

**Same-Sex Marriage**  
**Resources for Churches**

Prepared by the

**Baptist Convention of  
Ontario and Quebec**



**April 2004**

## Introduction

Issues related to sexuality and marriage have been prominent in our Canadian setting for a number of years. As followers of Christ, we are called to live faithfully in accordance with the truth God has revealed through the Bible. We are also called to demonstrate God's compassion and love for each person, without regard to gender, race, or any other distinctions and to respect them as persons made in the image of God. To accomplish this we need God's wisdom and grace.

At our 2004 Assembly we will have opportunity to express our views as a family of churches and make decisions about our collective response to same-sex marriages.

A number of concerns have been expressed surrounding this issue. For instance, some emphasize morality and what the Bible says about sexual relationships and practice. Others emphasize justice and what the Bible says about our response to all people. Another concern is how we work together as a convention of churches. Each issue is important and relates to the others. Let us dialogue together with respect and Christ-like grace as we prayerfully discern God's leading and work together for the greater mission of bringing each person into relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Recent Assembly Decisions

### Assembly 1988

In 1988 the BCOQ Assembly considered a significant report entitled "Sexual Orientation: Ministry and Human Rights" and passed the following resolution:

As Christians we affirm that the Biblical ideal for sexual relationships is within a permanent monogamous heterosexual union. Marriage is the foundation of both family and society, and this pattern, ordained by God at creation, must be upheld.

Homosexual sexual expression clearly deviates from this Biblical pattern, and is strongly condemned in Scripture. We therefore assert that homosexual behaviour is unacceptable in the sight of God, since it is contrary to Scriptural principles of morality and family life.

Although homosexual practice is sinful, condemnation and rejection of a homosexual person is also sinful. It is based on fear and prejudice and has no place in the church.

We affirm both God's love for the homosexual person and promise of the liberating, healing and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit that is available to the person struggling with homosexuality.

As the body of Christ, we are called to minister God's love and forgiveness to the homosexual person and, through prayer, encouragement and counsel, to facilitate the work of the Spirit in her/his life.

We believe that the good of society is served by upholding heterosexuality in law and public policy.

WHEREAS as Christians we cannot participate in, or condone, unfair arbitrary discrimination of any group or individual, we therefore must oppose any such discrimination against homosexual people in areas of basic civil rights such as employment and housing, and where there is evidence of such discrimination, we encourage our elected representatives to address the problem through modifications of specific, relevant legislation;

AND WHEREAS the legislative bodies of Ontario and Quebec have amended their respective Human Rights Codes to include “sexual orientation” as a prohibited basis of discrimination, and the Federal government has expressed a desire to introduce the same amendment into the Canadian Human Rights Act;

AND WHEREAS these amendments appear to:

- a) grant special status to a particular lifestyle, and elevate it to the same level as “morally neutral” characteristics such as race, religion, age and sex, and thus change the purpose and intent of the legislation;
- b) open the door to fundamental alterations in our society’s view of family, education and social services;
- c) open the possibility of legitimizing sexual behaviour beyond the present intentions of our legislators, by not defining “sexual orientation”;
- d) intrude on the freedom of conscience and practice of many religious organizations and individuals;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec regrets the inclusion of the words “sexual orientation” in the Human Rights Codes of Ontario and Quebec, and opposes their addition to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT we call upon the churches of our Convention to pursue actively ministry to the homosexual person sharing God’s love, forgiveness and healing.

(BCOQ Year Book, 1987-88, pp. 141-2)

### **Assembly 2003**

A further resolution with respect to marriage was passed at the Assembly in 2003:

In view of recent court decisions respecting same-sex marriages in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, and particularly the Ontario Court of Appeal decision handed down on June 10, 2003 legalizing same-sex marriages immediately,

We, the delegates to the 115th Annual Assembly of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec

AFFIRM:

1. The dignity and value of all persons regardless of sexual orientation;
2. That marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life to the exclusion of all others;
3. That sexual intercourse is to be confined to one man and one woman in marriage;  
and
4. That all the appropriate rights and benefits should be accorded to all other relationships recognized in law.

We encourage the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec Council and Staff to continue to work closely with our Canadian Baptist partners through Canadian Baptist Ministries, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and the Canadian Council of Churches in making cooperative representations to various levels of government on this issue of same-sex marriage.

We call upon the Federal Government:

1. To appeal the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal;
2. To uphold and reaffirm the current legal definition of marriage as that between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others; and
3. To respect the role of Parliament as the elected body responsible for establishing public policy and the laws of the land.

We further call upon the Ontario Government not to register same-sex marriages until the Federal Government has been able to pass legislation on this issue. If the Ontario Court of Appeal decision is upheld we call upon the government to respect the religious convictions of those holding licenses to marry but who refuse to marry same-sex couples.

### **Council Action**

In light of the Ontario Appellate Court decision to legalize same-sex marriage, and in response to requests from a number of pastors and churches, an Advisory Team was convened to make recommendations to the Division of Pastoral Resources and the BCOQ Council. At their September 2003 meeting, BCOQ Council passed a motion that included a directive to accredited clergy advising them not to perform same-sex marriages. See *Appendix A*.

This resource, intended to facilitate our discussion on this issue, is presented in four sections:

1. Resources for Biblical Understanding
2. Resources for Pastoral and Congregational Care
3. Legal Considerations
4. Baptist Polity

The Board has affirmed these resolutions and Council Action, but now needs clear direction from Assembly before continuing to uphold the directive.

While our society has moved away from an understanding that homosexual practice is sinful, as a Convention of Churches we have affirmed that the Scriptures teach that it is. Same-sex marriage is a further departure from the Biblical ideal and all such departures from God's vision of human sexuality are harmful both to the individuals involved and to our society as a whole. Though we regret that we have come to this point as a society we must courageously, lovingly and truthfully declare our understanding of the will of God on these matters as part of our missionary mandate to be light and salt to our society.

## 1. Resources for a Biblical Understanding of Homosexuality

There are numerous resources available to individuals and churches to help them come to a clear Biblical understanding of homosexual practices. We are listing but a few for your consideration.

According to Lois Mitchell, Public Witness and Social Concerns of CABC/CBM

“Books that deal with the subject of homosexuality - particularly those which are written from a Christian perspective – tend to fall in one of two streams. There are those, which begin with the assumption that homosexuality – and specifically homosexual *practice* – is contrary to God’s design and will for healthy human sexual expression. Then there are those, which begin with the assumption that homosexuality – and specifically homosexual *orientation* - is a biologically determined and therefore unchangeable human characteristic and therefore homosexual practice is a perfectly reasonable, healthy and acceptable variety of human sexual expression, even from a Christian perspective. Regardless of what variations are presented, in the end, writings on homosexuality all fall in one camp or the other.”

Recognizing that we are all broken and sinful, as your elected Board we support and affirm the interpretation of Scripture that homosexual practice is contrary to God’s revealed will. So that you might be aware of the arguments being made by those Christians who hold that homosexual practice is an acceptable human sexual expression, we have included some additional resources under Section B should you wish to study that position further

### A. Homosexual Practice Is Not Acceptable

#### **A Strong Delusion: Confronting the ‘Gay Christian’ Movement**

Joe Dallas (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996) \* specifically addresses theological issues  
Written by a former member of the pro-gay church movement, this book gives clear and forthright rebuttals to "gay theology" issues. It offers the responses in simple, clear, and very logical terms, while taking a powerful, straightforward look at the growing acceptance of homosexuality in the evangelical community. This is a truthful, yet compassionate and practical guide to communicating with those who have embraced pro-gay theology, including some very wise suggestions of dos and don'ts when engaged in a debate over homosexuality.

#### **Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate**

Stanton Jones & Mark Yarhouse (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001)  
Stanton Jones, provost of Wheaton College and Mark Yarhouse, assistant professor at Regent University address issues where false statements have recently been accepted as truth. This is a valuable resource for people called to take a strong advocacy position for traditional Christian teaching. This book will help readers steer clear of weak and emotional arguments that sound good at first but in the end turn out to be counterproductive.

### **The Bible and Homosexual Practices: Texts and Hermeneutics**

by Robert A.J. Gagnon (Abingdon Press 2001)

This is the most comprehensive and scholarly up-to-date treatment of the biblical texts that are generally associated with homosexual practice and of the arguments used to interpret them. Gagnon contends that the Bible unequivocally defines same-sex intercourse as sin."

### **The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics**

by Richard Hays (HarperCollins 1996)

How do we relate the Bible to everyday life and such pressing contemporary issues as violence, homelessness, divorce, homosexuality, and abortion? One of the leading N.T. thinkers finds coherent patterns and approaches sometimes similar to O.T. codes, sometimes significantly different.

### **How Is Homosexuality Understood in Scripture, Tradition, and in Contemporary Theology?**

Paper by Edith M. Humphrey, Augustine College (available at [www.augustinecollege.org/papers/EH\\_00\\_3.htm](http://www.augustinecollege.org/papers/EH_00_3.htm))

### **The Marriage Issue** by Lois Mitchell

This is a multi-media resource which looks at this issue from a variety of angles: the political and legal context, social considerations, a theological foundation, and thoughts and suggestions as to how Christians might effectively engage our culture on this issue. This resource is provided by Canadian Baptist Ministries and BCOQ.

## **B. Homosexual Practice Is Acceptable**

### **BPFNA "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth"**

The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and The Alliance of Baptists have jointly developed a resource whose purpose is to encourage local congregations to undertake intentional conversations on the subject of sexual orientation and Christian faith and to support those churches in their efforts.

This material was collected in a August 26-28, 1999, retreat for leaders from 15 such congregations led by Rev. Mahan Siler, retired pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC; April Baker, a member of the BPFNA board of directors, from Chapel Hill, NC; and Rev. Brenda Moulton, pastor of Chestnut Hill Baptist Church, Exeter, RI, and coordinator of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists.

The resource also includes a basic set of resource materials - most of which are reprinted from existing sources - including one or more brief articles focused on:

- Bible study
- Theological Reflection
- Scientific/Medical/Psychological information on questions of sexual orientation
- Personal Testimonies/Reflections of gay and lesbian Baptists and their families and friends
- Statements from Baptist and other Christian institutions
- Sermons and Meditations

- An Annotated Bibliography, with descriptions and ordering information of additional print and audio-visual resources which local church leaders could consider using (BPFNA material)

### **What the Bible Really Says?: Top Scholars Put Homosexuality in Perspective**

Author: Daniel A. Helminiak, Foreword by: John S. Sprong (Alamo Square Press, 1994) Daniel A. Helminiak respected theologian and Roman Catholic priest explains in clear fashion the fascinating new insights of top scholars who show that those who perceive Bible passages as condemning homosexuality are being misled by faulty translations and poor interpretations.

### **The Bible and 'Lifestyles'**

Author: Dr. Raymond Hobbs 2000

“This study is written to a large extent in response to the current dilemma [*in the BCOQ churches*]. It is not offered as an academic treatise on homosexuality. Nor is it intended to address all the points of the modern debate, but restricts itself to three important ones. The first is the use of the Bible in the debate among Christians. In discussions about ethics, recourse is often made to the Bible to decide the argument or to defend a position. On some issues the Bible is helpful, on others not, and on others confusing. On the matter of homosexuality, the Bible is less than helpful because it does not know of the existence of ‘sexual orientation’. The second point to be looked at is why this is an issue now within the BCOQ and other church bodies, and thirdly is what scholars call hermeneutics, that is, how do we interpret what the Bible states for modern living as Christians.” (Raymond Hobbs [*italics added*])

### **Further resources**

Further resources may be found at [www.vancouver.anglican.ca](http://www.vancouver.anglican.ca) and follow the links to Blessing of Same-sex Unions, Archives, Faith and Doctrine Commission.

## 2. Resources for Pastoral and Congregational Care

The resources and references included here provide an introduction to the subject of pastoral and congregational care for those who are either dealing with their own homosexuality or who are experiencing the challenges of understanding and responding as Christians to homosexual persons and same-sex marriage issues.

We encourage congregations and pastors to actively explore the issues regarding homosexuality and same-sex marriage and to adopt a healing and redemptive ministry to those struggling with homosexuality and their Christian faith or seeking a Christian response to homosexuality and same-sex marriage issues.

The ultimately compassionate thing to do is to teach that homosexual practice is sinful and that persons struggling with homosexuality, along with all of us in our brokenness, need the full redemptive power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To declare homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle greatly reduces the ability for individuals to hear and receive the truth of the gospel, which changes lives and empowers people to live lives pleasing before God. Pursuing a lifestyle of homosexuality is to live outside of God's vision of human sexuality, which brings greater harm and destruction to the individual and to our society as a whole.

One reference (*Transforming Congregations* website) identifies the key aspects of a redemptive ministry as seeking to:

- Affirm the Biblical position that God loves all persons, and that, while we consider homosexual practice as contrary to God's will for us, the Holy Spirit is available to transform all persons – including homosexual persons.
- Minister to persons struggling with homosexuality, their families, and all others affected by homosexuality as partners in Christ's work of healing.
- Call the church community to create an enlightened atmosphere of love and openness toward homosexual persons and to avoid adopting responses, which would ignore or reject the homosexual person or which would accommodate and accept homosexual practice.
- Integrate all persons striving to live as honest, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ into full membership in the church community.

As an introduction to exploring the congregational/pastoral issues associated with homosexuality and same-sex marriage, we urge you to access and read the articles listed. Information on accessing these resources through the Internet is included. This material will point to further study and steps (key resources are highlighted below) which can help equip congregations, pastors and leaders for addressing issues and developing a redemptive ministry.

### **Introducing the topic of pastoral / congregational care**

1. Bergner, Mario "The Not-So-Gay Lifestyle – Pastoral care for homosexuals who want out" in *Leadership Journal*, Winter 2004  
([www.christianitytoday.com/le/2004/001/7.42html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2004/001/7.42html))
2. "What can I as a pastor do?" "How do I help my church respond to homosexuality?" "Homosexuality: is your church hiding or healing?" Articles on the *New Direction for Life* website  
([www.newdirection.ca/users/churches.htm](http://www.newdirection.ca/users/churches.htm))

3. "God grabbed hold of me" Article in *Pathway* March / April 2004 on the *New Direction for Life* website (address above)
4. "Questioning homosexuality" Resource sheet #1011, Revised Nov. 2001, 100 Huntley Street ministry ([www.100huntley.com/resource/homosex.htm](http://www.100huntley.com/resource/homosex.htm))
5. *Transforming Congregations* website ([www.transformingcong.org](http://www.transformingcong.org))
6. Jaunzarins, Loretta and Remus, Harold (compilers) *Bibliography: Homosexuality and Christianity*, October 2003. ([www.telc.ca/pdf/LJ\\_bibliography.pdf](http://www.telc.ca/pdf/LJ_bibliography.pdf))

### **Study materials, guides for congregational groups or individuals**

1. Gaede, Beth Ann, ed. *Congregations Talking About Homosexuality: Dialogue on a Difficult Issue*. New York: The Alban Institute, 1998.
  - A practical handbook to help congregations discuss homosexuality and issues, aimed at assisting pastors and lay leaders
2. Buck, Erwin. *Studies on Homosexuality and the Church*, Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 2001 ([www.telc.ca/conversations.html#studies](http://www.telc.ca/conversations.html#studies))
  - A series of 5 studies suitable for use by groups or individuals which explore issues regarding homosexuality and the Christian faith
3. Geis, Sally B., and Donald E. Messer, eds. *Caught in the Crossfire: Helping Christians Debate Homosexuality*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994
  - Includes divergent points of view. Each chapter concludes with questions to stimulate individual thought, group discussion
4. Cantlon, Christopher L. and Pauline A. Thompson, eds. *An Honourable Estate: Marriage, Same-Sex Unions and the Church. A Study Guide*. The Anglican Book Centre, 1998
  - Guide for group discussion purposes
5. Wink, Walter, ed. *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999
  - Chapters on a variety of issues relevant to churches and the Christian faith
6. Paulsell, William, ed. *Listening to the Spirit: A Handbook for Discernment*. Disciples of Christ, 2001 (order from [www.chalicepress.com](http://www.chalicepress.com))
7. Marriage Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice. *On Marriage and the Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Unions* February 13, 2003. Evangelical Fellowship of Canada ([www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca))
8. *Journey Together Faithfully - A Call to Study and Dialogue: Part Two The Church and Homosexuality*. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2003 ([www.elca.org/faithfuljourney](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney))

### **Counselling / pastoral care**

1. Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care of Gays, Lesbians and their Families*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999
2. Culbertson, Philip. *Caring for God's People: Counseling and Christian Wholeness*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000

### **Christian organizations offering assistance**

1. New Direction for Life Ministries of Canada ([www.newdirection.ca](http://www.newdirection.ca))
2. Exodus International ([www.exodusinternational.org](http://www.exodusinternational.org))
3. Focus on the Family ([www.family.org](http://www.family.org))
4. Redeemed Life Ministries ([www.redeemedlives.org](http://www.redeemedlives.org))
5. Youth - New Direction for Life Ministries of Canada ([www.newdirection.ca/users/youth.htm](http://www.newdirection.ca/users/youth.htm))

### 3. Legal Considerations

The legalization of same-sex marriages has ramifications for local churches. Churches that have not developed a faith statement or policies regarding marriage, pastor/staff involvement in marriage ceremonies and facility use, are at greater risk of not being able to defend actions contrary to new marriage laws.

As an introduction, we recommend that you read and consider, at minimum, the two articles cited below. Each church needs to take responsibility to formulate suitable policies, which may require legal counsel. **These articles are for information only and are no substitute for legal advice.**

#### **Resource 1:**

**Charity Law Bulletin No. 31, December 17, 2003, Carter & Associates, *Same Sex Marriage: What Churches and Religious Organizations can do in Response*, by Terrance S. Carter.**  
([www.carters.ca/pub/article/charity/2003/chylb31.pdf](http://www.carters.ca/pub/article/charity/2003/chylb31.pdf))

This 14-page bulletin has 3 main parts. The first 7 pages give a brief but very helpful overview of the recent developments in the courts regarding same-sex marriage as well as human rights legislation. The next 5 pages outline various areas for congregational consideration including: constitution review, statement of faith/beliefs, how membership is defined, by-laws and/or policy statements for marriages and facilities usage. The last 2 pages are a summary of the main points.

*Appendix B*

#### **Resource 2:**

***Defending Marriage*, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada** ([www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca))

On the website there is an article called *Defending Marriage*. Under the heading “Policy Development” guidance is given regarding the development of policies. Here you will find some useful helps in beginning to draft policies related to both marriage and facilities usage. We are including this section in this material for easy access. See *Appendix C*.

## 4. Baptist Polity

### A. Freedom of Conscience/Soul Liberty

Baptists have always stood for freedom of conscience and soul liberty. We have contended for freedom of conscience for all: that is, that everyone should be free to serve God as he or she feels constrained to by God. However, this does not mean that Baptist churches are loosely organized groups of freethinkers. Early Baptists were people who walked in covenant with each other under God. Their covenants meant that the common good limited their individual freedom. Should individuals have found themselves unable to agree with their church on matters that the church deemed important for its life, they were free to withdraw from the church and practice their beliefs in another fellowship. The church was also free to withdraw its fellowship from one who could not accept the common rule. Such an action preserved both freedom of conscience and the integrity of the church.

The BCOQ is a convention of churches that has established standards to which we hold our pastors accountable. When a pastor is granted accreditation by the BCOQ, that pastor accepts some limitations on his or her freedom of conscience. This is seen most clearly in the ordination council. An ordination council assures itself that the candidate meets certain standards of belief and practice. If at some time the pastor's fundamental convictions change, or his or her life no longer conforms to these standards, credentials may be withdrawn. This is not to be interpreted as a restriction on individual liberty of conscience, but a preservation of the integrity of the wider body. Such an individual would be free to follow his or her convictions in association with another denomination, and we would contend for his or her right to do so.

These words from Maring and Hudson's, *A Baptist Manual of Faith and Practice*, are insightful:

Although in our tradition there has been a cherished emphasis upon liberty of conscience, this has not always born the same meaning that some modern interpreters give it. Initially resting their belief in the sovereignty of God over the conscience, rather than upon human dignity and individual rights, early Baptists advocated *a responsible freedom which had certain recognized limits* (emphasis added). Today this doctrine of liberty is often taken to mean that individuals are free to adopt whatever views they will, without any restraints at all. Many Baptist take pride in their lack of agreement, boastfully asserting that where there are two Baptists there are at least three opinions. Early Baptists, however, would have regarded such a concept of freedom as unwarranted license, a view that can lead only to chaos. Thus, though liberty of conscience has been an important strand of Baptist tradition, the meaning of that concept today has been twisted beyond recognition.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice, Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, revised edition 1991, p.8.

Should the Assembly affirm the Board's decision regarding the performance of same-sex marriages, there would be nothing "unBaptist" about that action. Therefore, we have every right to establish together the standards for our accredited pastors.

## **B. Local Church Autonomy**

Throughout Baptist history two principles have existed in tension: the autonomy of the local church and the associational principle. The autonomy of the local church holds that the local church is its own authority under Christ, the Head of the Church. No outside body has the right to tell the congregation what it must believe or how it must govern itself. On the other hand, the associational principle holds that Baptist churches are not independent of each other, but are interdependent, and to express that belief local churches gather together to form associations (and other bodies). Historically these associations have existed to engage in mission (planting and constituting new churches), settle questions of theology and polity, resolve disciplinary problems, and supervise ordination of clergy.

To hold these two principles together, Baptists have walked a very careful line. Note this statement by the Philadelphia Association (USA) in 1749: "An association is not a superior judicature...Yet we are of opinion that an association of delegates of associate churches have a very considerable power in their hands, respecting those churches in their confederation."<sup>2</sup>

While this association firmly held to the autonomy of its churches, it was also firm that, once the delegates and pastors of its churches had decided a matter that was of concern to all its churches - such as the same-sex marriage issue before us now - the churches of the association would be well advised to adhere to what had been commonly agreed among them. Hudson provides an excellent summary of the historical record:

While an association may only determine and declare and not impose, a church [was] not free to reject the advice and counsel of an Association and still remain a member in communion with the other churches of the Association....It [i.e., the Association] was not a collection of miscellaneous churches of varying belief and practice, and no church was subsequently admitted until it first had ascertained that its faith and practice was in harmony with the standards of the Association. The corollary to this, it was frankly recognized, was the right to withdraw fellowship from a church that departs for the accepted faith and practice of the member churches.<sup>3</sup>

The Berkshire Baptist Association of England explained its understanding of the place and power of the association in these words in 1652: "There is the same relationship betwixt particular churches each towards other, as there is betwixt particular members of one church, for the churches of Christ do all make up one body or church in general under Christ their head."<sup>4</sup> In other words, as the local church has the power to make decisions affecting the common life of its members, so the

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<sup>2</sup>Maring and Hudson, p.176.

<sup>3</sup>Winthrop S. Hudson, *Baptists in Transition: Individualism and Christian Responsibility*, (Judson Press 1979), pp.47f.

<sup>4</sup>Maring and Hudson, p.174.

association has the power to make decisions touching the common life of its members, that is, its churches.

The principle here is exactly the same as that which resolves the tension at the local church level between individual freedom and the corporate life of the congregation: the individual member (congregation) is not under compulsion to accept what the body has decided, and, should it decide it cannot abide by the common decision, has the freedom to withdraw and go on its own (or to be withdrawn from, as the body recognizes the individual no longer walks in fellowship with it). What is abundantly clear from even these few citations is that Baptists in our tradition have never seen their autonomy as an impediment to group decisions that affect all churches. While careful to do nothing to infringe on the autonomy of the local church, Baptists have not been afraid to expect and require adherence to decisions agreed to by member churches.

### **Resources**

1. Stan Fowler, "A Second Look at Local Church Autonomy", *The Evangelical Baptist* (March/April 2004) pp. 14, 15, 16.
2. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Baptists in Transition: Individualism and Christian Responsibility* (Judson Press 1979), esp. chapter 2, "The Associational Principle Among Baptists", pp.37-53.
3. Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* (Judson Press, 2nd Edition 1991)

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**APPENDIX A** [click here](#)

**APPENDIX B** [click here](#)

**APPENDIX C** [click here](#)