

Come to Burlington April 24th for our Spring Gathering.

We will be welcomed at Burlington Baptist Church, and welcoming Stan Haste, Executive Director of the Alliance of Baptists. Stan spoke to us a few years ago as we were beginning our journey together, and is coming back to talk to us about the past and future, helping us to put our situation into perspective. He wants us to know that he is bringing a word of hope for us. When he was here before the Alliance was “licking our wounds, and now we have come a long way.”

I am looking forward to his reflections on their journey based on the breadth of their experience.

The Gathering of Baptists is working toward constituting more formally and incorporation. The afternoon session will include sharing and discussing information regarding this and our presence/plans for BCOQ Assembly. The information will be posted on the website before the meeting for you before our Spring Gathering because we hope to discuss this in the afternoon session. Please see page 4 for registration and location details.

- Cam Watts, Moderator

IN THIS ISSUE:

Spring Gathering 2004	1, 4
Voices Responding to “The Voice” ..	1-4
Tides and Winds	2
from a deacon	2
The BCOQ and Fatwas	3

Baptist Peace Fellowship

Peace Camp

The Stones Will Cry Out!

19-24 JULY 2004

**Towson University
 Towson, Maryland**

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 Trinetta McCray - Preaching
 David North - Music Leader
 Ken Medema - Special Music
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 Franklyn Busby - Arts and
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“THE VOICE”

Background

There are Pastors, Congregations and individuals within the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec who wish to affirm an evangelical position on matters that affect our denominational life and our witness to the world. Since the structure of our Convention allows and encourages affinity groups, there are those who feel that the forming of an Evangelical Affinity Group, called “The Voice,” would be of benefit.

Purpose:

Our purpose is to promote a collective evangelical voice by:

- 1) Exalting God,
- 2) Encouraging one another,
- 3) Extending the Kingdom,
- 4) Expounding the Scripture, and
- 5) Expressing our voice within the churches of our Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, and within our denomination.

Essential Matters

- The Bible in its entirety, all sixty-six books, as contained in the Old and the New Testament, is the written word of God, is inspired by the Holy Spirit, is infallible, is entirely trustworthy, and constitutes the only absolute authoritative rule in all matters of faith and conduct.

- There is but one true living God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh; we affirm his virgin birth, sinless humanity, divine miracles, vicarious and atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension, ongoing mediatorial work, and personal return in power and glory.

- The salvation of lost and sinful humanity is possible only through the merits of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, received only by faith and apart from works, and is characterized by regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit enables believers to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

- The Church, the body of Christ, consists of all true believers

who are born again by the Holy Spirit.

- Ultimately God will judge the living and the dead; those who are saved unto the resurrection of life, and those who are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Proposed Action

- 1) To share this document with like-minded Pastors.
- 2) To form a leadership team (or a Board of Directors)
- 3) To inform our Convention leadership about the formation of this Affinity Group called “The Voice,” and to express our support for their evangelical position on current matters.
- 4) To explore ways to communicate our message, e.g. establishing a Web Page, hosting a booth or room at our Annual Assemblies, etc.

Interim Leadership Team: The Rev. Donald Crisp, the Rev. John McIntyre, the Rev. Murray Stovell, the Rev. Geri Johnston, the Rev. Ross Carkner, and the Rev. Lionel Pye.

If you have any enquiries or questions, please contact one of the members of the Interim Leadership Team.

(December 12, 2003)

The Voice: a response

I have always enjoyed being in the company of semi-heretics who value compassion and justice more than orthodoxy!

I remember one time when I was pastor of Dolores Street Church in San Francisco that someone from a Baptist institution admonished us for caring more about people than principles. Believing that caring about people IS the principle, we embraced that admonishment as a badge of courage as our denomination (Southern Baptist Convention) attacked us and tried to destroy us with a narrowly defined cultural reality disguised as “orthodoxy.”

I value and cherish kindred spirits who choose to gather together to support each other and to find ways to work for peace and justice rather than claiming some universal “orthodox” answers. Keep on getting together!

- Jim Lowder

Tides and Winds: The choice is ours how we will respond to God's will

By Barbara Bishop

I am writing this in the midst of the worst blizzard Nova Scotia has experienced in twenty-two years. We knew when we woke up that we were in for a bad one. When the wind is from the northeast, it whistles in our front door. And when the door is whistling, you know it's not going to be a good day.

My brother overestimated his ability to handle the storm. He delivers papers for the Halifax Herald in his retirement, and when he started out around 4:30 a.m. the roads seemed clear enough. He even felt he could get up Middle Road, as it is called. But he couldn't. The storm arrived almost in an instant, and before he knew it he was in trouble. He slid off the road, and managed to climb out the passenger side. A nearby house had a light in the window, and he made his way there. He phoned to let us all know he was stranded, but then felt uncomfortable where he was. The next phone call a few hours later told us that he was walking across the bridge into the nearest village, almost there. His wife and a neighbour eventually rescued him from outside the Fire Station, which was itself closed. Later, he described his ordeal. He walked nearly eight kilometres in snow that was growing deeper by the moment, stopping to lean against trees now and then so he could catch his breath. When he finally did get home, he had lost feeling in his legs and feet. He is fine, and we are thankful.

We walked across the road to their house later, Robert pulling me through waist-high drifts, and both of us laughing so hard we had to

stop every so often. But for Allan, there was fear and danger.

You don't mess with storms, and you need to respect the winds. They are predicting "storm surges" on the north coast, with high tides which could drive the powerful ice chunks into coastal homes. It's enough to get a person's attention.

It seems to me that in the matter of same-sex marriages, or full equality for all people, there is a wind blowing, or a tide rushing in, that the church needs to respect. It seems to me that in Christ, we should be respectful and in awe. But while our noblest motives are simply that we love our neighbour, sexual orientation being part of one's personhood and obviously to be fully accepted, there is also the matter of the church's fate. The universal human longing for freedom and equality, once given birth in a particular person or group, is as powerful as any wind, and as inevitable as any tide. The Church, whether Baptist, Roman Catholic, United, Pentecostal, or anything else, has the choice of behaving well in this, of embracing those who are being set free by these powerful winds that are stronger than we — as God's spirit always is.

Or not.

from a deacon ...

By John Mackie

Janus, the Roman god of gates and doors, lends his name to the first month of our calendar year. Representing beginnings and endings, Janus has two faces looking in opposite directions, gazing at the past while facing the future. In Church life we frequently have to do the same thing: respect the past while trying to assure that we will have a future.

As I look to my past I see growing up with my father, an Anglican minister, as the authority on everything. I later became aware that he was just the first step in the church hierarchy. I also recall my mother saying in response to my views, since the Bishop said such and so on the subject that is what *WE* should believe too. In this environment I didn't express my beliefs because it usually meant that I lost them in the tidal wave.

The Baptist experience for me was that I was no longer told "that's not what WE believe." I had found a denomination that respected my interpretations and allowed me to search for the truth. I didn't need to have all the answers and I had a right to think differently.

Looking to the future I see a threat to all that. The Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ) has adopted a "new" structure that is beginning to look very much like the old hierarchy I left behind. This restructured BCOQ already has handed down one directive that tells us what WE should believe.

We need to take this time to look at our past and respect the things that make us Baptists. Distinctives that include the priesthood of all believers, individual soul liberty, the autonomy of the local Church, and the authority of the Bible. These are Baptist distinctives because individual Baptist churches have consistently and independently held to them, not because Baptist leaders composed a list and imposed them on local churches. As we look to the future we may be forced to make some difficult decisions if we want to maintain these historical distinctives.

Our friend Janus represents transition ... and not all transitions are easy.

This article reprinted with permission appeared in Woodbine Highlights, January 2004.

The Voice: a response

I wondered how long gatherers would be the loyal alternative before another alternative would coalesce. Not a voice in the wilderness but a vocal reaction.

I have experienced the Gathering as a liberating, stimulating and nurturing influence. As I understand the e-mails The Voice sounds to me like the old fellowship baptists, bitterly opposed to anything that sounds like freedom of thought and expression (i.e. "liberal") and bibliolaters. Back we go to 1927 or to days of John Bunyan, when you were to conform or be shut out. Isn't that the SBC current mood?

Perhaps this appraisal is not quite fair to them. I could find friends and former colleagues among them. If I have been neighbour to them in association, fellow committee member in association or convention, or just hold them in affection, I would want to say, "Let's agree to disagree but let's hold our friendship and sharing in Christ in the same warmth we always enjoyed. Don't let Satan divide and conquer."

We have so much to share and so much to lose. If The Voice has been convened in opposition to the Gathering, let it not be a tragedy. Let it not be, as in 1928 when old friends would cross the street rather than have to meet. Let the emails seek common ideas, goals and unity, for the sake of the churches, where there is enough malaise and weakness. Let this not come across as a political tangle. Let it not be the start of a fight, recalling that Christians "fight dirty."

Any group who would put the whole Bible on a flat plain and not see the mountains and valleys in it, the humanness of its authors and editors, the different atmosphere of the New Testament and the freshness of the Christian Gospel would have to throw away a lot of commentaries, but perhaps that is what they want to do. Sounds like a purge is on the way.

So much for this rant. Bless the Lord, O my troubled soul.

- Gerry Hunt

The BCOQ and Fatwas

In what can only be termed a radical departure from historic Baptist biblical understanding the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ) leadership, i.e. the Council has issued a fatwa or edict banning licensed ministers from performing same sex marriages in Ontario. The penalty for non-compliance is the revocation of the offending pastors license to marry which is granted by the provincial government via the denomination. Further BCOQ churches have been asked to each endorse the Council's position thus forcing a potentially divisive topic onto the agenda of local churches with no apparent concern for their needs or preferences in how they may wish to process this issue.

The difficulty my friends is not the issue of same sex marriage. This is a complex and challenging controversy that we must face. The problem is the process. Conventional wisdom suggests that if you don't like a decision question the process. However, in this situation the decision making process and its implementation is not only clearly flawed it is downright destructive to Baptist life and unity. Here is how I see it.

Baptists just don't do directives. We are essentially autonomous local churches who agree to work together for common purposes. To be "directed" or to have an "agenda" placed upon us with no grass roots agreement contradicts our understanding of church and the desire of churches to govern them locally.

When it comes to performing marriages Baptist pastors have always been free to make their own decisions based on our understanding of the bible and our assessment of the suitability of the couple. To be directed from the head office not to do something that most would not do anyway is demeaning, insulting and not appropriate in a Baptist denomination.

There is also the question of human and religious rights. In our society the extension of marriage rights to same sex couples is a logical of all other rights they enjoy. Religious leaders also have rights and will not be forced to perform marriages their religious scruples prevent them from conducting. Conversely those of us who by conviction wish to conduct marriages for loving couples of all sexes should be free to do so.

Fatwas become the new or latest test of orthodoxy. If you agree and obey you are keeping the faith. If you dare to disagree you are unorthodox, heretical and are disobeying God. This type of self-righteous judgementalism has no place in Baptist life. It is just not who we are.

The directive is virtually unenforceable. This is largely due to Baptist polity that cherishes local church autonomy. We do not have church courts to rule on these matters. Then there are the challenges of determining what constitutes evidence of a violation of the directive. How is the evidence gathered, surely not merely by hearsay? What is the appeal process? Are accused pastors permitted legal counsel? And on it goes. One gets the impression of a heresy hunt. Is this the supportive atmosphere we want to foster within the BCOQ?

The directive was issued with no opportunity for considered discussion or any in depth study of what the bible really says about sexual orientation. Biblical scholars and theologians of all stripes are considering this issue anew from all perspectives. Should we not do

our homework before making hasty judgments?

While promised no resources have been forthcoming from the denomination to assist pastors and churches to process this concern in a way that builds understanding and helps to preserve church unity locally and corporately. This is just not good enough.

So could we not all just back up take a deep breath, perhaps several and engage in a process that enables us to consider the issue from all perspectives carefully and prayerfully. Could we not have a blue ribbon committee to study the issue with lots of input from all sides? Could we not provide churches with a process that enables them to vet this concern in a way that builds understanding and strengthens unity rather than polarizing people?

R. Michael Steeves - Editor

"The Gathering" "The Voice" "A Gathering" "A Voice"

Why does one seem exclusive, and the other one not?

Because we choose to gather. And value inclusiveness and sometimes struggle for it amongst ourselves. Because there are many voices, or should be. But if a group decides to call itself "The Voice" then are they not suggesting that their's is the one worth heeding?

It fascinates me that in the forming of this group in the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ) our own disease is articulated. We have been saying, to other Gatherers and more broadly, that what is wrong with our Baptist life right now is the narrowing of scope, the lack of inclusiveness, the sense that we no longer have the time and energy and agape to argue with each other and listen to each other and live together with our differences.

In BCOQ life we don't get to have many voices any more.

In my opinion the reason for "The Voice" is cultural, not theological. The members are trying to preserve a way of life they feel is threatened. Orthodoxy is the expression of that protection. I think they are wasting their energy. I think it is a way of life that has been dismissed by the broader culture. Not that the Evangelical Movement is powerless. There has been hype and energy in Evangelical circles around Mel Gibson's *The Passion*, and it was effective, for a time, in distracting North America from Global Conflicts and Presidential Races (it almost moved our Canadian Federal Liberal Scandal off the front page—thank goodness Canadians recognise that money scandals are more interesting than pietistic movies). But for the surrounding culture "this too will pass."

That is not to say that members of the Gathering are the servants of culture, although I am sure we have been accused of that. I just think we are semi-heretics: we value compassion and justice more than orthodoxy.

- Cam Watts

Letters are welcome at gnl@gatheringbaptists.ca, fax: (local Toronto) 416-922-4359 or by post to Michael Steeves, at 70 Linsmore Cr., Toronto ON M4J 4K1. Letters may be edited for clarity and length. Please include full name, address, phone number and email if applicable. Editorial Board: Michael Steeves - Editor, Cam Watts, Barbara Bishop, Colleen Furry, bob paterson-watt, Daphne L. Hunt (production).

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The Voice: a response

Thank you for your email re “THE VOICE”. I have had a number of thoughts about those who want to bring forward a “voice” that feels like a not too subtle attempt to clarify who is in and who is out.

The proponents of “The Voice” long for those who will agree with their notions of orthodoxy. Sure they are good folk seeking to defend the faith.

I would not accuse them of seeking to separate or divide the family but they do not understand the real harm they are advancing. What harm you say? Well how about the very idea that unless you agree with them you are persona non grata? Do we have the freedom to create affinity groups? Of course we do but to what end? If such a group sets forth conditions based on “this we believe”, (disguised as essential matters), by implication those who “believe” otherwise or suggest other essential matters, are of questionable value to the stated enterprise.

Miroslav Volf stopped me in my tracks with Nietzsche's notion that “the harm the good do is the most harmful harm.” “Exclusion,” he offers “is often the evil perpetrated by the good.” Here is my problem. In my reading of the new testament I do not see Jesus excluding anyone. Yes he confronts, he challenges, he causes folk to think about their motives and attitudes. But he excludes no one. Rather he breaks down walls that separate, he offers hope to those who have been excluded by the orthodox proponents of the religious status quo, he welcomes the children whom others would exclude from this rabbi's presence, he engages women who have been dismissed to the margins by the orthodox. We see in Jesus the spirit of God that reaches out to

embrace, welcome, forgive, include, graciously releasing the oppressed, freeing the captives and giving sight to the blind. Jesus unleashed a social movement that gave dignity to all and enabled the underclass to discover their voice celebrating new life in a sense of fullness heretofore unknown by the marginalised citizens of Judaism. Communion with God was found through life with each other in the spirit of Christ.

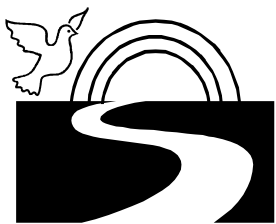
Essential matters? Not what I believe but rather what I do that expresses what I truly believe. I am not yet persuaded that what I believe makes any real difference in the great scheme of things. But how I interact with those around will reflect what I believe to be of greatest value. What I stand for and what I lay my life down for tells you what I consider essential matters.

I will pray for those who think that truths to be believed or affirmed as “essential matters” is of greatest importance. I wonder how they understand Amos 5, especially verses 21-24? My guess is that many who will affirm “The Voice” and the authority that such a name implies will not attend to the voice that can only be heard in the silence. If only we could listen to the voice that speaks to us in our core inviting us to welcome the other and thereby Him. I have no interest in being known for what I say I consider “essential matters.” Rather I would spend my self expressing what marks the people of God, grace and mercy flowing like an ever flowing stream and the goodness of the Lord is alive and well amongst people of good will.

- Robert S. Campbell

Spring 2004 Gathering of Baptists

Saturday, 24 April 2004, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.



*Hopeful
Alliances for the
Journey Ahead*

Speaker:

Stan Hasteley

**Executive Director
Alliance of Baptists**



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Take QEW to Guelph Line South. Turn right (west) onto New Street. Burlington Baptist Church is at Bridgeman Ave.

Registration starts at 9:00 a.m.
followed by worship, morning session,
lunch and afternoon session. Cost is
\$15 for the day and includes lunch.

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following the example of Jesus
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