

The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship Its Aims and Purposes

By Dr. Reginald Dunn, President ABF
(Circa. 1977)

*See the end of the article for a sketch of Reg's life

One thing needs to be made clear at the beginning of this article, "The Atlantic Baptist Fellowship — Its Aims and Purposes" and that is simply this: it is generally understood by the Fellowship that it has no intention of setting itself apart from the fellowship of Baptists in general; whatever its "aims and purposes" it is the hope of the Fellowship that these may be worked out by the Fellowship within the Atlantic Baptist Convention. It is the hope of the Fellowship that it may represent as faithfully as possible certain strands in the total Baptist witness — strands which the ABF deems to be of historic validity and of current importance. From time to time in our history some aspects of Baptist life and witness are strongly emphasized while others tend to be challenged or muted or neglected. Such muted or neglected aspects need a voice and a visible demonstration within the total body for the health of the whole body. Within the last few years such important Baptist principles as the primacy of local church autonomy, the right of individual interpretation of Scripture under the guidance of the Spirit, the inclusive nature of the Christian fellowship, have been neglected and in some cases officially rejected among us. It is the view of the ABF that these must be maintained and, where necessary, restored as ways of thinking and acting.

The ABF fully realizes the hazards of taking any stand which is not a major concern of the majority, and which might so easily be interpreted as being divisive or at least disruptive. Nevertheless the hazards must be accepted in the conviction that the purposes involved are valid and worthy of demonstration.

Some of these purposes are as follows; in reading what follows the reader needs to be reminded that this is not an official statement of the ABF, but rather, the personal reflections of the writer who hopes that they reflect with responsible accuracy the views of the ABF.

A major purpose of the ABF is to demonstrate in word and action the historic Baptist principle of the self-responsibility, under Christ, of each Baptist congregation. This means that no larger body has the right to make decisions binding on a local congregation without the prior consent of the local congregation. We hold this to be so for all congregations, not only those represented in the ABF. It is expected of course that individual congregations will act responsibly.

—with this purpose in mind, the ABF is organized on this model.

—with this purpose in mind, all proposed action of Association or Convention need to be examined carefully to prevent excessive authoritative action which impinges on congregational self-responsibility — which has also been called "the autonomy of the local church."

—with this purpose in mind the ABF considers itself responsible to give support to any congregation which justifiably feels its rights have been usurped or ignored.

Another major purpose: to maintain the primacy of the work of the Holy Spirit in the opening up of and the interpretation of Holy Scripture. No less than others, members of the ABF are people of the Bible.

Believing in the spirit of free inquiry, the ABF is a Fellowship of biblical studies, studies in theology and doctrine, and in the mission and work of the church. The focus of every ABF meeting is on such studies. This has created a fellowship of openness to the Spirit, willingness to listen to each other, the absence of authoritative presuppositions other than the Bible — all of which provides a fellowship climate which, we believe, makes it possible for God to speak, to be understood, and to provoke appropriate response.

—through the work of a recently appointed Theological Commission it is hoped that eventually study guides may be made available to local churches.

Another major purpose: in the name of Christ, to be identified with people through sharing in their needs as they actually are, without expectation of any rewards. Or, to put it in a more familiar phrase: encourage the development of social action. By and large, our Baptist witness in society requires much strengthening. One thinks particularly of the disadvantaged, the imprisoned, and their families, and those considered by many to be social outcasts.

—As a small start in this direction we, (1) have examined the work of the special ministries of the deaf, through the Atlantic Ecumenical Ministry of the Deaf; we participate financially, and are aiding in the spread of information about this special and much needed ministry; (2) are seeking some means of being involved more creatively in ministry within penal institutions, and (3) are striving to stimulate interest among churches so that they will become directly involved in their own localities in such projects as drug dependency, family life, housing for the economically disadvantaged, or whatever is of priority concern in the local scene.

A further purpose: the ABF believes that Baptists should seek fellowship not only among themselves but share faith and life with others as widely as possible. The ABF believes that Baptists have a witness to bear in all forms of ecumenical relationships, and that Baptists need the widening vision and awareness of common purposes, as well as differences, which involvement in such fellowships provides. The ABF realizes that this is not the point of view of our Convention at the present time, but believing that this is an appropriate extension of our fellowship, and knowing that churches of other denominations look forward to Baptist participation, the ABF makes persons available wherever possible:

- through such persons, participating in the Atlantic Ecumenical Council,
- through such persons, participating in the “Heads of the Denominations” Conference,
- maintaining in a very limited way, linkage with the Canadian Council of Churches.

A purpose inherent in the Fellowship is steadily demonstrated: that is the development of a sense of “Fellowship” itself as a way of life.

Reginald Dunn President, ABF



Rev. Dr. “Reg” Dunn (1915-2000) was born in Middlefield, Queen's Co. and graduated from the Acadia Divinity School in 1939 (BD).

Reg served pastorates in Deep Brook, Digby Co.; First United Baptist Church, New Glasgow; First Baptist Church, Montreal; Walmer Road Baptist Church, Toronto; and First Baptist Church Amherst.

Reg also served as a chaplain in WWII and worked for YMCA War services.

In 1965, Reg was awarded a Doctor of Divinity from Acadia University. In 1968, his work on many boards and councils, in television and radio, and his strong ecumenical interests led to his appointment as President of the Canadian Council of Churches.

In the words of his obituary writer: “Throughout his long career, Reg provided understanding and support to countless people in all walks of life. He was a kind, gentle and patient man, who asked very little for himself.