBWC Board will bring resolution(s) to Assembly 2021 that clarify issues of: Who makes decisions about local church membership and What it means to be a member church of the CBWC"*, acknowledging that neither the Board nor the Assembly would be ready to address such motions at the 2019 Gathering. Being unable to hold an in-person assembly in 2021, this commitment is to be fulfilled at the Assembly 2022. On a positive note, this has allowed more time for resourcing our churches for engagement, in hopes that congregations will soon be able to meet in person and prayerfully enter the dialogue, discussion and discernment process.

### **Why isn't the Baptist acrostic included?**

The Baptist acrostic is a helpful tool for remembering and explaining the Baptist distinctives. However, almost every Baptist Association have their own distinct version of the acrostic and the CBWC's Stanley Grenz created one for us. The purpose of the proposed identity statement is not to repeat the acrostic, but to emphasize and clarify our common assumptions and practices as the CBWC.

### **Is this a type of Creed?**

The identity statement is not intended to be a creed. The Oxford dictionary defines a creed, in part, as "any system or codification of belief or of opinion." We are not intending to codify our beliefs or opinions, but we are attempting to affirm our common practices and assumptions. Many parts of the identity statement are already used regularly for many purposes in our family of faith. It is our belief that putting those pieces into this format does not make it a creed.

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### **What about congregational autonomy?**

Congregational autonomy has been a long-standing assumption and practice of our family of faith. The common assumption of autonomy in this context is that the local church is not necessarily bound by the Assembly decisions and actions and therefore reserves the right to disagree and follow its own discernment. Historical inquiries point out that many contemporary expressions of congregational autonomy are a relatively recent and somewhat distorted understanding of Baptist theology and practice, probably rooted in the American experience. The longer standing Baptist practice appears to be the associational principle, which is the simple and pragmatic desire to associate with other Baptist churches to share the task of ministry and mission with those of similar belief. In other words, Canadian Baptists have always practiced a type of associational mission and ministry that in some ways tempered local congregational autonomy. The CBWC having oversight of ministry certifications like ordination would be one example. The practical outworking of local church autonomy alongside of association with other Baptist churches, is that every local church has the right to disagree with the Assembly. Conversely the Assembly also has the right to disagree with the decisions of local churches.

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