

November 6, 2005

To: The Board of The Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec
Attention: Mr. Evan Whitehead, President

Dear Board Members,

The Deacons, Honourary Pastors, and other Officials of First Baptist Church, Brantford performed a major study of the 2005 Constatng Documents passed at Assembly. As a result of the unanimous vote of our Committee, the Church Council called a Special Meeting of the membership of First Baptist Church for November 6, 2005 for the purpose of considering Resolutions from the Board of Deacons concerning our relationship with the BCOQ. Written announcement was delivered to every active member, with more than 2 weeks notice, including the exact wording of the resolutions and 2 pages of analysis by the Committee, which are appended to this letter.

This duly called meeting was held today. It was moved, seconded, and passed (with no dissenting votes) that the following resolutions be adopted and sent to the Board of the BCOQ:

THAT:

- 1) *We reject the 2005 Constatng Documents in their entirety, and demand that they be totally withdrawn at all levels, on two basic grounds:
 - a) they are erroneous in their theology and interpretation of essential Baptist beliefs and practices,
 - b) and they represent objectives which are incompatible with our concept of a convention and our relationships at all levels.*
- 2) *We assert that such portions of the proposals as are professed as having been approved at Assembly 2005 are in fact totally invalid and ultra vires, as they have been performed in substantial rejection of the normal rules of due process, and that in at least three areas, any of which make the Assembly action invalid.*
- 3) *In view of the above, we require the Board of Convention to end, cancel, and in fact undo all of its contacts with any Government agency, in relation to any real or supposed changed legal status of our Convention under a new format.*
- 4) *We demand that the Convention Board immediately advise all member Churches, by letter, that the whole project, including the parts already improperly implemented, is to be held in abeyance, with a view to total revision with adequate input from all levels.*
- 5) *We notify the Convention that, failing to receive satisfaction in the mean time, this Church (and probably others as we discover them) will end or defer all financial contributions to Convention Budget, starting January 1, 2006.*
- 6) *If it becomes apparent that the present Convention Board is unable or unwilling to make a start in the direction we are demanding, by Dec. 31/05, we, and others of similar mind, will institute proceedings to replace the Board members with others.*

By order of the Church,

Diane Boyd
Moderator

Robert Geen
Clerk

Debra Duce
Chair, Board of Deacons

**Meetings of the Deacons and Honourary Pastors of FBC Brantford, October 11 & 16, 2005.
Problems identified in the 2005 BCOQ By-Laws and Associated Documents.**

1. Inadequate time was given for Churches and Associations to study the 88 pages of changes proposed. Even though the technicality of the previous regulations regarding Notice of Motion may have been observed, the actual result of the process was experienced by many as forced and contrived.
2. Improper means were used to present and adopt the resolutions at Assembly 2005. As the documents were formally presented for discussion and action, the presenter (the BCOQ Treasurer) announced that the package must be accepted or rejected as a unit, and that NO amendments would be entertained. This was challenged from the floor, but the chair would not entertain the challenge – explanations being offered that the nature of the legal language could not be changed, etc. This denial of the legal rights of the Assembly to amend business presented to it robbed the delegates of opportunities to correct some of the flaws which they had planned to fix with amendments. The offer that the Board would review our comments and make appropriate changes THEMSELVES after the fact becomes high-handed and dismissive. The power of the Assembly was usurped by the Board.
3. Baptists are *covenant* people. Covenants are made between people who honour and trust each other. These By-Law documents are written in legalese and are essentially *contracts*. Contracts, by nature, are often required between people who do not necessarily trust or honour each other.
4. Historic Baptist principles and polity are sacrificed for the sake of business efficiency. In Baptist heritage, the Association and the Convention exist at the will of the Local Churches, and exist solely to serve the Local Churches and to provide a platform from which Local Churches may collectively attempt greater works for the Kingdom.. In these By-Law documents, the Convention, and specifically its Board becomes the master of the Local Churches and the Associations.

Specifically regarding Associations:

a. [page 19, 2.02(a)] “*Local churches shall be grouped into Associations to be established by the [Convention] Board...*” In Baptist heritage, it is always the Local Churches who form voluntary Associations with each other. The key word here is ‘voluntary’ association; never forced or legislated.

b. [page 19, 2.029(b)] “*Association Boundaries...shall be determined, in consultation with the other Associations, by the [Convention] Board of Directors by resolution in its sole discretion.*” While there is an obvious need for coordination of such matters as boundaries between Associations, it is unacceptable for the Convention Board to claim ‘sole discretion’ to place or remove Local Churches from Associations, unless those changes are first approved by the respective parties. This By-Law requires only ‘consultation’, not **agreement**.

c. [page 19, 2.02(c)] Purpose of Associations (iii) “*to perform such other duties as may be determined by the [Convention] Board of directors...*” In this By-Law, the Board is improperly given the authority to determine the purposes of each Association. In Baptist heritage and polity, the only body which can legitimately do this is the group of Local Churches who have established **their** Association.

Specifically for Local Churches, called ‘Members’ in these documents:

d. [page 5, VI 2 (m)] The Convention will “*enforce the standards of the Corporation for its member churches in relation to doctrine, theological distinctives, teachings...*” The concept of a Convention ‘enforcing’ doctrinal requirements on Local Churches is abhorrant to Baptists. Our forebears died for the principles of soul liberty and Local Church autonomy.

e. [page 20, 2.03 Qualifications (b)] “*the prospective Local Church indicates in writing that it is in full agreement and will continue in full agreement with the Constitution of the Corporation, as amended from time to time.*” The phrase ‘will continue’ is a blank cheque which binds the Local Church to accept, in advance, regulations and rules which have not yet even been formulated!

f. [page 20, 2.03 Qualifications (d)] “*Local Church enters into, and is at all times in compliance with an Affiliation Agreement...*” This is contractual language (*compliance*) which is offensive to those whose heritage is covenantal.

g. [page 21, 2.06 Duties and Rights of Members (Local Churches) (b)] “*the duty to respect and submit to the provisions and procedures of the Corporation....*”

[page 21, 2.06 Duties and Rights of Members (Local Churches) (d)] “*the duty to comply with the Affiliation Agreement, including compliance by Local Churches with any applicable Standards in place from time to time.*” In these two sections, the Local Church is required to ‘submit to’ and ‘comply with’ the apparent superior authority of the larger body, the Convention and its Board. According to number 4(d) above, the Convention will set and “*enforce... the doctrine, theological distinctives, teachings...etc.,*” which means that the Local Church must submit and comply even on matters of faith and doctrine. This is a direct contradiction of historic Baptist polity, which has always recognized the autonomy of the Local Church. This alone makes the whole By-Law package invalid, unless each Local Church **voluntarily gives up its autonomy. That is effectively what signing the Affiliation Agreement accomplishes.**

h. [page 68, 15.02] “*Amendment of By-Laws. The By-Laws ... may be repealed or amended... by a 2/3rds Resolution of the Board... and sanctioned by an affirmative 2/3rds Resolution of the Members [Church delegates at Assembly].* There is no provision for an amendment coming to Assembly **except through the Board, and that must be by 2/3rds of the Board!** This gives the Board power to effectively block any proposed amendment. It gives the Local Church **no** opportunity to propose such an amendment directly to the Assembly. This is a breach of Baptist polity, which always allows an individual Church the right to bring business to the Assembly **without the permission of the Board.**

i. [page 68, 15.02] “*Amendment of By-Laws. The By-Laws ... may be repealed or amended...provided that the repeal or the amendment of the By-Law shall not be enforced or acted upon until the approval of the Ministry of Industry Canada has been obtained.*” This means that for the first time in the history of the BCOQ, and for the first time in the history of Canada, **we Baptists will need the permission of the Government to change our By-Laws.** Under our present Federal Charter granted by the Parliament of Canada, we are authorized to operate our free Church institution according to our own wishes, including the setting and amending our own By-Laws – needing no permission from any external source. Under the new system, we will need the permission of Industry Canada for **every** By-Law change; even a simple change such as the length of the term of office of a Committee member, or the time when minutes of a meeting are due! This kind of dependence on the State for permission to conduct our own business is incompatible with our Baptist understanding of *the separation of Church and State.*

Conclusion: We are now being requested to accept, and sign, and submit to a system where the Board of the BCOQ is empowered to make decisions for Local Churches and Associations. These bodies are now compelled to abandon their local autonomy and religious liberty at the direction of that Board. This Committee recommends total rejection of the By-Laws and associated documents, and also recommends that no Affiliation Agreement based on these By-Laws ever be signed by this Church.

Committee Members:

Debra Duce, *Chair of Board of Deacons, Delegate at Assembly 2005*

Robert Geen, *Church Clerk*

Dianne Boyd, *Moderator*

Carol Bonney, *Parish Nurse*

Jack Bragg, *Deacon*

Rev. Dr. Fred Bullen, *Honourary Pastor, retired General Secretary of the Baptist Federation of Canada*

Rev. Thomas Caldwell, *Honourary Pastor*

Douglas Game, *Deacon*

Rev. Dr. Dan Gibson, *Pastor, Delegate at Assembly 2005*

Rev. Dr. Theo Gibson, *Honourary Pastor, former General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Western Canada*

Muriel Harrington, *Honourary Pastor, retired Canadian Baptist Missionary to Bolivia (40 years), Deacon*

Julia Howard, *Pastoral Intern, in training at McMaster Divinity College*

Barbara Potts, *Deacon*

David Partridge, *Trustee, Church Legal Counsel*