

Ten years ago . . .

Ten years ago, in 1993, many of us in the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec were coming to understand how clear the shift in Convention life, politics, and theology was. We were beginning to share our angst about the changes with one another. Some of us were more vocal than others, but all of us were distressed. Something had changed. As some of our most beloved elders who had gone into retirement down east out west said, we felt as if we had lost our family. Those of us who were still here in Ontario and Quebec realized that we would need one another to get through it.

Ten years ago, a lot of things were different. How many can you think of?

Televisions were a modest size.

Computers were large.

A person or a family in need might actually survive on welfare.

There weren't many people sleeping on the streets, and not many Jaguars in downtown parking lots. I watched both of these grow in numbers, in tandem, when we lived in downtown Toronto, from 1996-1999.

There were at least 800,000 people alive in Rwanda who would be killed by their neighbours within one year. Romeo D'Allaire did not suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

AIDS was a "gay disease," mostly. Some of us had lost beloved friends or brothers or companions. Churches, by and large, didn't much want to talk about it. It was a lonely experience for Baptists who did.

We didn't put "AIDS" and "Africa" in the same sentence.

We didn't talk about "government cutbacks" in the same breath as we talked about schools, libraries, poor people, or safe drinking water. I can't remember if we talked about them at all. I think that ten years ago we basically assumed that there needed to be social infrastructures funded by our taxes.

Acres of rich farmland were not covered by houses with two and three-car garages.

There was no such thing as a "Powerpoint" sermon.

Some churches were still singing from the 1973 hymn book.

Cancer research was less advanced. Chemo was different.



In this issue...

Some of us reflect on what the Gathering means to us.

>> bob paterson-watt gives us his experience as a member of a Christian Peacemaker Team in Puerto Rico

>> Michael Steeves shares with us a letter sent to the Division of Pastoral Resources

>> News about the Fall Gathering. This one is not to be missed.

>> And you will notice that our editor, Ray Hobbs, has ended his long and helpful time as our newsletter editor. We thank Ray for many hours of collating and thinking, stuffing and mailing, and most of all for his editorial contributions and excellent analysis, which were always just what we needed. A thousand thanks.

This interim issue is a collaborative effort. If you would like to be involved in future issues, or even take on the editor's job, please contact Daphne L. Hunt at 416-255-6191 or email newsletter@gatheringbaptists.ca.

You see what I mean. And I haven't even mentioned some of the larger changes in North American life these past few years.

Through all of this, we as a community of Baptist people who have shared certain self-understandings and common aspirations have met twice a year, in the spring and the fall, to talk, to listen, to learn, to be together. We have had everything on our plate from Phyllis Trible (a personal highlight!) to Stan Hasteley from the Alliance of Baptists in the United States, to the Canadian content we have needed – bioethicists, thinkers, one another, biblical scholars, one another, storefront ministers, one another...

We are as a group also in a very different place. What has never changed is our enjoyment of each other, and our passion for those commonalities which we outline in our brochure and on our web page.

How has the decade with The Gathering been for you? Send us a letter. Invite a friend to our fall event (more on page 4). Think about what you think should happen next. Tell us

Hope you have all had a blessed summer.

- Barbara Bishop, Interim Editor

Why I hang out with The Gathering

by bob paterson-watt

I can be my true self, in terms of asking questions and exploring ideas that are perceived as threatening within the bounds of institutional church.

My spiritual kin are part of The Gathering of Baptists, so our gatherings are 'home' for me.

Divergent thinking is encouraged, not suppressed.

Vieques

In early May of this year, I was one of five members of a Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) delegation to the island municipality of Vieques, Puerto Rico. I represented the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (BPFNA) on this celebratory delegation. We joined thousands of other peace activists from Vieques, Puerto Rico and the continental United States to mark the end of US Military bombardment on the eastern end of the island. Since 1941, the US Navy has used Vieques to practice land, sea and air manoeuvres for their operations elsewhere. Their final blast took place in January and February of this year in preparation for the invasion of Iraq.

CPT and BPFNA sent this delegation to both celebrate the demilitarisation of Vieques and to say to the local people that we are with them in their ongoing struggle. Nearly 2000 arrests later (for non-violent civil disobedience, that is, 'trespassing' on 'Navy' land), the first of four stages of the struggle was achieved. Three important stages remain.

Sixty-two years of military bombardment have devastated this island paradise. The US government has signed a decontamination agreement for the lands and seas poisoned by their activity. But it is clear that pressure will be necessary, on many levels, to hold the government to this agreement.

When the military left, the lands were not returned to the local people. The US government simply handed control of the land from one federal department (Defence) to another (Interior). The lands are designated as a nature preserve. The people of Vieques rightly want their land back. Pressure many levels will be required to achieve this goal.


Local people on Culebra have been isolated and impoverished while continental developers have reaped huge financial gains.

The fourth stage of the struggle deals with the matter of sustainable development of the Island, for the people, by the people. Culebra, another island municipality of Puerto Rico that was taken over by the Military in 1941, was returned in the 1970s to Puerto Rico. No local planning was done and this island is now simply a tropical playground for wealthy US Americans. Local people on Culebra have been isolated and

impoverished while continental developers have reaped huge financial gains.

The people of Vieques will not allow this to happen to them. They have been working for four years in multidisciplinary partnerships to develop a plan that protects the land and empowers local people once again to earn a living on the land and sea.

It was a rare privilege to be part of this delegation. The generous hospitality this unilingual northern Anglo received from the hands and hearts of the Viequense people was both humbling and delightful. These folks, along with activists from away, put their freedom at risk in the struggle to this point. I was able to celebrate their good work and assess what work is yet to be done.


Given the US policy of using pre-emptive military force to exert their will wherever and whenever they see fit, it is my hope that more of us might take this victory by means of non-violent direct action over the US military as incentive to become active ourselves. Join the BPFNA (www.bpfna.org). Consider going on a delegation with CPT. Douglas duCharme and Lee McKenna-duCharme are recently back from a CPT delegation to Iraq. If you are have the resources to take a Caribbean vacation, go to Vieques. You'll experience beautiful beaches and a relaxed atmosphere. More importantly, you'll meet genuine people who love their home and would be glad to welcome you there. 

New territory

by Daphne L. Hunt

In my "middle" years I find myself increasingly resistant to change, and yet I am restless with things as they are and trying to go back to how things were is some pretty old wine poured into a new wineskin. It merely has been repackaged. Same old, same old. How can I reconcile my need for the novel and the desire for the durable? I think The Gathering of Baptists has helped me in this regard.

Preserving what is essentially Baptist – following the example of Jesus – The Gathering of Baptists has ventured into "new" territory in drawing together folk who have been rejected in their own communities and making them welcome. The Steering Committee's recent adoption of a Welcoming and Affirming statement in how we relate to gay, lesbian, transgendered and bisexual Baptist folk who have grown up with us in and live among us is one such venture.

Old wine in old wineskins will be enjoyed before its time passes, but new wine in new wineskins must constantly be replenished to take its place. I am looking forward to another decade of being anchored to this family of Baptists and taking joy in the excitement of being effective in building, helping, loving, caring, growing, healing, mending and repairing. 

Grabbing the lifeline and throwing it to others

by Margie Bell

I have just completed the sermon for June 22. It is entitled, "God's Life Lines" and is based on Mark 4:35-41 where Jesus is asleep in the boat and is awakened to calm down his panicked disciples by calming the storm that is threatening them.

As I ponder my response to what there is to celebrate about the Gathering, somehow the title to my sermon seems to fit. For ten years the Gathering of Baptists has been a spiritual 'life line' for me. The sessions afford opportunity to meet with likeminded folk and to ponder together the mystery that is God and the miracle that is Faith.

I feel that I receive far more than is in me to give, both to Steering Committee meetings and to the Gathering of Baptists, and yet there is always a welcome and an acceptance that says it's ok to be empty. Come and be filled. And so, for 10 years, this empty vessel has been replenished time and again. ☺



Dr. Travis Kroeker, Ethics in Exile, and Dr. Elizabeth Boetzkes, Strange Bedpartners, answer questions at the Spring Gathering in April 2003 at Dundas Baptist Church.

Letters are welcome at newsletter@gatheringbaptists.ca, fax: (local Toronto) 647-439-0803 or by post to Daphne L. Hunt, 2531 Lakeshore Blvd W, Suite 114, Etobicoke ON M8V 1E7. Letters may be edited for clarity and length. Please include full name, address, phone number and email if applicable.

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Letters: Email from BCOQ on Marriage Protocols

The email from Dr. Bellous suggesting that BCOQ licensed ministers refrain from performing same sex marriages while the Council deliberates on this sensitive issue is quite concerning. It suggests to me that a decision may have already been made about attempting to prohibit BCOQ ministers from performing such marriages. My urging is that the group studying this issue be balanced with clergy who have an open mind on the issue. Of even greater importance is to review our Baptist polity as it relates to decisions about who a licenced pastor will marry, for we are like no other denomination I know of in this regard.

Historically Baptist Clergy have been free to decide who they will or will not unite in marriage. To be sure, wise ministers have sought advice and guidance from their congregational leaders when marriages that might be controversial are requested. To be specific some Baptist clergy will marry divorced people some will not, even today. Yet there is no BCOQ requirement either way. This is as it should be. Each of us makes our own judgement through council with the couple and most of us have had times when we decided not to perform a wedding for many different reasons. The BCOQ hierarchy has never dictated or made any rules across the board about this responsibility. Please be reminded that even though we jointly set up ordination councils to examine candidates for ministry and in most cases the church asking for the council abides by its recommendation, in the final analysis it is

the "local church" not the examining council or the BCOQ hierarchy that "ordains." In our system, if an autonomous local church did not agree with the recommendation of an examining council against ordination, that local church could go ahead and ordain their pastor if they wished. The implication of all this is that, since we are not hierarchal in structure but rather congregational in our government, it would seem to me to be unwise and even inappropriate to make BCOQ wide dictums in the matter of performing "same sex" marriages. The wiser and more appropriate course that best reflects and respects our cherished Baptist Distinctives of "soul liberty" and "local church autonomy" would be to leave this matter to the local pastor and her/his congregation to work out in prayer and "rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

The threat of removing credentials from BCOQ pastors whose conscience is that all loving and committed couples regardless of their sex have a right to be united in marriage goes against everything Baptists have lived and died for. Please do not further polarize us by acting punitively in an area where freedom of conscience is so important.

In my view, any discussion should not focus on the issue of "same sex" marriage but on Baptist polity as it applies to ministers performing marriages.

*Sincerely,
Rev. R. Michael Steeves*

Fall 2003 Gathering of Baptists

Topic:

Guardians of Hope and The problem of Thick Skin:



***A Day of Reflection on HIV/AIDS
in Kenya and Rwanda***

Carla Nelson

Member of the Canadian
Baptist Ministries Task
Force on HIV/AIDS



<http://www.cbmin.org/web/>



photo:www.baptistwomen.com



photo:www.mcmaster.ca

Daniel Coleman
Canada Research Chair
in Critical Ethnicity and
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http://www.mcmaster.ca/research/faces/faces_coleman-d.htm



www.gatheringbaptists.ca

**Saturday,
25 October 2003
9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.**

AT

Alymer Baptist Church
153 John Street S.
Aylmer ON N5H 2C3
Phone: 519-773-7293
Minister: Rev. Cam Watts

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.

To preregister, please contact

Colleen Furry

6240 Edenwood Dr.

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Telephone:

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