



A Letter of Explanation to the Churches of the CBWC | February 2021

Below, you will find several notices of motions and a proposed CBWC Identity Statement. Before reading and considering them as churches, it is important that you have an understanding as to how we got to where we are today in this conversation.

### How We Got Here

Approximately eight years ago, one CBWC church, after working through a 5-year process of discernment in their local context, voted to change their membership practices to allow people in same-sex relationships to become members. Shortly afterwards, a second CBWC church made the same changes to their membership structure. In both cases, these churches affirmed that people in same-sex relationships were not allowed to serve on their church boards or in pastoral roles.

At the time that this was happening, CBWC staff challenged these two churches to recognize that their decisions went against the Assembly approved Marriage Statement from 2003, which defines marriage as between one man and one woman and the Assembly 2011 Statement, which says, "That the position of the CBWC with regard to any sexual behaviour outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage is that it is not affirmed." The churches moved forward with their decisions, and even though there was discussion, neither the staff nor board took any formal action against these churches.

In December 2017, after learning about the decision these two greater Vancouver area churches had taken years earlier, the leadership of 7 central Alberta churches came together and wrote a letter to the CBWC Board asking that these churches either be instructed to bring their membership practices back into compliance with the CBWC positions, or the Board should bring forward a motion to Assembly 2019 seeking to remove the two churches from the denomination.

Through these years a great deal of thought, study, conversation and prayer has gone into this topic by CBWC Staff, CBWC Board and church leaders. The Board invited the leadership of the two Lower Mainland churches to a meeting where they were asked to share how they came to the decisions they did. Some staff and board members met with the leadership of the 7 Alberta churches to hear their concerns more fully. Over time, other CBWC churches have affirmed both perspectives.

## Moving Forward

Two key questions have risen to the surface in our discussions; “Who makes the decisions about local church membership?”, and “What does it mean to be a member church of the CBWC?”. As we approached Assembly 2019 it was decided that we would hold an education time, hoping to better understand the LGBTQ conversation. We facilitated “table talk” discussions where people were encouraged to sit with people they did not know and share their perspectives on several relevant questions. It was a rich time of learning for many. We also agreed at that time to bring forward motions to Assembly 2021 that sought to bring further clarity to this conversation.

Since Assembly 2019, Staff and Board realized that implicit in asking the two questions, is our understanding of how we identify as Baptists, and in particular, Baptists of the CBWC. A team of Staff and Board were tasked to look at the shared core values we have traditionally agreed upon to determine if, indeed, these were still true statements about ourselves as CBWC churches.

Staff, Board, Carey faculty, Pastor clusters and some congregational input have all contributed feedback and suggestions in the creation of our proposed Identity Statement. Along with the autonomy of the local church as having high value in the CBWC, this document clearly shows the many ways in which we, as an association of churches, are interdependent.

We also recognize the diversity in membership practices. Some churches do not practice formal membership beyond the legal requirements. Some are Covenant churches with differing sets of criteria for people to enter. In each church, we recognize and trust the discernment of the local congregation in their mission field, to determine their membership practices. These practices may differ, but the goal is the same: to disciple all who come into a deeper relationship with God through Christ, where the Spirit does the work of transforming us step-by-step into our new selves as His image-bearers. Membership is not a sign that we have yet attained this, but rather a public commitment to pursue it.

This requires us to trust one another enough to facilitate, guide and walk alongside one another in our individual and corporate journeys, in ways that are faithful to God’s mission in the world and our understanding of Scripture.

The Identity Statement helps us recognize common values, even within our diversity of thought and mission. It facilitates theological and pastoral conversations on how we engage seekers of God, who have and are considering connecting with our churches.

## Next Steps

As we approach May 2021, the CBWC Board has determined that due to ongoing Covid-19 regulations and the projected pace of the vaccine rollout, the 2021 Assembly will need to be an ONLINE virtual meeting, making Assembly 2022 our next in-person gathering. We all know by now that online platforms, like Zoom, are better suited for small group discussion, which has convinced the CBWC Board that a face-to-face gathering will best facilitate healthy discussion around challenging topics. In summary, the online meeting via Zoom Webinar will be held on Thursday, May 27, 2021 at 5:30pm PST. Registration for this online event will open mid-February for all delegates, pastors, and visitors. Lord willing, we will gather for an in-person Assembly in May of 2022, at a location yet to be determined.

## Notice of Motion\*

For these reasons, the CBWC Board is bringing “notice of motions” to our 2021 gathering, which you will be encouraged to take back to your churches and, over the coming year spend time engaging in discussion with your entire congregation. Discussion resources will be provided following the May 2021 Assembly.

As you choose your delegates for Assembly 2022, we encourage you to send people who are informed as to the perspective of your local church, and who will be prepared to engage in discussion and vote on these notices of motions. Together, we will seek the Spirit’s leading for the CBWC.

Please be in prayer for each of our churches, the denominational leadership, and this process. The CBWC has been a voluntary association of churches for over one hundred years, always seeking to be faithful to God. May we continue to seek and celebrate Him together.

Rob Ogilvie | Executive Minister



Sam Breakey | CBWC President



\* Notice of Motion is always necessary if the motion concerns the constitution, policies or procedures of a body, does not require seconding at the meeting where notice is given, and is not debatable at that meeting. (Source: [Bourinot’s Rules of Order - A Summary for COSS \(utoronto.ca\)](#))



## Identity Statement of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada

The Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC) is a voluntary association of independent Baptist churches gathered under the Lordship of Jesus Christ as revealed through Scripture. As a Spirit-led, multicultural community, we assemble to seek the Father's will together in unity of faith and to celebrate God's past, present and future work among us and through us. Churches choose to associate for the purpose of enhancing our local and global participation in this work of the triune God, as disciples of Christ in word and deed, thus engaging in God's mission in the world.

Standing within the historic orthodox understanding of church and Scripture, as Baptists in name and heritage, we affirm the following statements of faith and practice. They are the core of our identity and are expressed in our policies, practices, and Assembly Resolutions (esp. 1959, 1987, 1988, 2003, 2011, 2015, 2017). Scripture passages referenced are illustrative, not comprehensive.

### Statement of Faith

The Canadian Baptists of Western Canada accept wholeheartedly the revelation of God given in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and confess the faith therein set forth. We here explicitly assert the doctrines which we regard as crucial to the understanding and proclamation of the Gospel and to practical Christian living:

1. The sovereignty, love, and grace of God, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit in creation, providence, revelation, redemption and final judgment.
2. The divine inspiration of Holy Scripture and its entire trustworthiness and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
3. The value of each human being as created by God. The universal sinfulness of humankind since the fall, which alienates all from God and subjects all to condemnation.
4. The full deity and humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, whose substitutionary sacrifice is the sole ground of redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin.
5. The justification of the sinner by the grace of God through faith alone in Christ crucified and risen from the dead.
6. The illuminating, regenerating, indwelling and sanctifying work of God, the Holy Spirit, in the believer.
7. The church as set forth in the New Testament and understood historically by the Baptist community.
8. The expectation of the personal, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ, our participation in the resurrection, and the hope of eternal life.

### Priesthood of All Believers

Loved by God and created in God's own image, each one of us is able to meet with God through the atoning work of Christ. As male and female, equally called, the churches of the CBWC honor each person's responsibility to exercise their giftedness in Christ's body, the church, and to minister to each other as a 'priesthood of all believers.' With Christ as our Lord, each person is to regard others with the same humility that Christ exemplified in the cross. We live in voluntary submission to one another out of reverence for Christ.

*Acts 6:1-7; 15:22-35; 17:10-12; Rom 12; 1 Cor 12:1-31; Eph 4; Phil 2:1-18; Heb 4:14-16; 10:19-25; 1 Pet 2:1-10; Rev 1:4-8*

This is proposed document which will be discussed and voted on at Assembly 2022

## Ordinances

We believe there are two ordinances (sometimes referred to as sacraments): Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We practice these ordinances in faith and obedience until the Lord returns. They are not a means of salvation.

- **Believer's Baptism** – We each come to faith in God through a free, personal decision as convicted by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, whenever possible, we practice the baptism of believers by full immersion in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Since baptism is reserved for those mature enough to make a fully conscious and committed decision as an act of obedience to Jesus' teaching and example, we do not practice infant baptism. *Matt 28:18–20; Acts 2:37–41; 8:12–13, 34–40; 10:44–48; 16:29–34; Rom 6:1–14; Gal 3:23–29; Titus 3:4–7*
- **The Lord's Supper** – On a regular basis (weekly to monthly) we communally remember and identify with the saving death and resurrection of Jesus by sharing in Christ's body and blood through receiving the bread and cup. *Matt 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–20; 1 Cor 11:23–34*

## Congregational Governance

We follow a form of governance in which congregants submit to the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Holy Scripture. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they discern and participate in the Father's ministry of reconciliation. Local churches grant membership to those who publicly confess Jesus Christ as Saviour, are baptized, and who demonstrate a desire to follow Christ as Lord in a life of obedience and service. Members are given an equal voice, vote, and opportunity to serve according to their spiritual gifts in an environment of mutual participation and accountability. In accordance with the priesthood of all believers, congregations affirm spiritual giftings and appoint Spirit-led leaders. In partnership with the CBWC, local congregations set apart ministers of the gospel, both men and women, to teach, preach, shepherd, and make disciples of Christ.

*Matt 18:15–20; John 14:12–31; Acts 2:37–47; 10:44–48; 13:1–3; Rom 12; 2 Cor 5:16–6:2; Eph 2:11–22; 4:7–16; 1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 5:1–5*

## Church Association as Interdependence

Just as membership in a local church is voluntary and for the sake of interdependence in the life of the church, so participation of Baptist congregations in the CBWC is voluntary and for the sake of interdependence. Under the Lordship of Christ, associated churches reflect the life and teachings of Jesus and the practices of the New Testament church, working together to accomplish the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The identity of associated churches is tied to the values of the larger CBWC body.

We desire to be grace-filled, compassionate and ever open to God's leading, so that all may come to know and experience God's love through the proclamation of the gospel. Thus, associated churches share resources to fulfill our mandate. We recognize the value of cooperating in mission through such means as training in theology, discipleship and leadership, the ordination of women and men, pastoral support, camping outreach, community development, and local and global evangelism.

*Mark 12:28–34; Acts 1:1–14; 1 Cor 16:1–20; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15; Col 3:1–17*

### **Separation of Church and State**

We affirm the practice of religious liberty and freedom of conscience to be essential to the security and well-being of both Church and State and recognize the unique and separate functions of each. The Church is called to be salt and light in the world, pointing to the Kingdom of God and contributing to the greater good of all.

*Ps 72:1–14; Dan 3:1–30; Matt 5:13–16; 22:15–22; Acts 4:1–21; 5:17–42; Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:11–17; Rev 19:11–21*

### **Marriage**

We define marriage as a publicly recognized lifelong covenant between a woman and a man whose relationship is characterized by loving faithfulness. The purpose of marriage is interdependence, mutual responsibility, and potential for procreation. Marriage symbolizes the relationship of God to his people and of Christ to his church.

*Gen 1:26–31, 2:18–25; Mal 2:10–16; Matt 19:1–12; Eph 5:18–32*

### **Engaging in Mission**

We believe that the gospel has transforming power, rooted in the grace and righteousness of God. We are compelled to proclaim this good news of Christ's atoning sacrifice, to stand firm against injustice, and to practice mercy. In our broken world, God invites us to participate in His work of reconciliation, which involves us in the work of restoring relationships to wholeness—the relationship each person has with God, creation, other human beings, and the self. Because we believe in the God-breathed sanctity of human life from conception to death, we make every effort to demonstrate Christian love to all people.

*Gen 1–2; 12:1–3; Exod 19:1–6; Ps 24:1–2; 86:8–13; Isa 58; 65–66; Mic 6:1–8; Matt 5–7; 10:1–11:1; 22:36–40; 28:16–20; Acts 1:1–11; 10:1–48; 17:16–34; Rom 12:9–21; 2 Cor 5:11–21; Jas 1:19–27; 1 Pet 3:8–16; 1 John 4:7–12*



## Notice of Motions: to be introduced at Assembly 2021 and discussed and voted on at Assembly 2022

**Motion # 1:** Be it resolved that we, the member churches of the CBWC, affirm the Identity Statement.

**Motion # 2:** Be it resolved that in recognition of our mutual interdependence, the churches of the CBWC establish membership practices and criteria in alignment with Assembly approved resolutions and statements- such resolutions and statements being in furtherance of the mission, vision, and purpose of the CBWC as outlined in our Identity Statement.

**Motion #3:** Whereas the following Statements have been agreed upon at CBWC Assemblies, such Statements being in furtherance of the mission, vision, and purpose of the CBWC as outlined in its Identity Statement:

- That marriage is between one man and one woman (summary of Marriage Statement Assembly 2003)
- That the position of the CBWC with regard to any sexual behaviour outside of monogamous heterosexual marriage is that it is not affirmed. (Assembly 2011)
- That we call upon all CBWC ministers and their churches to make every effort to demonstrate Christian love to individuals who are same gender attracted. (Assembly 2015)

Be it resolved

That all CBWC credentialed Ministers, all CBWC Executive Staff, and all CBWC Board Members uphold these three Assembly approved statements.

### **Timeline:**

- February 2021- information of Notice of Motion
- May 2021- Notice of Motions given at Online Assembly (no discussion or vote)
- June 2021 to April 2022- CBWC staff-supported and local church implemented dialogue
- May 2022- Presentation of Motions (discussion, vote).

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