The Bulletin

A Publication of the
Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms

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The Bulletin is published three times a year by the Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms, formerly the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship. It is meant to be an informative magazine about Baptist concerns and news of the Church in the world.

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COVER: Port Williams Baptist Church in Port Williams, Nova Scotia was one of the founding members of the Canadian Association of Baptist Freedoms. It is pastored by the Rev. Dr. Scott Kindred-Barnes.

Editorial

MARK PARENT

The Spring issue of *The Bulletin* featured articles on Baptist distinctives and the autonomy of the local church in light of upcoming motions at Oasis (the Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada) in August of this year. The two motions laid out procedures for removing pastors and churches from the CBAC for not being in compliance with Convention resolutions, chiefly the resolution banning Baptist clergy from any involvement (including a scripture reading!) at a same-sex marriage. I attended the meeting and spoke against the motions which passed with more than the required two-thirds majority.

In this issue, two Baptist pastors, Aaron Kenny and Scott Kindred-Barnes, provide personal reactions to the passing of those motions. Complementing these reflections, Acadia Divinity College professor Spencer Boersma examines what unity looks like in the Baptist tradition without lapsing into majoritarianism on the one hand or separatism on the other.

After devoting two issues to these Convention Baptist motions, it is time to move on to other issues that were requested by readers in response to a survey which was which sent out earlier.

Thus, the Winter 2027 edition will feature an article by Meaghan Parent who laments the lack of emphasis on Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Baptist tradition and raises the possibility of a deeper appreciation of the person of Mary in fostering spiritual growth. In addition, Lutheran minister Kristie Chandler shares her journey of feeling called to ordination but being blocked by the leadership in her church which belonged to the Missouri Synod.

Articles on the experience of women in pastoral roles as well as ways in which women can further their own spiritual growth within a theological tradition that often feels male dominated are eagerly solicited for this next edition.

Love from the Centre of Who You Are

AARON KENNY

The apostle Paul exposes a deep tension that has shaped nearly every conflict in Church history. It is present in every congregation, every family, and within each of us. He identifies this tension as a polarity between the *dunatoi* and the *adunatoi*–the "strong" and the "weak." Beneath these labels lies a struggle between inclusion and exclusion: the common human dilemma between the widening of mercy and clinging to the safety of a closed circle of control. In Christian organizations, this tension most often appears in the debate between the freedom of faith and the apparent security of religious legalism. How are we to navigate this tension?

Baptists have historically leaned toward inclusive freedom, honouring the dignity of *soul liberty*. Yet, moving toward greater mercy and compassion can be frightening. Big tents and longer tables require unity without uniformity. We must be willing to surrender our craving for institutional clarity for the messy diversity of embracing Christ's presence in all of us–with all our contradictions and ambiguity. For some, this tension seems too much to bear.

And yet, the Apostle Paul warns against the alternative response of religious exclusivism. Boundary-drawing and conformity make us all poorer. History reminds us that what was once radical becomes ordinary. Within Canadian Baptist life, convictions once defended as the "clear teaching of Scripture" have given way to a more gracious vision of God's Kingdom–seen in our acceptance of remarriage after divorce, the leadership of women, and our growing awareness of racism's pervasive evil.

In Atlantic Canada, United Baptists once pointed to a basis of union that formed a common centre based on the Gospel of Christ as the anchor of our Christian faith. For 120 years, we have striven to stand with other Baptists of diverse theological and practical convictions because we were united in this common Gospel. But acknowledging the ongoing and outward movement of God's Spirit requires great humility.

Today, we as Canadian Baptists are wrestling with whether a "big tent" is truly possible, especially around welcoming and affirming homosexual Christians and the freedom of churches to differ while remaining in fellowship. I grieve when we trade the humility of Christ for judgment, exchange faith for apparent certainty, and settle for group loyalty over the ecumenical heart of Jesus, who prayed that all who believe would be one.

This oneness, Paul teaches, is not a rigid institution but a living body in which every member belongs and deserves honour.

Hope is our calling but hope without humility is dangerous. When hopeful movements harden into fixed boundaries, someone is always left out. As Franciscan Richard Rohr observes, “The rejected and silenced ones always expose what a culture idealizes.” As I look back on the summer of 2026, I cannot help but wonder what the current debates within Canadian Baptist life reveal about who we are and who we hope to become in Christ.

Paul’s answer in his letter to the divided house churches of Rome is not an either/or but a table where both sides remain together. As far as it is within our power, we are to live at peace with everyone, which includes loving and protecting those with whom we disagree. May we as Canadian Baptists hold one another in affection, remembering that we know only in part, and that God–and God alone–is good. Or, in the words of Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of Romans 12:9: “Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it.”

The Rev. Dr. Aaron Kenny is the lead pastor of the Bridgewater Baptist Church, a member church of the Lunenburg/Queens United Baptist Association, the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, and the Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms.

Outcome of OASIS 2026

SCOTT KINDRED-BARNES

> *We Baptists do not distinguish ourselves from other Christian groups by our concepts of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and other such cardinal Christian emphases. We do not have a Baptist Bible, separate from other Christians. Nor do we identify ourselves by certain theological approaches, for example Calvinism with its stress on the sovereignty of God or Arminianism with its emphasis on human free will. Both Calvinism and Arminianism have long and noble histories among Baptists, but one can be either or neither and still be a Baptist. Nor are we distinguished by popular theological labels. Among Baptists you will find fundamentalists, conservatives, liberals, evangelicals, and everything in between. But it is a serious mistake and a gross misrepresentation of our history to equate* “*Baptist*” *with any of these. One can be a Baptist and be any of these.*
>
> -Walter B. Shurden, *Not an Easy Journey: Some Transitions in Baptist Life*.

I thought of Walter B. Shurden's thoughtful quotation when I attended this year's OASIS Assembly in Wolfville in early August. We started off the Friday morning (August 7th) at a packed Theatre Festival with a thoughtful sermon by Dr. Bruce Fawcett, President of Crandall University. He wisely and carefully contextualized the Greek in John 3:16, linking the well-known passage to John 3:14-15, where Jesus likens his own mission and destiny with the cross to Moses lifting up the serpents in the wilderness in order to spare the lives of the Israelites. I took from Bruce's message that we can find unity and life in the cross of Christ. I thought Bruce's message set the right tone for a charitable discussion about "Longer Tables – Where Hope Gathers," which was the theme of the Assembly. However, when we turned to the business session, I soon found out that the real business of the day was making sure those who come to the table were in accordance with what ***some*** in the CBAC deem to be 'orthodoxy.' In this case, "orthodoxy" was equated with a traditional understanding of sexuality and marriage, which sadly was never spoken to directly. Although, in fairness, people were given opportunities to share their thoughts (up to three minutes) from the microphones on the floor. Here is the statement that I read in the morning session before the first vote.

My Words read from the Microphone at OASIS

My name is Scott Kindred-Barnes. I have recently become the pastor of Port Williams United Baptist Church in Nova Scotia. Before moving to Port Williams in January 2026, I served as the pastor of Wolfville Baptist Church for seven years. My credentials are only with the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada (CBAC). But from 2020 to 2025 I served as the Bulletin editor for Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms (CABF) and attended numerous meetings of the CABF. Why? Because the CABF, and its predecessor, the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, since its foundation in 1971, has been committed to exploring what a faithful Baptist witness in the modern era looks like.

The ABF/CABF was formed in 1971 to counter a group of so-called '*concerned pastors*' *who sought to narrow the denominational tent. The concerned pastors did influence the direction of the denomination but petered out in less than a decade after. But the ABF has promoted a broader tent and addressed issues relevant to our denomination for past 55 years.*

Yesterday I was invited to be a guest at a luncheon in which pastors from the CBAC were congratulated on their ordination milestones. It was wonderful to hear the accomplishments of the sixteen ministers who have served faithfully for 40 to 70 years of ordination. The word 'family' was used often and rightly so. But the group of ministers congratulated were all gifted in numerous ways and were theologically diverse [and thank God for that]. Five out of the sixteen ministers had strong ties to the CABF.

And of the five their accomplishments ranged from being a trailblazer for women's ordination to a retired missionary who helped bring clean water to parts of India. I for one would not want these committed Christians cut off from our family because of their connection to the CABF.

To quote from one of my favourite songs by U2: "*We are one, but we are not the same. We have to carry each other. Carry each other. One.*"

I am voting against these two motions. Thank you for the time.

Why am I so disappointed by these motions being passed? Well, I can understand [somewhat] why holding dual credentials might cause problems for a denomination; especially one that wants ministers to "toe the line" so to speak on certain issues. What concerns me most is what was originally the second motion which outlines the procedure by which only two credentialed CBAC pastors can start a process to have the membership of a church dropped. This can happen should a church be thought not to be in "substantive" agreement with the statement of faith as found in the Basis of Union of 1905/1906 or, not in agreement with the resolutions passed over the years by the CBAC convention.

I heard words used from the floor such as "adhering to the authority of Scripture" and "departing from orthodoxy" as a justification for getting rid of "the stray cats." In fairness, those who used such phrases and descriptions cannot be said to speak for all who supported the motions. However, I am concerned that the autonomy of the local church will no longer be respected, and that these resolutions will be used to move the denomination in a more conservative, fundamentalist direction. This would be contrary to what the Basis of Union was all about.

Why not name the real elephant in the room?

The real issue behind these motions has to do with sexuality and preventing ministers from presiding over same-sex marriages. Instead of addressing these issues prayerfully as a body with meaningful, healthy and honest discussions, we have buried our heads in the sand with the hope that those who are inclusive (or even tolerant of those who are inclusive) might simply go away. We have let backhanded denominational

politics rule the day, while paying lip service to the autonomy of the local church.

Since the Basis of Union is being upheld as a litmus test a few words are in order here. The Basis of Union is important precisely because our founders believed it was possible to be "United Baptists" even though it was clearly acknowledged that there were divergent ways of interpreting the Scriptures. This is why Calvinistic and Arminian Baptists are part of our heritage. To say things like "we want to ensure that everyone acknowledges the authority of scripture" is either disingenuous or naive. Both those against same-sex marriage and those who support it (or who at least have some sympathy for it) look to the scriptures to support their positions.

I cherish the days when the Rev. John Boyd and Dr. Brian MacArthur (two very thoughtful Baptist leaders who were diametrically opposed on most issues) could debate topics in the *Atlantic Baptist* and still be part of the same Baptist family. We no longer have a denominational magazine like this to conduct healthy discussions, and unless one is willing to be a contributor to the CABF's *The Bulletin,* issues get buried under the rug.

The Importance of discussing and debating issues

There is a difference between truth seeking and truth proclaiming, and those who claim to have the whole truth will see no place for healthy debate. That is why the CABF has done our denomination a great service over the years.

More than a few of my friends and mentors over the decades have attended the ABF/CABF Rushton lectures (named after the Rev. Vince Rushton, a retired missionary and a founder of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship). Most of these faithful women and men who joined the CABF conversations did so while fostering a solid relationship with the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada. Since moving back to Atlantic Canada from Ontario in 2018, I thought I could do the same. In essence, engagement with such issues through the CABF has allowed numerous Atlantic Baptists (hopefully myself included) to be bridge builders between the broad wings of our denominational tent. Now I am told that to have a voluntary affinity with the Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms is no longer acceptable for a CBAC pastor because ***some*** deem the CABF to be anathema. It seems to me we have bought into the dangerous fallacy that Walter Shurden's quotation warns us against; that is, the table has been narrowed by those seeking solely to be truth proclaimers even at the expense of asking how Jesus would have us respond locally to the diverse needs we are encountering in the present day. I think of this as a sad day for liberty of conscience, church autonomy and for Baptist freedoms in general.

Scott Kindred-Barnes is the pastor of the Port Williams Baptist Church one of the founding members of the CABF. Scott grew up in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia and was an amateur boxing champion before attending university. He completed his BA and MDiv at Acadia and his MTh and PhD from the University of Toronto. He and his wife, Kerry have two children.

The Struggle for Spiritual Democracy

SPENCER MILES BOERSMA

> *Under Baptist polity, you cannot organize the churches for any but good ends. You can organize them for mission and education, but not to try heretics or to impose creeds or to pass general laws. The Baptist polity has its shortcomings, doubtless, but it has unmatched advantages. It localizes disease in the particular church and generalizes health through larger organization. All these things we derive from the New Testament, which we accept as the only rule of faith and practice.* (E. Y. Mullins, *Axioms of Religion,* pg. 262)

Mullins, the great Southern Baptist theologian and statesman, perhaps the most ardent and programmatic proponent of autonomy as the bedrock for congregationalism (what some call "spiritual democracy") as a Baptist distinctive, offers a description many of us see as ideal. However, one cannot help but read Mullins with tragic nostalgia: he brushes off the schism of the Civil War, its issues of slavery and race that tore Baptist life apart (and still do). Moreover, by the end of the century, his denominational leadership did not shield Baptists in America from fracturing several times over with the fundamentalist resurgence that split the Southern Baptist Convention, particularly over issues of gender. What will be the fate of this Baptist ideal?

Reflecting on his heartbreak over the state of American politics, the renowned educator Parker Palmer writes about the future of democracy in America in *Healing the Heart of Democracy* (2024). This was some of my summer reading. I picked it up both due to the deep regard I have for Palmer's understanding of pedagogy (his *Courage to Teach* is a book that has deeply formed my own philosophy of teaching) as well as a deep sympathy for his grief: I too look at the political situation of our world and

worry about the future of democracy. Reading it, I cannot help but think that it has important lessons for Baptist ecclesiology.

Palmer looks to the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville, a man from Europe who toured America in the 1830's observing this radical experiment in democracy that had taken root. Tocqueville inquired into what causes democracy to flourish, and he concluded that successful democracies are not merely built by polities and policies. It must be something much deeper: democracy thrives with habits of the heart. Palmer elaborates on what he sees as five virtues that form the heart of democracy: (1) the realization that we are all in this together, interconnected, interdependent; (2) an appreciation for the value of "otherness," where the other is welcomed rather than seen with suspicion; (3) the capacity to hold tension in life-giving ways, seeing contradiction as generative; (4) the strong sense of personal voice and agency, a fervour that one has a voice, conscience, and convictions that must be one's own and no one else's; and (5) a value of community, one where this value of the individual person multiples with and through others (pg. 44-45). Palmer reflects on a lifetime of teaching, activism, and community organizing, and he admits that there is no formula for a perfect society, only virtues and practices that open up social spaces of commonality, solidarity, and co-operation, all of which fostered by and also, in turn, fostering that sacred quest he calls the "inner search": the relating of the whole person to that which is transcendent. Palmer, a Quaker, believes his tradition offers a witness to wider society: where authenticity is pursued without threats of conformity or coercion, where otherness is met with hospitality rather than hatred, where there is a guiding commitment that there is "that of God in everyone." These are the things that nourish what he calls "deep democracy," those practices of being together that honour what it means to be human.

Of course, as Tocqueville notes, democracy in America (and Canada for that matter) has unmistakably religious roots. Democracy formed from Puritan congregationalist practices migrating to public policy, and so, Palmer is right to worry as he looks at today: how will democratic practice survive if it forgets the religious convictions that first taught that the heart is its first home? On the other side, what hope will there be for the world when religious communities show that they are incapable of resisting the things that disrupt democracy: individualism, the tyranny of the majority, inequality, etc.? How do we welcome diversity and maintain liberty when there are differences that rest on utter falsehood and malintent? How do we foster authenticity within a community when there are others committed to ideology and inequality? Again, Palmer offers no silver bullet, only the hope that healing happens first by looking at the heart.

Reading Palmer, I could not help but see applications from the political to the ecclesial. Over a year ago, I reviewed an excellent book by Christopher Schelin for the site *Reading Religion* called *The Contestable Church: Dissent, Democracy, and Baptist Ecclesiology* (2024). I noted that Baptists have an ongoing tension between their convictions of autonomy and association, one that Schelin says makes Baptists known as a "contentious people." Baptists have a tendency to swing in two ways: one is to pull towards majority rule, suppressing dissent and viewing liberty as nothing more than the choice to either conform or leave; the other is to absolutize autonomy so as to make accountability and cooperation difficult (I will leave it to the reader to think of examples). I have routinely said that the worst way to take Baptist liberty is to invoke it as if it were playing a card that says, "Because I know what I believe, I no longer have to deal with you." Schelin prescribes, "To avoid the dangers of paralysis and division, Baptists must find a way to rethink their ecclesiology that anticipates and integrates the perpetual potential of conflict" (pg. 12). He also warns, "Pious affirmations of Christ's Lordship by themselves are not enough" (pg. 12). Schelin writes from the standpoint of a former Southern Baptist, who in the wake of the Baptist battles has engaged in important introspection. He sees non-fundamentalist Baptists increasingly forfeiting robust theological argumentation and reasoning in favour of withdrawing into private judgment. He does not see this as a sustainable solution. Drawing from theorists of radical democracy (putting them in conversation with Baptist thinkers throughout the book), the solution to Baptist battles is not to withdraw from conflict: it is to learn how to fight better. Baptists must search for an ecclesiology that sees plurality, contestation, conflict, and dialogue as part of its affirmation of convictions of congregationalism, association, and soul competency, as well as offer theological deliberations on Christian tradition that work to keep these conversations going rather than shut them down. Baptist attempts to form doctrinal consensus must always be marked by receptive generosity and openness to further light and vice versa. Schelin longs for a Baptist ecclesial life to be enriched with vulnerable conversations conducted with others in respect and dignity, ones that are characterized by genuine listening, rearrangements of power that bring the voiceless to the proverbial table, the willingness to travel across boundaries in pursuit of genuine points of meeting (pg. 225-226). This is done in order that the most contentious differences in Baptist life can be welcomed as a "gift rather than an obstacle" (pg. 227).

The editor invited me to reflect on recent motions in the CBAC, but there is a deeper travail here, and because of this, my thinking is not settled. How do Baptists maintain unity? What does that unity look like? How do Baptists also come to consensus that is not majoritarian rule? How do Baptists make decisions that prevent liberty from being used to perpetuate inequality or to depart from baseline orthodoxy (whatever that means)? Some, such as Harvey Cox in his *The Future of Faith* (2009), advocate for a completely non-dogmatic, practice-oriented approach. This seems to neglect at least some minimal rules of faith that undergird the Christian understanding of justice and equality this approach prizes. Others, such as my friend Steve Harmon, have suggested using the great creeds as a dogmatic minimum. I am sympathetic to this, but it has shortfalls as well. Even the creeds can be enforced in ideological ways. Others, like the denomination I used to pastor in, offered an increasingly specific and totalized doctrinal statement continually imposed on all. Others closer to home use the language of "substantive agreement" with a certain confession. I abide by this approach, but I have routinely asked: what does this mean, and who decided the limits? How can this be applied consistently? I do not have answers.

I worry we are increasingly seeing the centralization of power in several committees and a growing clericalism, draining the local church of its focal privileges and prerogatives. But I also worry separatist rhetoric further fuels conservative scapegoating in the service of ideological purity. I worry that attempts to secure necessary doctrinal baselines, as well as attempts to withdraw by invoking Baptist convictions of liberty, can both have counterproductive consequences. Short-term solutions can create a long-term status quo. Indeed, I have many complicated thoughts on the nature of doctrinal consensus and accountability, of autonomy and association, of polity and power, etc. Perhaps I simply do not have the stomach to turn Baptist polity into barefaced acts of realpolitik. Perhaps it is because at heart I believe the Baptist family deserves better than the potential dead ends we might be locking ourselves into. I merely sit with Schelin's words, prayerfully, when he writes, "Baptists have yet to clarify what it means to be a spiritual democracy" (pg. 71).

Spencer Miles Boersma is an Associate Professor of Theology at the Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Spencer lives in Kentville, Nova Scotia with his wife, Meagan, and his five sons: Rowan, Emerson, Asher, and twins, Elias and Benedict.

Together

Gunter Rochow, *Together: Joyful Interdenominational Collaboration in Ministry*. Ottawa: Waldo Rochow, 2025.

Reviewed by ED COLQUHOUN

Rochow opens this booklet with “An invitation to share your observations and experiences”. He begins by sharing his own faith story in which he attended Lutheran, Christian Reformed, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and, when he could not find a Protestant church, Roman Catholic churches. His academic journey sounds similar, ending with McMaster University, studying theology and later counselling. While preparing for Baptist mission service in Bolivia, he befriended a Catholic priest in Alberta with whom he shared a number of learning and social experiences. In Bolivia, he developed a relationship with a German priest who, like him, spoke German. Later he found himself celebrating the 400th anniversary publication of the Bible in Spanish and helping the local Archbishop in promoting the reading of the Bible.

There is a three-part oft-cited motto underlying all this joyful interdenominational cooperation: in essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity. Soon the relevance of this booklet to the current Canadian Baptist situation becomes obvious. His next example - the support five diverse churches in the Ottawa area provided to civil servants suffering a mass layoff is disrupted when a new minister refused to cooperate with another denomination for not removing an ordained minister who openly identified with LGBTQ+. The next chapter of the book tackles this debate about what is essential, reviewing how Christians through the ages have answered this question.

The story of the Canadian Council of Churches is briefly recounted in relation to Baptists: its formation in a prominent Toronto Baptist church, the eventual withdrawal of all Canadian Baptists from full membership, and the acceptance into full membership of the Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms. The formation and purpose of this CABF is fully recounted with one minor correction required. Rochow states that First Baptist Halifax was the first to join the CABF. In fact, a number of churches, one of which this reviewer is a member, joined with Halifax, Port Williams, and others as the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship transitioned to the CABF.

Moving beyond church politics, Rochow considers the way interfaith cooperation might take place. He encourages reflection on the many possible pathways to the Divine, always recognizing that, for Christians, Jesus Christ is the way. He definitely is not naïve about the danger of radical Islamism; however, he shares instances of co-operation between

Muslims and Coptic and other African Christians illustrative of “charity in all things.”

His case study of Cuba would be of interest to the CABF churches, notably Port Williams, which have involved themselves in this area of ministry. Of interest to Acadia Divinity College and all churches wrestling with how to address Truth and Reconciliation will be a section on Outreach to Canadian Indigenous Communities.

This call to Christian denominations for collaboration in essentials without forcing participating churches into a single doctrinal structure sounds like being Baptist to me.

Ed Colquhoun is a retired education who has served as editor of The Bulletin and as president of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship.

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

CABF Annual General Meeting (via Zoom) Monday, September 28, 2026, 7:00 pm.

To Faithfully Evolve...One Day, Six Voices (The Gathering of Baptists: Ontario) Saturday, October 24, 2026, 08:30 am - 05:00 pm.

CABF Cross Canada Conference #4: Saskatoon SK, October 25-28, 2026. This year’s theme - *Consider the Joy*

For more information on these events or for registration links please visit the Canadian Association of Baptist Freedoms Web page which can be found at https://www.c-abf.ca/