



Edmonton, Alberta

*An open letter from the congregation of First Baptist Church, Edmonton to the churches affiliated with the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada (CBWC), and to the Board and Executive Staff of CBWC.*

This letter is in two parts. The first is to communicate our decision regarding affiliation with CBWC. The second is to share our deep reflections and the journey we traveled to making this decision.

We hope you will read this to understand why we believe this difficult step is necessary.

## The Decision

First Baptist Church Edmonton is one of the oldest Baptist Churches in Western Canada. It is a founding member of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada. It has consistently contributed leadership, support, encouragement, celebration, resiliency, and resources with congregations across the denomination and beyond. We are proud of that legacy and of those contributions.

First Baptist Church Edmonton believes that all children created in God's image are loved by God, loved by us, and warmly and fully welcomed in our congregation. We seek, together and as equals, to understand and to do God's will and to respond to God's call for us.

Certain recent motions of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada take a view that differs from the one we have chosen. Those motions would have a substantive impact on who First Baptist Church Edmonton would welcome and serve as a congregation and how we would welcome and serve some of God's children. Those motions are structured to require compliance. Effectively, First Baptist Church Edmonton is being told that the decisions of its congregation are to be muted and replaced by those made by others. The fundamental Baptist tenets of congregational government and local church autonomy cannot be reconciled with such a motion.

Without rancor or ill-will, but in the desire to follow the Baptist traditions of congregational government and local church autonomy and, more importantly, to follow the path to which we believe God has called us, First Baptist Church Edmonton must now begin a new chapter and path in its journey.

We will end our affiliation with the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada on June 21, 2024.

## The Journey

It is not easy to be a Church in a world and a city with so much need, so much pain, so much loneliness, such great deficits of love and belonging, and so much need to know and feel the love and Word of God. Unhoused people live their lives within metres and blocks of our sanctuary, sometimes even on our property. Unfed people, the lonely, those living with addictions and other mental health needs, those who are victims of human trafficking and so many others walk among us and walk by our building every hour of every day. The continuing and painful effects of Indian and Inuit residential schools are evident throughout our city with much work to be done, with so much of that pain having been caused by those claiming to love God and Jesus. Our congregational members have exceptional gifts, talents, and blessings, but also have many needs. Being the Church that God calls us to be amongst all this need is very hard work, just as God and Jesus promised it would be.

To choose our path, we relied on some of the oldest and richest of Baptist traditions, congregational government and local church autonomy, tenets at the very heart of what it means to be Baptist. We met as a congregation, over a period of many years, seeking what God is calling us to be and do as a Church. Those conversations were sometimes very challenging. We had some important disagreements along this journey, as Baptists have always had since their beginnings hundreds of years ago. Although mistakes were made along the way, the majority of FBC congregants respectfully interacted with each other even when common ground was difficult to determine. We continued to pray for God's leading and wisdom as we worked through these necessary steps.

One thing that we did all agree upon, however, was that oldest of Baptist traditions and tenets, that every congregation must decide for itself on how it will understand and follow God's call.

We spent many years in conversation with one another. We heard from Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Queer and other members of our congregation who were determined to love, follow, and serve God despite histories of Churches that had caused them enormous hurt. We heard from many women who told us of their struggles to be fully recognized as equals in all the roles in God's Church. We heard from First Nations and other Indigenous peoples of the racism and pain that they had endured when simply trying to worship God and to be a part of God's Church.

What we decided as a congregation can be summarized in part as this: We celebrate the God-given worth of every person, and we seek to worship and act in solidarity with

people displaced, silenced, and harmed by injustice. We stand against racism, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, and classism.

We seek the peace and the well-being of the city.

The moment that we have arrived at now has not arisen suddenly or unexpectedly. First Baptist Church Edmonton has taken various steps over the years to remain true to its decisions and its understandings of the principles of Baptist congregational government and local church autonomy, all while seeking ways of continuing an association that has lasted for well over a century.

Faced with the motions of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada, the congregation of First Baptist Church Edmonton met in accordance with its constitution. The choice was to proceed with the understanding that we have reached about what God has called us to do and be - or to comply with decisions made by others. In an overwhelming vote, the congregation of First Baptist Church Edmonton chose to continue to follow the path it had chosen previously after a considered, challenging, full, intentional, sincere, and prayerful process. We will love, serve, support, welcome and embrace all of God's children as God created them.

We are proud of and grateful for the journey that we have traveled together with the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada since 1907. If the day should come when First Baptist Church Edmonton is able to resume the journey with the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada, the congregation of that moment would no doubt review that possibility with hope and joy. That day, however, is not here now.

Again, without rancor or ill-will, but in the desire to follow the Baptist traditions of congregational government and local church autonomy and, more importantly, to follow the path to which we believe God has called us, First Baptist Church Edmonton must now begin a new chapter and path in its journey.

May God's love and welcoming embrace be felt ever more deeply, ever more warmly, ever more fully and by every single one of God's children. May First Baptist Church Edmonton be God's vehicle and servant in making this happen.

*This is the call that we have heard. This is the path that we have chosen.*

*We pray for wisdom and courage as our sister churches choose their paths.*

*Peace of Christ be with you.*