



Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION in support of STRATEGIC PLANNING

May 2018

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The Context

Incorporated in 2012, the Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms (CABF) is a faith-based, volunteer, non-profit society. It carries on the intents of its predecessor organization, the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship: to bear witness to the historic Baptist principles of freedom, and to continue involvement with non-Baptist communions in joint worship, social action and ecumenical discussions.

In 2018, CABF is a Canada-wide fellowship with a membership base of churches in Nova Scotia and Ontario. A legal Memorandum of Association sets out objectives describing what the Association is for (a core subset of which appear to the right >>). CABF aspires to expand individual and church membership into every Canadian jurisdiction.

The Stakeholder Consultations

On behalf of its members, the CABF Council secured independent facilitation services to help craft a multi-year strategy. A draft strategic plan outline is required for discussion with the Council by June 30, 2018, with the final version will be available by August 31, 2018.

April involved engaging Council members and the broader membership in dialogue about the Association's future directions. Invitations were sent to all individual and church members. They were encouraged to invite others who might be interested.

The sessions unfolded as follows:

Wolfville:	April. 7 th	(17)
Port Williams	April 8 th (Younger Adults)	(8)
Halifax	April 11 th	(9)
Burlington ON	April 21 st	(10) ¹
Amherst	April 24 th (Younger Adults)	(9)
Amherst	April 24 th	(19) ²

- ### CBAF (Core) Objectives
- ✓ To witness to the freedom implicit in the voluntary principle in religion, which is a fundamental tenet of historic identity.
 - ✓ To affirm and celebrate Baptist participation in, and witness to, the whole visible, catholic and evangelical church of Jesus Christ;
 - ✓ To promote peace and understanding amongst people of all faiths;
 - ✓ To provide a forum for the discussion of doctrinal and ethical questions, and social issues and policies in that spirit of tolerance and mutual respect which issues from Christian love;
 - ✓ To bear witness to these objectives with and among Baptists regionally as well as nationally and internationally;
 - ✓ To provide accreditation for clergy and chaplains;
 - ✓ To associate and co-operate with other like-minded organizations, such as the Atlantic Ecumenical Council, The Canadian Council of Churches, The Gathering of Baptists, and the Alliance of Baptists.

Number of attendees in each location appear in the brackets.

The Briefing Note in Appendix A accompanied the invitations.

Appendix B is the Dialogue Guide that the Facilitator handed out to start each session

With the groups' permission, all sessions were recorded (for the Facilitator's ears only). This report provides an anonymous synopsis of the findings and a number of conclusions.

¹ Including 2 who joined from Ottawa via Skype

² Including 3 from New Brunswick

Executive Summary

The Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms (CABF) Council secured independent facilitation services to help craft a multi-year strategy. The Council will have a draft strategic plan outline by June 30, 2018. The final version will be available by August 31, 2018.

In April, Council and the broader membership were engaged in dialogue about the Association's future directions. Seventy-two stakeholders attended 6 facilitated focus groups in 5 locations; 4 in Nova Scotia and 1 Ontario. Two groups were deliberately populated by younger adults to understand how the successor generation's views might differ from those long involved with CABF. The overall mix by age, gender, and familiarity with CABF was diverse. There were relatively more men who were older and relatively more women who were younger. All sessions were digitally recorded with the participants' permission.

Two segments (Core Objectives and Contemporary Issues), were used to gauge participants' knowledge of the organization and its perceived relevance going forward.

- a. The level of engagement on the part of all but 1 group indicated a good grasp and valuing of CABF's Core Objectives.
- b. Similarly, most groups could relate to the contemporary issues posed. They added others: e.g. economic disparity, a world-wide shift to greater conservatism and rigidity in mainstream churches, the need for different conversations with young people, student clergy and clergy who have never been a part of Convention.
- c. The needs of clergy relative to the contemporary issues garnered significant attention. People see looking after the clergy as being central to advancing the freedoms.
- d. The Bulletin, Web site, AGM and the accreditation process are recognized as foundations to build upon. Participants also named less concrete artifacts of CABF's value: freedom; profoundly impactful relationships; persistence as an independent voice; the practice of acceptance; and being a viable, open organization.

Concerning CABF's strategic direction, there were saturation points around a handful of potential priorities: bringing people together; telling our story; and pursuing pension and benefits. Others, though not as frequently cited (e.g. starting some kind of educational initiative) could nonetheless be intriguing.

There are mixed views around *Expanding Individual & Church-based Membership* as a priority:

- a. Nova Scotians tend to question the purpose and feasibility of expansion west of the Maritimes.
- b. Ontario and New Brunswick voices cite an impending exodus of pastors, individuals and churches from Convention and the need for a place of refuge and fellowship. They see Nova Scotia's experience as having the potential to facilitate their transition.
- c. A significant proportion of older participants are focused on the historic battle and are weary. Younger people familiar with the cause are knowledgeable but not necessarily motivated to take up their parents' cause in the same way. Younger people unfamiliar with the freedoms and their history have no context; because they are looking to the future, very different means of inspiration, education and engagement will be needed.
- d. Advice was offered concerning how to approach other organizations for the purposes of growing CABF.

The Respondents

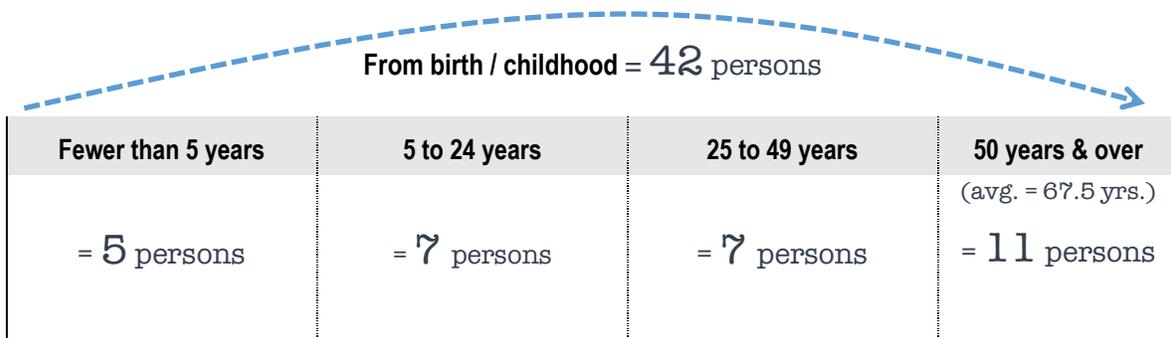
Number

17	in Wolfville
8	in Port Williams. (Younger Adults)
9	in Halifax
10	in Burlington Ontario
9	in Amherst (Younger Adults)
19	in Amherst
72	in Total

Reach, beyond the host church

Port Williams, Scotch Village, Chester (?)
Chester (?), Scotch Village
Ottawa (via Skype), Brantford, Orillia and the Niagara
Springhill, Moncton

How long travelling in Baptist circles?



Extent of familiarity with CABF?

Little to none	Familiar	Very familiar	Since ABF formed
= 16 persons	= 9 persons	= 12 persons	= 5 persons

Fewer than 5 years	5 to 19 years	20 to 39 years	40 years & over
= 8 persons	= 11 persons	= 3 persons	= 5 persons

Findings - The CABF Objectives

The Association's Objectives were pre-circulated with the invitation and are listed below. Participants were asked:

Which of these particularly resonate for you (and why)?

Soul liberty and congregational autonomy seemed to be the freedoms mentioned most often as being key. A number of people preferred not to draw distinctions for the purposes of dialogue because they value all of the objectives.

Here is what emerged for the rest, by venue:

	No. of times mentioned					
	WV	PW	Hfx	B	A	A
1. To witness to the freedom implicit in the voluntary principle in religion, which is a fundamental tenet of historic identity.	3		1	4		2
2. To affirm and celebrate Baptist participation in, and witness to, the whole visible, catholic and evangelical church of Jesus Christ;						4
3. To promote peace and understanding amongst people of all faiths;	4		1	2		3
4. To provide a forum for the discussion of doctrinal and ethical questions, and social issues and policies in that spirit of tolerance and mutual respect which issues from Christian love;	6		1	4		3
5. To bear witness to these objectives with and among Baptists regionally as well as nationally and internationally;			3			1
6. To provide accreditation for clergy and chaplains;	1		1	1		2
7. To associate and co-operate with other like-minded organizations, such as the Atlantic Ecumenical Council, The Canadian Council of Churches, The Gathering of Baptists, and the Alliance of Baptists.			2	2		1

Reflections on the Objectives

All 7 resonate

They comprise the principles we've been based on for so long. In the beginning of the ministry, these are the things we were striving towards in a convention that was much more limited with respect to allowing other faiths and having a connection. They are all essential.

And there is a thread of openness that runs through many of them. What I see of faith is that it is to be opening and not closing.

Findings - The CABF Objectives

Reflections on the Objectives (cont'd)

1 Resonates

To witness to the freedom implicit in the voluntary principle in religion, which is a fundamental tenet of historic identity

Local Autonomy. ABF emerged because of what some considered to be a crisis in the Convention: taking freedoms from the congregation by demanding that all Convention delegates be immersed as believers.

Some felt that the churches, being independent and interdependent, should decide who would best represent their congregations.

Convention then went on to withdraw money and membership from the Canadian Council of Churches³.

Fellowship. CABF is the only Baptist organization that always includes Holy Communion ... the absolute fundamental experience of that higher fellowship which is symbolic but real in the sacrament.

The autonomy of the individual.

Regenerate church membership (believer's baptism) is fundamental to being Christian and a person needs to make up his/her own mind. CABF can offer the ability to come to faith as an individual without being told to.

We respect everybody's search for God and search for the truth. It reminds people that we honour individual thinking (which is the opposite of judgmentalism or confining thought).

The autonomy of the individual is getting lost in Baptist battles. The dissenting voice is a foundation of who we are as Baptists. However mainstream Baptist life doesn't get that and has become highly centralized, very dogmatic and very doctrinal.

The term 'freedom' particularly resonates.

One participant shared that they come from a very, very, very conservative and doctrinal Baptist home in which freedom would not necessarily be found. As he matured in his Baptist understanding, he grabbed hold of the freedom. He likes to think that all can have the freedoms.

Peers of another participant associated with a variety of denominations growing up, but they don't associate more than culturally with any particular denomination as adults. It's important to him that CABF stands for the "freedom implicit in the voluntary principle in religion".

Developments in Ontario. That sense of freedom is really under attack in the Ontario Convention.

At the last CBOQ Assembly, 1st Orillia Baptist, with the backing of the Covenant Life Renewal Association (CLRA⁴ – described as a sort of anti-Gathering group of Convention) was very much pushing for a doctrinal statement⁵ to which everyone must adhere or experience punitive actions.

The Gathering will meet to consider the autonomy of the local church and some of those passages that have traditionally been used to 'beat up on' the LGBTQ community.

³ Of which CABF is now a member on behalf of Maritime Baptists

⁴ http://www.adfontes.ca/about/about_clra/index.php

⁵ See the Motion in Appendix C

Findings - The CABF Objectives

Reflections on the Objectives (cont'd)

2 Resonates

To affirm and celebrate Baptist participation in, and witness to, the whole visible, catholic and evangelical church of Jesus Christ

One participant is holding on to the true 'evangelical' (vs. what has been co-opted south of the border). He'd like to reclaim it if it's not too late. It means "good news" for him in justice, in action, and in equality.

Eighteen to 24-year-olds in the 90s were nominally churched and started leaving about 25 years ago. Most of today's 18 to 24-year-olds have no experience with church. Their entire familiarity is whatever they pick up in the news and on social media. 90% of that is negative.

To be offering that 'evangel' / good news about equality, justice, response to poverty, care and commitment and proactively speaking up publicly and through media about ethical and social issues is also to be evangelical in the traditional sense. Our mission should be to figure out how to show love to all as Christ did.

Another participant is, "persuaded that too often the Convention is a conservative animal with a very low tolerance for other opinions or thoughts. A clergyman in that domain had better stay in line. You lose your accreditation if you think, speak or practice differently. Your professional career is at risk".

Objective 2 is an excellent alternative and it links to #4 and #6.

3 Resonates

To promote peace and understanding amongst people of all faiths

To some, this is one of the possibilities that we haven't yet exercised in the changing texture of our culture. We need to find a forum where we can sincerely, openly, and lovingly share the faith journey of other people. Our society is pushing us in that direction and our faith could be expanded with more of that. However, we're too concerned about other things to be seizing that opportunity.

Another felt that what we should be seeking to discover is where God is at work in Canada in particular. There is an openness to hear other stories and CABF has been inclusive, but there are battles (with the Convention) yet to come on that front.

It will require being non-judgmental and accepting of what others are saying as their own experience.

Many of us have had opportunities to move in this direction through involvement with church-based groups supporting refugees as an expression of our faith.

One person values this Objective because increasingly it's part of the work he does in chaplaincy, an inter-faith environment. That's a way forward for an organization like CABF. With our identity rooted in our history and the uniqueness of who we are in a Christian community, we can take that into a dialogue with other faiths in ways that can allow us to have a meaningful impact in the world.

Objective 3 is especially important now in light of what is going on in the world; e.g.

Findings - The CABF Objectives

Reflections on #3 (cont'd)

the United States is becoming more and more intolerant.

This Objective advances the idea of tolerance for anyone who is coming from a slightly different direction with their faith.

“I don't believe that any particular denomination has the 'in' way; it depends so much on so many factors: how you've been raised, your culture. It's so important to be very, very open and accepting of all people and how they approach their faith.”

“Born and raised here, the difference between my parents' generation and mine significantly impacted religious affiliation. Religion was less of a separation by the '60s. For example, the tradition that religion might influence where you could get hired disappeared when I was in high school. Catholics were not allowed to attend social functions in Protestant churches after ecumenical secular functions (like cadets, youth activities like sleigh rides). There's a totally different openness now.”

“This one stands out because as a youth, I never got a satisfactory answer to who dictates the different practices across denominations if there is only one God.”

4 Resonates

To provide a forum for the discussion of doctrinal and ethical questions, and social issues and policies in that spirit of tolerance and mutual respect which issues from Christian love

We can differ without rejecting each other. CABF has been a safe place for fellowship; a place to share your thinking about faith, to explore a lot of different ideas, and to talk

about 'grand questions' that we're not allowed to talk about in church. In exploring your answers, you get to find out and choose what's true for you and why.

“As Baptists, we may not all agree, but we should be agreeable.”

— Quote shared by a participant re: Objective 4

It sets up incredible possibilities for soul freedom. You don't have to grow up in the church or come to belief in a particular way.

The 'Conventional' Baptist emphasis on personal salvation is not wrong, it's just not enough. Under a more progressive approach, our mission is not simply to live individually as Christians but to be about a collective faith that makes a difference in the world.

One participant grew up in a family where the general rule was about what you cannot do as a Baptist. Total abstinence from alcohol was taught and conversations about the narrowness of that stance were not entertained (the mother and 5 daughters signed a pledge to never drink alcohol).

Another noted the contrasts between The Gathering and CABF. He wasn't around when The Gathering was created but echoes and seismic waves could be heard/ felt in Nova Scotia due to the controversy in which it was founded.

By contrast, CABF was founded as a forum for reflection ... a longstanding 'ginger group'⁶ within the Convention.

Objective 4 is about being able to discuss, be open and engaged, partly to reclaim a little bit of that freedom and progressive thought that Baptists represented for many years in Canada until the 80s. “That's when we began to be influenced by American

⁶ A formal or informal group that works to alter the organisation's policies, practices or office-holders, while

still supporting its general goals.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ginger_group

Findings - The CABF Objectives

Reflections on #4 (cont'd)

models of evangelicalism which did not represent freedom for me”.

It is important not only from the perspective of Christians relating to one another, but also and increasingly relative to churches in relationship with the rest of society. One can find openness and more liberal views in the United Church for example, but you won't necessarily find any stronger connections with society or ability to relate the faith to the secular world.

Policy conversations around social justice can attract some people to CABF.

5 Resonates

To bear witness to these objectives with and among Baptists regionally as well as nationally and internationally

Objective #5 is the inclusive one and talks about representing all of these principles to others. That's what makes CABF stand out as a group.

It embraces Bible, church, religious and soul freedom and how we became to be Baptists in the first place.

It's what gave a road to the Black Baptist churches. Association was one of the most racist organizations that ever existed, because of the view that they hold and have others adhere around on race, gender, religious beliefs, spirituality, soul freedom, and so on.

Even the way that Black Baptist churches have participated in convention (was racist) ... although older than the Convention churches, they were tacked on as entertainment at the end of Convention sessions.

Objective #5 is inclusive of all the others and it speaks of relationships. You must have relationship to get collaboration and cooperation. We can't function as we want to unless multiple voices are included.

6 Resonates

To provide accreditation for clergy and chaplains

Objective 6 was important as we shifted from the ABF (which wasn't a credentialing body) to the CABF. It provides a platform for becoming something greater, resetting the DNA for future opportunities.

Younger people coming into clergy and attracted to CABF are asking questions that older clergy may not be. They also have different things to say to society.

Ontario participants understand that Objective 6 is really the only significant difference between old ABF life as a fellowship group within the larger denomination, and CABF; through its accrediting function, CABF recognizes itself as a denomination.

Having The Gathering in Ontario provides the freedom to provide accreditation for clergy and chaplains. It became a place of refuge for a lot of clergy who were burned by their experience of the Church and increasingly by their experience of the denomination and its authoritarianism.

Moving forward, CABF could play a role supporting those on the national landscape affiliated with other denominations where they feel constrained. We've only just begun to explore what that looks like.

Findings - The CABF Objectives

7 Resonates

To associate and co-operate with other like-minded organizations, such as the Atlantic Ecumenical Council, The Canadian Council of Churches, The Gathering of Baptists, and the Alliance of Baptists.

One participant who has been actively involved with ecumenical activities and the Canadian Council of Churches for over 30 years without Convention endorsement, appreciates this objective

The words 'associate' and 'cooperate' particularly resonate. "I'd love to see a body that can help us connect to other like-minded people who are doing these things

and know each other. One of our struggles is to know from whom we can learn, and with whom can we work. What does it mean to be church in 2018? What models are there in other progressive Baptist churches?"

Perhaps we should think 'denomi-network' instead of denomination. The (digital) platforms exist to network and cooperate across Canada and across the world.

CABF doesn't need to do all these things, but rather to point us and bring churches and groups together who are already doing them.

Other Comments around the Objectives:

The Autonomy of the Local Church. One participant pointed out that the autonomy of the local church, though implicit in many of these objectives, is not stated. He also noted that 14 years ago the Convention passed a resolution essentially saying that the autonomy of the local church is a secondary thing. That was the decision to tell the clergy that they if they performed same gender marriages, they would lose their right to marry.

This participant contends that that matter should have been a decision of the congregation in consultation with the local pastor and not a denominational-level decision. This is important because having the freedom to ask questions and explore issues facilitates the Christian doing some of their own growing without having to always agree with the pastor.

Synergies across Objectives 7 & 3? Whether #3 (*promote peace and understanding amongst people of all faiths*) would be the prime goal for The Gathering or CABF would require further dialogue, but #7 (*associate and co-operate with other like-minded organizations*) can be one step to help secure understanding of like-minded organizations and thereby supports achieving #3. In our society, where younger generations have had no connection with the church and think we're quite strange, this link could be key.

Findings – What we’re Building On

In your opinion, which of its accomplishments should the Association be building on as it prepares for the future?

Here is a significant take-away: Most of the ideas were contributed by those with relatively more experience with CABF. As you read their feedback, it has been noted that the issues of the 60s and 70s are not issues that the successor generation is ever likely to experience.

The younger generations cannot see the freedoms in the same way as the veterans do because they have not experienced the opposite. They are perceiving as their normal, the way that faith is practiced and church is done now with the freedoms secured. If the people coming behind us don’t get it, can’t see it, or don’t value it in some way, then sustainability will be a very real issue.

Accomplishments to build on (roughly in the order mentioned but not prioritized):

- i. The **Rushton Lecture**, the **Annual General Meeting** with speakers brought from outside the Canadian Baptist context, and associated discussions continue to bring people together. These have enlivened people’s minds and reinforced their convictions. Hopefully they go back as the ‘leaven in the loaf’, stimulating openness and inquiry.
- ii. The **Bulletin**
- iii. The **Website**
- iv. Our **accreditation process** that supports people who have discerned the call through to ordination and recognition (Echoed in Ontario). There are now about 15 people who get their accreditation through the CABF because it would be very difficult to do so through any of the Canadian Baptist conventions.

An example was cited of a military chaplain who works with those suffering from PTSD. He is also gay and Baptist but could not get any recognition from anybody except the CABF. After a proper examination, he was given accreditation and is serving that military population.
- v. The **KAIROS Blanket Exercise**⁷, a workshop that engages people’s minds and hearts in understanding why the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is often broken and how we can take action together.
- vi. The word that’s in the name and in the 1st Objective: ‘**freedom**’. Exercising the freedoms that were inherent in being Baptists from the beginning could build a bridge to the future. This should encourage us to reach out so that people can come with their questions beyond the confines of a church or a denomination.
- vii. Having **put aside our ‘anti’ feelings** ... being against things ... watching for things with which we don’t agree, etc. Rebellious groups either die, or mature and contribute. There’s a solid foundation of thoughtfulness and organization that allows us to proceed with expansive ideas.

⁷ <https://www.kairoscanada.org/the-blanket-exercise-video>

What we're Building On (cont'd)

- viii. **Relationships** that have been profoundly impactful. A benefit of CABF is getting together with other Baptists. As a fellowship over the years, CABF has staved off attrition, encouraging pastors and lay people to remain Baptists in their local congregations, even when they felt that perhaps they didn't fit well.
- ix. **Persistence as an independent voice** of principle within, without being swallowed up by Convention for over 40 years. The principles always went back to the 4 Baptist freedoms or the 8 Baptist distinctives. The essence: the individual's personal relationship with Christ; the relationship with the individual church being able to make its own decisions; and always maintaining an openness to listen and to speak (on topics like women in ministry).

Some have been impressed with the teaching that Baptists don't have to take a position against something as a denomination. Individual churches are autonomous; make their own choices, call their own ministers, and do not have a hierarchy.
- x. The power of its practice of **acceptance**. It doesn't matter who you are, your age, the colour of your skin, your sexual orientation or your gender. Just 2 things determine whether you should be part of the fellowship: that you are a believer in Jesus Christ; and, if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, you're interested in learning about it.
- xi. Our **real and tentative reach** across the country. The extension past Atlantic Canada into Ontario with 1st Baptist Brantford and Burlington. This should be built upon because in light of what's happening in CBOQ, there are churches that will experience more rigid expectations and loss of freedom. They will need to find somewhere to go; CBAF could provide them a home, show love and kindness, and offer them the freedom to be who they are.

This collaboration enables a lot of issues and opportunities to be advanced without having to re-invent the wheel or duplicate work.
- xii. Being a **viable, open organization** in an era where Baptists (e.g. in the U.S.) are divided. One of challenges will be to keep the sense of openness alive as our friends in the States separate further.

Findings – Contemporary Issues

A Briefing Note that accompanied the invitation set out a number of issues that CABF congregations and members face.

A. Freedom for LGBTQ Baptists called to prepare for ordained ministry, to have a denominational home, an affirming place to study, accreditation and eventually a job.
B. Freedom for Baptist congregations to have theological or social justice positions/policies at odds with their denomination and not be faced with their clergy losing accreditation and their Church being dis-fellowshipped with a loss of access to pension and insurance plans.
C. Freedom for Baptist clergy to speak out when their views differ from those of their Convention or Union without fear of being black-balled, or worse.
D. Freedom for theological education that meets the needs of Baptist Churches around issues of theology, worship, inclusion (language, gender identity, sexual orientation) etc.
E. Freedom for ecumenical and interfaith fellowship, engagement and common action.
F. Freedom to develop authentic biblical, theological and pastoral responses to social and ethical issues in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

We asked: Which of these would you say are relatively more important? and, What role might CABF play?

Most groups did not relate to differentiating amongst these as to their relative importance. They did, however, offer comment about all of them. They had to be reminded however that we wanted to know about CABF's perceived role.

Comments on Issue A⁸

Freedom for LGBTQ Baptists called to prepare for ordained ministry, to have a denominational home, an affirming place to study, accreditation and eventually a job.

More than one group felt that the scope of this one should be broadened somehow.

Regardless of lifestyle or any other issue, there are people that come from CABF or other Baptist churches who want to continue on in the freedoms.

The Accreditation Committee has no checklist or creed that you must assign yourself to. You don't have to declare where you are on which side of any issue. The key is helping people to

discern their call and supporting them in it if they feel that it leads them to some form of Christian ministry. Right now, that is the accreditation part of CABF.

Further, we have some who are in ministry but not ordained. It was suggested that this be modified to "Freedom for ~~LGBTQ~~ *those* Baptists called to prepare for ~~ordained~~ *practicing* ministry, ..."

⁸ As a matter of interest: there were at least 2 LGBTQ participants and another with 2 children who are gay.

Contemporary Issues - Issue A (cont'd)

Baptists have a distinct opportunity to share a perspective of openness and caring as our Lord did. One participant noted that in her opinion, 1st Baptist Halifax not only speaks its affirmation but practices it.

Another struggled with what was perceived as unnecessary specificity. “We are not a one issue group and want to broaden the role of CABF to be ‘radically inclusive’ and practice ‘radical hospitality’. They may or may not be LGBTQ. They may or may not be called to prepare for ordained ministry. They may or may not have Baptist backgrounds.”

For example, how do we re-integrate sex offenders and murderers into the wider community? What does it take to create and nurture radically inclusive communities that welcome and serve all, even those who are at odds with broader society?

If you are called to ministry, it is God who has done that. So in a way, narrowing down or

specifying issues or groups has an unintended effect of seeming *less* than all inclusive. Some would like to eliminate all labels and hope to be totally open.

However, it could be misguided to contend that we do or should not see colour, gender, race or any other difference. The Gospel does name disadvantaged groups. An option for reframing might be to use specificity but with openness to other categories:

e.g. “welcoming of everyone including, LGBTQ, _____, _____ and other groups historically excluded by many churches.”

Perhaps the question should be, “If you do see difference, what is the problem with it?”

CABF Role: In the context of CABF, there could be a conversation about *values* that the Association would advance. However, it was noted that the associated *actions* and decisions are carried out by the churches.

Comments on Issue B

Freedom for Baptist congregations to have theological or social justice positions/policies at odds with their denomination and not be faced with their clergy losing accreditation and their Church being dis-fellowshipped with a loss of access to pension and insurance plans.

The *freedom for Baptist congregations to have theological or social justice positions/policies* is very important because of all the Convention-related developments already identified.

If you leave Convention, having a safe place that is going to take care of pastors’ financial needs is important. The financial vehicle for that does not necessarily need to be church-based. For example, one participant indicated that the ACTRA Fraternal Benefit Society⁹, which provides insurance benefits and

investment services to 25,000 Canadian performers and screenwriters, has taken on some smaller customers.

CABF Role

1. Give people a home where they could have that freedom to speak out.
2. Continue to bring people together to have these kinds of conversations. Host weekend or evening training sessions about affirming and encouraging one another so that we have the energy to reach out.

⁹ <https://www.afbs.ca>

Contemporary Issues - Comments on Issue C

Freedom for Baptist clergy to speak out when their views differ from those of their Convention or Union without fear of being black-balled, or worse.

Interestingly, individuals and groups within the association should have the freedom of dissent relative to any of these issues.

Is this one essentially the same as Issue B? One concerns the congregation and the other concerns the clergy.

It doesn't necessarily need to be restricted to clergy. *Everyone* should have the right to voice their views. In that sense, C is included in B. Modify B to read, "Freedom for Baptist congregations *and their pastors* to have ..."

If there is a difference, C allows clergy to differ from the Convention, while B is anchored in social justice and theological issues.

'C' is the odd Issue amongst the list. It has a negative connotation with roots in our history, not of *being* over against but of having to *speak* to being over against. Nonetheless, it

does, along with all of the others, extol the notion of freedom.

The motion by 1st Orillia Baptist referenced earlier (see App. C), signals a general movement towards disciplining clergy and churches for holding specific views with which Convention disagrees. Objective #4 and Issue C are key to working through this kind of pressure so that people can voice their variety of opinions and to do so safely.

'C' is simply a Christian way of looking at respecting individual opinions whether held by clergy or by individuals. Ignoring it when clergy are "being black-balled, or worse" is enabling and won't help in any way. There is a need to get involved.

One participant doesn't like the term, "black-balled"¹⁰

Comments on Issue D

Freedom for theological education that meets the needs of Baptist Churches around issues of theology, worship, inclusion (language, gender identity, sexual orientation) etc.

This is very important that our clergy know what it means to be Baptist and are Baptist. If not, then there's a good chance that over time, congregations will lose that knowledge of what it means to be Baptist ... something that has been happening in Convention as we see a huge influx of clergy from other denominations.

"The Gathering was born in controversy and confronted the age-old choice of fight or flight. We chose to flee with no concerted effort to battle for control of the denomination. That calls for accreditation, education and shared worship¹¹ to play significant roles for the future".

¹⁰ Blackballing is a rejection in a traditional form of [secret ballot](#), where a white ball or [ballot](#) constitutes a vote in support and a black ball signifies opposition. A large supply of black and white balls is provided for voters. Each audibly casts a single ball into the [ballot box](#) under cover of the box, or of a combination of a cloth and the box itself, so that observers can see who votes but not how they are voting. When voting is complete, the box is

opened and the balls displayed: all present can immediately see the result, without any means of knowing which members are objecting. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackballing>

¹¹ You have numerous churches with nominal attendance and membership. There surely is value in getting together to have a much more satisfying worship that will minister to people because of the size of the gathering.

Contemporary Issues - Issue C (cont'd)

We must ensure that clergy and church members are getting quality Baptist education that's not indoctrination to a certain ideology ... balanced education that explains what both conservatives and liberals, as well as what the Bible says on key issues and allows them to come to terms with what they think.

While there are good educational facilities in Canada, one participant feels that here are not good *Baptist* educational facilities. There is no seminary in Ontario or even the Maritimes that another participant would feel comfortable recommending. Perhaps it's time for us to

look at setting up a seminary that can meet all students' needs. We have gifted people who could provide education.

Other alternatives would be to: (a) support people in ecumenical places where they would be happy (e.g. Toronto School of Theology and related Colleges, Union Theological Seminary); (b) develop partnerships with institutions that already have bricks, mortar, infrastructure and perhaps some programming that is suitable; or (c) determine how to deliver quality education on line.

Comments on Issue E

Freedom for ecumenical and interfaith fellowship, engagement and common action.

We buck the tide amongst Canadian Baptists by retaining an openness to ecumenical activities. The next step is inter-faith, and there is a formation occurring within Nova Scotia for an Inter Faith Council.

Perhaps we don't want to get into the institutional aspect of it, but openness to those of other faiths will represent an area of potential opportunity.

We cannot isolate ourselves in any way. We are not just members of a church but also members of a community in a bigger picture. Our behaviours in that world are just as

relevant as our regular attendance at work.

CABF has a chance to reflect a tolerance amongst other churches. The traditional churches still seem to be open, but (in the Amherst area) the younger generation of clergy coming out of other denominational institutions don't have that sense of tolerance; they are isolated to their own church and don't want interaction. There were a variety of theories but little clarity as to why this might be. CABF can promote interaction as being essential if the Christian church is going to survive.

There were no comments on Issue F

Freedom to develop authentic biblical, theological and pastoral responses to social and ethical issues in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect

The Facilitator asked, "Are there any other issues or trends in Canadian society or beyond that an organization with objectives like CABF's should be paying attention to?"

(in no particular order)

G. **Economic disparity.** Society and the Church should be looking at the increasingly huge gaps within the Atlantic provinces (and not just to open more food kitchens). Outreach and inclusion are needed.

Contemporary Issues Added

Economic disparity (cont'd)

- Helping to break the cycle of poverty and to introduce disadvantages people to the Church, (Some low-income people don't feel welcome because they perceive that you need to have money to go to church.)
- Addressing access issues (e.g. lack of transportation)
- Helping to introduce congregations to the issues that have never had exposure.
- Getting congregations out into the community.

As a society, we lack the kinds of faith-based influences that we had growing up. Some kids have no clue. The shift is such that we're almost subject to discrimination if we are part of a church. Children are afraid to say anything about their church at school. We need to find ways to bridge that somehow.

H. **Traditional mainstream churches are stumbling** to be relevant in the 21st century.

- There seems to be a **world-wide shift to greater conservatism and rigidity** ... e.g. the Southern/Northern Baptist rift. More local churches will be looking for a safe place where local autonomy and the various freedoms are valued. (This was echoed in Amherst.)
- Churches of all denominations are **slow to react to societal changes**. If we wish to incorporate more members of society into the churches, we must move faster.
- Core faiths from the 50's and 60's are **splintered and blurred** now. There seem to be more community churches without obvious denominational affiliations.

I. **A Need for Discipleship**. People in the pews need to tools to develop spiritual maturity (e.g. on discovering your gifts, what it means that God loves them, their view of the world, etc.)

J. **It's a different conversation for young people, student clergy and clergy who have never been a part of Convention**. They have never lived the perceived oppression or been stimulated to push back. They don't derive value from contrasting 'what we were' with 'what we are now'. They value the freedoms from different perspectives and other who lived that experience need to figure out how to break out of that dynamic.

K. **Caring for clergy**. Respite or pastoral care (not just programs) for the pastor. There are clergy that are being burnt out in their congregations; they are in intensive care so to speak, spiritually and emotionally. CABF could step into a caring mode and provide some form of retreat where clergy could come together to: discuss the issues; be brought up to date on modern/popular thinking, etc. Some feel that the duration should be a minimum of 5-days to be effective. This is an area that the Convention doesn't really adequately serve.

Further, during pastoral training, students have a **sponsor or mentor**, but that seems not to be the case after they begin their pastoral experience. A relationship based on mutual accountability could be really valuable if it included not only a retreat-type offering but also ongoing support (i.e. via video conference, a private Facebook account, etc.). It could

Contemporary Issues Added

Caring for clergy (cont'd)

provide support in times of personal or professional crises, through transitions, and for future planning.

It goes back to the relationships that make this possible.

- L. CABF could help build a recruitment process for filling pastoral vacancies.** Where does one start when a church has a vacancy? There is no formal way for congregations to find out whom they might want to consider or approach. (Informally, that was one of Charlie Taylor's functions because he kept tabs on everything. Today, every search committee is on their own.)

This is one role that might be played by a half-time Executive Director (who would presumably help support of all the strategies).

Expanding Individual & Church-based Membership

From its base of member Churches in Nova Scotia and Ontario, CABF is seeking to expand its individual and Church-based membership into every province and territory in Canada.

What should the Association's strategic priorities be over the next 3 to 5 years?

To chase the pan-Canadian vision, be relevant, be a source of aspiration to those who embrace to the objectives and value the freedoms, CABF's priorities should be (in no particular order):

- a. **To bring people together**, building on, increasing and promoting vehicles like the Rushton Lecture and the Annual General Meeting.
 - Be excited about who we are, what we believe in and where we're going, less about our history and away from being a refuge for cast-offs. Put the welcome flag out and talk about our ecumenical, inclusive, progressive visions for the future.
 - Pursue ecumenism because by its very nature it is inclusive. For multi-denominational leadership to be seen to be working together sends a message to the community and to the Convention leaders.
- b. **To tell our story.** We've kept the door closed. We've loved it, but there are others ... we don't know who they are ... who need to be brought in and to be loved by us. There might be a right time to step out (perhaps after this planning exercise, whether in response to some specific development or just to provoke thinking).
 - To reach out to others, we have to refine, define and be able to tell them who we are and what the possibilities are.
 - Be the spokesperson for openness. Continue to represent an open forum of the Baptist tradition ... open to social justice, open to diversity of gender and sexual

"Whoever tells the stories
defines the culture"

Dr. David Walsh

<http://drdavewalsh.com/posts/75>

Expanding Individual & Church-based Membership

To tell our story (cont'd)

orientation, open to dialogue and different theological perspectives in a variety of forms. Within itself affirming that, within the churches, and more broadly within the public sphere.

- Strive for effective communication and relationship. Be mature (not anti or negative about others), convinced of what we're trying to do and moving on with doing it. Define ourselves not by who we're not, but by who we are.¹²
- Communicate within our own CABF circles, within Baptist churches, and more broadly within the public.
- Be a voice for the voiceless. People need to know that there is an alternative.
- Get past the pastor in getting the word out. For example, find out how best to get the Bulletin distributed (there's some sense that it arrives at some churches but never gets to the members). Target sympathetic, reliable individuals to get them out.
- Use relationships and leverage optimal social media platforms to connect with younger generations.
- Have someone whose responsibility it is to communicate; have conversations with clergy, with persons from congregations, use some kind of instrument that goes by mail or social media.

c. **To think strategically, broadly, and claim a place on the national stage** for who it is we claim to be and what it is we have to offer to the wider church.

- We have something to offer nationally. It seems clear that there are few if any other Canadian organizations coming from the place that we are. The kinds of issues that 1st Baptist Halifax has already dealt with are now threshold issues for many other churches. Some of our Nova Scotia churches, in having already grappled with those issues, are moving on to carve out a future that resonates with younger people.
- Start to think outside of the constraints of being a Maritime-based organization and reach out. Expand the number of member churches west of the Maritimes, continuing to gather more like-minded churches and individuals (with Ontario considered a good beginning.)
- Be ready to provide a safe place for like-minded clergy, individuals and churches to freely associate in fellowship. There could be more provincial fallout at the Convention level in terms of a policy or relational tipping point that results in more and more churches needing a place to go. In light of what's happening in CBOQ, there are churches that will experience more rigid expectations and loss of freedom. They will need to find somewhere to go; CBAF could provide them a home, show love and

¹² Would CABF exist if Convention wasn't around?

Expanding Individual & Church-based Membership

To claim a place on the national stage (cont'd)

kindness, and offer them the freedom to be who they are. Leaving Convention should not be a CABF requirement for membership.

It might be wise to do some reconnaissance through relationships, to inventory like-minded individuals and churches so that if things start to unravel in their worlds, we won't be surprised at how many there are.

- Build that community across Canada through clergy relationship. When clergy are learning from each other and doing things together, that spills out into churches doing the same. We'll have a bigger voice then to speak out on social justice. It could also give strength to those who choose to stay in oppressive environments.
 - Have someone whose job it is to be the contact and oversee that growth. This would be key to demonstrating that this is a real CABF priority.
- d. **To look at starting some kind of educational initiative** to address what has been identified as a gap for those who need a broader knowledge including the Baptist freedoms.
- e. **To pursue pension and benefits plans** that can address barriers that keep clergy from exercising their freedoms or advocating local church autonomy. Embracing the CABF values, objectives and freedoms would be an expectation.
- f. **Organizationally, to:**
- Achieve more balance in the leadership and volunteer base. Right now, CABF is 1st Baptist Halifax-heavy. The Communications priority mentioned above should help to boost awareness and involvement across the membership outside Halifax and beyond.
 - Secure at least part time admin support to actively work the above, with an emphasis on marketing and communications.
 - To reinforce the legitimacy and value of the work, charge a fixed membership fee per church (not a free will/voluntary amount). Set the amount by working back from the costs associated with providing pensions and benefits and securing admin support.
 - For the sake of sustainability, strive to lower the average age of the members. Recruit, motivate and engage the next wave of leadership. Break the volunteer ask down into manageable, time-limited chunks of effort.
- g. **To keep a relationship growing with the Convention.** Our inclusiveness must include them. We must keep the doors of dialogue open to listen to both sides and to speak. Encourage a bigger umbrella, helping the rest of our Baptist family to be more open. Perhaps informally, get the message to them that Baptists can be an umbrella in this part

Expanding Individual & Church-based Membership

Keep a relationship growing with the Convention (cont'd)

of the world and include people like us (with CABF) that differ in substantial matters but who can still work together.

Some aspire to see CABF being respected as part of the broader work and not the Convention's enemy. For example, we should be trying to be and be received as a positive influence on diversity and inclusion for the wider group.

Collaboration with Like-minded Organizations.

One way to advance this pan-Canadian vision might be through collaboration with like-minded organizations.

What's your best advice on how to approach other organizations (including turning back in to the Convention) for the purposes of growing CABF?

- a. **Be clear about why we want to join with or work with another group.** Cross fertilization can be useful, but beyond that, there could be a lot of landmines around differences. It takes a lot of courage to give up something for the sake of a larger, shared purpose. We would need to be clear as to what that purpose is.

One train of thought is that the fact that we're stretched thinly is a reason to expand ... i.e. so that there will be more people to carry the workload.
- b. **Focus on how we can work together** ... on areas of cooperation we could explore ... with other groups (rather than on bringing them into our fold or being brought into theirs).

While it would be good for CABF to explore collaborative relationships with like-minded organizations, it doesn't mean that everybody who belongs to them has to join us.

We might manage to do some things together. The Ontario session echoed this thinking. An example would be the recent arrangement for a chaplain who is CABF credentialed to get a license to marry in Ontario.
- c. **Retain both strengths/emphases.** One person's observation was that The Gathering has been a safe place largely (though not exclusively or deliberately) *for pastors* to at least talk without fear of recrimination. CABF seems a little bit more like a place of refuge *for churches* that don't fit the mold. These emphases are not mutually exclusive; they have started from different places. One is meeting needs of a group of peers; the other is meeting needs of congregations.
- d. **Be clear about what CABF can do** in terms of nurturing inclusive churches, creating an ethos that welcomes and supports them and the clergy. Differentiate that from the ministry that has to be done at the local level; i.e. from what the local, inclusive churches of CABF can accomplish by reaching into the lives of young people and all sorts of devastating social realities.

Collaboration with Like-minded Organizations.

Be clear about what CABF can do (cont'd)

Share with like-minded groups, the common experiences we have. We've gone through struggles and some difficult decisions and perhaps have come to some conclusions.

There are lots of churches outside of our organization that are just coming to that threshold now with some uncertainty. They could use a bit of a guide (in the form of a person, a process or a document).

- e. **Get CABF members more involved with national, faith-based, inter-denominational organizations.** That would help make it clear that the Baptist denomination is not the same everywhere; that CABF represents a more progressive wing.

When we see a movement that makes sense with our theology, we need to get in, network and collaborate. It's timely to connect with environmental and human rights organizations. For example, the Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ)¹³, a Christian faith-based organization, was fascinated and encouraged by the fact that there is a link to their Web site on CABF's. Women's rights for example are prominent. The involvement of youth in the gun control lobby is a recent, high profile movement.

Try all provinces, but the west coast generally is a bit more progressive, so BC might be a better place to start than other provinces. "The prairies are scary."

- f. **In terms of governance structure**, create a federation model of organizations. There could be a point where western, central Canadian and Maritime/Atlantic Baptists would have some trouble getting along ... i.e. retaining a cohesive national view without also insisting on regional preferences. It is probably important for each of the entities to not be tied down by striving for a unified, homogenized structure. Therefore, the structure should be modeled on the idea of freedom and individuality.

That said, how do we create and sustain a model where being both together and separate, does not lead to redundancy, duplication and ultimately, burnout (given that our prevailing demographic is of the older generation)?

- g. **Contrary Minded?** A couple of Nova Scotia participants were unsure whether we're willing to put in the work needed to make expansion happen.
- To have individual members outside of Nova Scotia is easy. Having more churches outside of Nova Scotia and keeping those relationships vital will take a lot of work. There are many relationships to be explored in order for that to happen.
 - Why would we *want* to reach across Canada? There is so much work to do right here. If we're already spread thinly given what our Council is here, why spread more thinly? (One Ontario participant also talked of their stretched volunteer base.)
 - We could continue to expand our current base in the Maritimes as we delve into these other opportunities for ministry. Tell our story and increase our mass in the Maritimes. Then we'll be listened to.

¹³ <https://www.cpj.ca>

Conclusions

1. The dialogue guide generally seemed to work well¹⁴. Most respondents seemed to be engaged and provided relevant, useful insights.
2. Two segments (Core Objectives and Contemporary Issues), were used to gauge participants' knowledge of the organization and its perceived relevance going forward.
 - a. The level of engagement on the part of all but 1 group indicated a good grasp and valuing of CABF's Core Objectives.
 - b. Similarly, most groups could relate to the contemporary issues posed. They added others: e.g. economic disparity, a world-wide shift to greater conservatism and rigidity in mainstream churches, the need for different conversations with young people, student clergy and clergy who have never been a part of Convention.
 - c. Clergy's needs relative to the contemporary issues garnered significant attention. People see looking after the clergy as being central to advancing the freedoms.
 - d. The Bulletin, Web site, AGM and the accreditation process are recognized as foundations to build upon. Participants also named less concrete artifacts of CABF's value: freedom; profoundly impactful relationships; persistence as an independent voice; the practice of acceptance; and being a viable, open organization.
3. Concerning CABF's strategic direction, there were saturation points around a handful of potential priorities: bringing people together; telling our story; and pursuing pension and benefits. Others, though not as frequently cited (e.g. starting an educational initiative) could nonetheless be intriguing.
4. There are mixed views around *Expanding Individual & Church-based Membership* as a priority:
 - a. Nova Scotians tend to question the purpose and feasibility of expanding west.
 - b. Ontario and New Brunswick voices cite an impending exodus of pastors, individuals and churches from Convention and the need for a place of refuge and fellowship. They see Nova Scotia's experience as having the potential to facilitate their transition.
 - c. A significant proportion of older participants focused on the historic battle are weary. Younger people familiar with the cause are knowledgeable but not necessarily motivated to take up their parents' cause in the same way. Younger people unfamiliar with the freedoms and their history have no context; because they are looking to the future, very different means of inspiration, education and engagement will be needed.
 - d. Pieces of advice were offered concerning how to approach other organizations for the purposes of growing CABF.

Prepared by
Wayne A. Marsh

Independent Facilitation Services

¹⁴ Except for Question 3(a,) "Which of these Issues that CABF congregations and members face would you say are relatively more important?" Most groups did not relate to differentiating amongst the Issues as to their relative importance. They did however, offer comment about all of them.

Future Directions Briefing Note

The Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms (CABF) has begun work to set future directions and wants broad input from the beginning of the process. A series of independently-facilitated consultations will be held during March and April in Wolfville, Amherst, Halifax and Burlington/Brantford, Ontario.

In the rear-view mirror

Founded in 1971, the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship focused on issues of Baptist freedom, identity and autonomy *within* the Convention (now Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada). Specifically:

- ✓ Local church autonomy, especially supporting congregations with “open membership”;
- ✓ Soul freedom, stressing freedom for biblical interpretation and affirming diversity;
- ✓ Ecumenism, maintaining local, regional and national relationships with other Christian Churches through local Councils of Churches, the Atlantic Ecumenical Council and the Canadian Council of Churches;
- ✓ Affirming women in ordained ministry;
- ✓ Considering doctrinal and ethical questions, social issues and policies, theological education, and the life and witness of the Church in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect (via conferences, the Vincent Rushton Memorial Lecture and the *Bulletin*); and
- ✓ Strong relationships of fellowship and mutual strength among our members, with the Gathering (Ontario) and the US-based Alliance of Baptists.

The ABF incorporated as the Canadian Association for Baptist Freedoms in 2013 and became a full member of the Canadian Council of Churches.

Today, the CABF:

- Continues the emphasis on fellowship and open dialogue through conferences, the Rushton Lecture and the *Bulletin*;
- Credentials and ordains clergy, including those whom the Conventions associated with Canadian Baptist Ministries rejects for ordination or accreditation for reasons of progressive theology, pastoral openness to full inclusion of LGBTQ persons, or sexual orientation; and
- Guides seminary students in their preparation for ministry, no matter their sexual orientation.

CABF has thirteen member congregations, including two in Ontario, and 65-70 individual members.

Tomorrow?

CABF congregations and members face a number of issues as we look to the future. We’re wondering how important they are to you, and what role you think CABF can play relative to:

- A. Freedom for LGBTQ Baptists called to prepare for ordained ministry, to have a denominational home, an affirming place to study, accreditation and eventually a job.
- B. Freedom for Baptist congregations to have theological or social justice positions/policies at odds with their denomination and not be faced with their clergy losing accreditation and their Church being dis-fellowshipped with a loss of access to pension and insurance plans.

Future (cont'd)

- C. Freedom for Baptist clergy to speak out when their views differ from those of their Convention or Union without fear of being black-balled, or worse.
- D. Freedom for theological education that meets the needs of Baptist Churches around issues of theology, worship, inclusion (language, gender identity, sexual orientation) etc.
- E. Freedom for ecumenical and interfaith fellowship, engagement and common action.
- F. Freedom to develop authentic biblical, theological and pastoral responses to social and ethical issues in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

The Consultations

The format will be an informal group conversation led by Mr. Wayne Marsh, our independent facilitator. He will prepare an anonymous summary of findings for our Council's attention. We look forward to your thoughts as we reflect carefully on our future directions in the context of these kinds of issues.

Here are the dates, times and locations:

Wolfville:	April 7 th
Port Williams	April 8 th (Younger Adults)
Halifax	April 11 th
Burlington ON	April 21 st
Amherst	April 24 th
Amherst	April 24 th

Questions? Kindly contact _____

Otherwise, RSVP with how many will be attending to _____

Consultations Dialogue Guide

Purpose of these consultations: To inform the Association's strategic planning process so that its Vision, Mission and Strategic Priorities are both relevant and aspirational.

1. Introductions:
 - a. "Hi, my name is ..."
 - b. How long traveling in Baptist circles
 - c. Extent of familiarity with CABF
2. The Association's Objectives were pre-circulated with the invitation (see also p. 2 of this handout)
 - a. Which of these particularly resonate for you (and why)?
 - b. In your opinion, which of its accomplishments should the Association be building on as it prepares for the future?
3. A Briefing Note that accompanied the invitation set out a number of v. (also on p. 2)
 - a. Which of these would you say are relatively more important and what role might CABF play?
 - b. Are there any other issues or trends in Canadian society or beyond that an organization with objectives like CABF's should be paying attention to?
4. From its base of member Churches in Nova Scotia and Ontario, CABF is seeking to expand its individual and Church-based membership into every province and territory in Canada.
 - a. What should the Association's strategic priorities be over the next 3 to 5 years?
 - b. One way to advance this pan-Canadian vision might be through collaboration with like-minded organizations. What would be your advice to CABF leadership should they explore those possibilities?

CABF (Core) Objectives

1. To witness to the freedom implicit in the voluntary principle in religion, which is a fundamental tenet of historic identity.
2. To affirm and celebrate Baptist participation in, and witness to, the whole visible, catholic and evangelical church of Jesus Christ;
3. To promote peace and understanding amongst people of all faiths;
4. To provide a forum for the discussion of doctrinal and ethical questions, and social issues and policies in that spirit of tolerance and mutual respect which issues from Christian love;
5. To bear witness to these objectives with and among Baptists regionally as well as nationally and internationally;
6. To provide accreditation for clergy and chaplains;
7. To associate and co-operate with other like-minded organizations, such as the Atlantic Ecumenical Council, The Canadian Council of Churches, The Gathering of Baptists, and the Alliance of Baptists.

Illustrative Issues & Trends

CABF congregations and members face a number of issues as we look to the future. We're wondering how important they are to you, and what role you think CABF can play relative to:

- A. Freedom for LGBTQ Baptists called to prepare for ordained ministry, to have a denominational home, an affirming place to study, accreditation and eventually a job.
- B. Freedom for Baptist congregations to have theological or social justice positions/policies at odds with their denomination and not be faced with their clergy losing accreditation and their Church being dis-fellowshipped with a loss of access to pension and insurance plans.
- C. Freedom for Baptist clergy to speak out when their views differ from those of their Convention or Union without fear of being black-balled, or worse.
- D. Freedom for theological education that meets the needs of Baptist Churches around issues of theology, worship, inclusion (language, gender identity, sexual orientation) etc.
- E. Freedom for ecumenical and interfaith fellowship, engagement and common action.
- F. Freedom to develop authentic biblical, theological and pastoral responses to social and ethical issues in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

CBOQ Resolution

On Thursday, June 7th, 2017, a motion (printed below) was referred to the CBOQ Board of Directors by Assembly. The Board met on Friday, June 8th and directed Tim McCoy, Executive Minister to consider the motion as he and staff develop a plan addressing issues and challenges which may include social, philosophical and theological perspectives related to CBOQ identity and beliefs. The Board is scheduled to receive and discuss the Executive Minister's proposed plan at its fall 2017 meeting.

The Board will bring an update on CBOQ identity and beliefs to Assembly 2018. Motion from First Baptist Church Orillia at the June 7th CBOQ Assembly

"In recognition that our current covenant, membership requirements and policies are not adequate for the new challenges we are facing as a family of CBOQ churches we propose that a committee be struck with the following mandate:

- i. To study, discuss and detail how churches can reach out to LGBTQ persons in love and Gospel concern without contradicting the clear teachings of the Bible concerning the sinfulness of homosexual behaviour and the essential goodness of God's design for sexuality and gender.*
- ii. To adapt and update as necessary the document known as "This We Believe" towards the end of it serving as a summary of our core doctrines and practices and as the standard for church and clergy discipline within the CBOQ.*
- iii. To submit updated policies, covenant agreements and membership requirements in light of the above.*

It is further proposed that said committee have representation from the full spectrum of CBOQ churches and that it be chaired by the Executive Minister Tim McCoy. The committee to report and to present the above requested documents for general discussion by March 1st 2018 towards the end of affirmation and adoption at Assembly 2018."



Other Thoughts

There were ideas that emerged during the sessions that did not obviously slot into sections of the Dialogue Guide. Rather than lose them altogether, they are gathered here in the order in which they emerged.

1. **We are not known well enough.** Looking back, perhaps we failed in what we set out to do by not explaining who we are more effectively and our positions to the Convention as well as we might have (acknowledging that they too have the freedom to disagree).

Ordination will resurface as an issue at Convention and CABF can expect to be attacked. We should be explaining that while we disagree, we would still like to be part of a broad church if they will accept us with our differing views. (N.B. the 'failure' was in not having them accept us because we failed to explain our position.)

There are misperceptions which make it hard to gain support in the local church for CABF (e.g. we're all about inclusiveness).

People were making decisions at Convention because they did not understand the points that we were making; a non-thinking, ill informed 'herd' reaction.

2. **How do we effectively communicate the principles under which we function?** It's interesting that by and large, in some areas of Nova Scotia, we have some churches that are indicative of open membership. We have a few that have taken the step of inclusiveness. But when we look at the Baptist family in Atlantic Canada, we definitely are a very small minority.

We have generated a lot of attention within the Baptist family ... at the past 2 AGMs, via dialogue about medical assistance in dying and reconciliation with indigenous people. These are social issues that the Convention might not consider specifically faith related but that help establish a process and a mind to see and through the agency of the Holy Spirit to understand and address injustice.

People are beginning to see that this is opening doors to see where the Spirit is leading us. That said, we don't know how many people in Baptist churches are 'sitting on' curiosities and questions that they dare not raise and don't even know about the freedoms or that CABF exists.

3. **High school students are very inclusive and accepting** of all people. They don't care about denominational issues or brands. That's where the future is. We are heading in the right direction while others are not. Churches need to get on board.
4. **First Baptist Halifax is the trailblazer across** Canada because it is one of the first to step out ecumenically as Baptists and not just in its thinking but in training (she's a grad of Atlantic School of Theology) and to go with same gender marriage. That's been a foundation that keeps me going.

While 1st Baptist is blazing trails, we must make it clear that CBF is more than 1ST Baptist Halifax.

5. **On Relationships.** Baptists tend to be ‘associational’ people. A lot of people at 1st Baptist Halifax would have had a history of very strong relationships at Convention. We have that sense of community through the Halifax Region United Baptists Association, many people would really relish that couple of days spent with other Baptists from across the Maritimes. No longer being a part of that will be felt as a gaping hole that needs something else to replace it.

Baptist clergy really only see each other twice per year.

6. **Growing up Baptist, you might not even realize how exclusive the membership was.** For example, you wouldn’t get to the table as a member of the LGBTQ community, let alone to discuss LGBTQ issues at the table. The focus on the gospels was foundational but effectively meant church goers did not encounter these issues and did not really understand them unless you went outside the culture to study.

7. **There’s a need for a body like ours.** During the search for new clergy for 1st Baptist Halifax, there were many conversations with people across the country. It was surprising how many people were sympathetic to who we are and were affiliated with other denominations where they felt constrained. They share our values, but they think that they are alone in larger denominational entities where they can’t talk freely about what they really value.

CABF is a valuable organization and we want it to stick around. However, we need to avoid it becoming an exclusive organization (“We’re better than you.” “We’re more inclusive than you”).

8. **The history of Baptist schisms in Atlantic Canada** is not one of separating over open liberal, it’s more over rigid doctrinal points.
9. **What does the term ‘association’ mean?** Is it simply a term used to deliver on the legal aspects of incorporation? Or is the essence more/different than that? For over 400 years, Baptists have always ‘associated’ for mutual ministry and mission. It is a bottom-up dynamic that sees churches volunteering to work together on things that couldn’t be done alone. If we’re intending to grow the ‘association’, what does that look like?

For a vital future that’s going to engage more people. If we can pretty quickly own some of these values, then what are we going to do and how are we mobilizing our churches and people in those churches to be forming those partnerships to get out into the world.

10. **Inclusion means** reaching ‘in’, not having to reach out. We. You’re so included that I see who you are; I understand, empathize, and have already welcomed you. The openness is what people trust. They are what matter when people are hurting.
11. **There is a paradox in emphasizing and practicing openness.** The effect of it is to be closed off by those who do not believe in openness.

12. The Deacon's Board at First Brantford Church discussed the 'tomorrow' visions which accompanied the invitation to this session and was very comfortable with them.

13. The Gathering as a denomination. The Gathering might consider having member churches but they haven't moved in that direction yet because they haven't seen themselves becoming a denomination. Recent meetings have attracted about 30 people whereas in years past, about 75 to 100 would come out. There might be some growth in those numbers if recent Convention intentions persist. And the Gathering might have to consider the matter of becoming a denomination quickly if the Orillia motion mentioned earlier garners significant support.

14. National reach. It is understood that CABF incorporated only in Nova Scotia, which could compromise its ability to function nationally. The Gathering incorporated nationally and could start relating to other provinces, which might be something that could help CABF through collaborative initiatives.

The Gathering is aware of a pastor in Edmonton, one in Saskatoon, and a church in B.C. who are very close to us in terms of their feelings in relation to their respective denominations. They are looking for a place where they can have some support.

15. We should be thinking of religion as unfolding. It can't be stagnant or staying in one place because people don't and society doesn't. We have to prepare by moving religion forward as well.