

## ***Background***

At Assembly 2000, the delegates of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches (CABC) agreed to accept a challenge from the Baptist World Alliance to make the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> C one in which to address racism and promote racial justice. Subsequently, the Council appointed a Racism Working Group (RGW) in 2001, including representation from the African United Baptist Association (AUBA), to provide leadership for this task and to hold the Council and Assembly accountable for maintaining a commitment to the mandate.

While previous Assemblies had adopted a number of resolutions regarding racism (1963, 1968 and 1991), the problem persisted and continued to hinder our mission and ministry. Despite the good intentions behind those resolutions, there was much work still to be done to eliminate racism and its effects from the work we do together as Baptists in Atlantic Canada, both through the AUBA and the CABC. This is the primary task we are called to tackle. Thus began the nearly ten year mandate of the RWG.

## ***Brief History of CABC-AUBA Relations***

The African Baptist churches have a distinct and distinguished history that predates the formation of the Maritime Baptist Convention in 1846. Racial prejudice and racial discrimination led to the formation of separate Black churches through the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to the formation of the African Baptist Association in 1854. Consequently, the AUBA has functioned more like an independent and autonomous Convention in its own right than as one of 21 Associations comprising the broader Baptist Convention family.

The pain and lingering effects of overt and covert expressions of racism may never be fully understood by the churches and individuals in the CABC family. However, until we acknowledge our active and passive complicity in the perpetuation of racism, our witness as a denomination within Atlantic Canada and the effectiveness of our local ministries continues to be compromised.

- ***Encouraging Signs for Celebration***

The election of two CABC Presidents of African ancestry in recent years, increased representation of AUBA members on all Board, Committees and Council, the appointment of a Regional Minister for the AUBA (Region 7), first full faculty appointments at Acadia Divinity College and Atlantic Baptist University of

persons of African ancestry, ABU's hiring of an African NS Athletic Director plus the establishment of an Equity Bursary, the 2007 historic Combined Assembly 2007, increased enrollment of AUBA students in both the Divinity College and the lay Pastors Training Program, and the recognitions/awards bestowed by both institutions of deserving AUBA members--these are significant developments to celebrate and noted as we move forward.

For nearly nine years now, the Working Group has been providing leadership to our Convention on this issue. Our goal is to nurture a mindset and model of redemption which we pray through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, will result in profound transformation in our churches and society. As we meet together each year, we are increasingly aware that we are on a journey of discovery which is challenging us on many levels. We encourage our churches and members to join us as we seek racial reconciliation and justice.

## ***The Sin Of Racism***

Racism has both social and spiritual implications. It affects individuals, often through the social structures which define our daily lives. From a social and psychological perspective, racism is devastating. From a Christian perspective, racism is sin.

God created the diversity of races and invites us to live together in community, loving one another as we love ourselves. Racism is fundamentally a spiritual problem because it denies our true identity as children of God and diminishes our effectiveness in mission and ministry.

***Racism*** is the sin that perceives persons to be inherently inferior to others, simply because of their race. Racism devalues persons in terms of their dignity and contribution to society. It is important to understand what racism is and how it differs from other expressions of social differentiation.

***Racism*** is not simply prejudice. Prejudice leads people to view other groups unfavourably based, not on facts, but on preconceived ideas. Prejudice combined with power produces racism. Racism uses the power structures of society to provide privilege for some and disadvantage for others.

***Racism*** has become embedded in the structures of our society and will be very difficult to dismantle. However, we believe that change is possible and essential. What is required is a vision for what is possible and a commitment to change. Then, we must be

willing to take the journey that will produce real and lasting reform in our social structures.

## ***A New Vision***

The CABC covenants to embrace racial and cultural diversity as God-given assets of our denominational family, recognizing that our fellowship and ministry together are threatened and stifled by racism. We therefore pledge to work actively and persistently at becoming a community that is culturally and racially inclusive with a view to influencing society to do likewise.

While celebrating our rich diversity, we confess the stain of racism in our history and current experience. We rejoice in the bold affirmations of previous Convention Assemblies to condemn and address the evils of racism, and will build on them in advocating a model of ministry that enables us to truly be the Family of God in Atlantic Canada.

Building upon this foundation, with God's help, we will strive to develop a community of faith where all believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live whole and fulfilled lives, irrespective of race. We envision, and are committed to becoming, a community of faith dedicated to personal and institutional transformation. Our ultimate goal is the eradication of racial prejudice and hatred in our Churches, Institutions, and Society.

## ***Biblical & Theological Framework For Our Vision***

- ***Purpose ---***

An appropriate response to racism and its effect on the fellowship and witness of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches must be developed in light of a clear biblical and theological understanding of what it means to be both human and Christian. Our humanity derives its meaning from the foundations of our creation.

*Then God said, "let Us make humankind in Our own image, in Our likeness...." God created humankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them. God blessed them (Gen 1:26-28).*

Our humanness is further developed in terms of how we interact with each other when Paul affirms:

*You are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-29).*

This understanding of community is affirmed in such God-moments as found in the Exodus of Moses' time and the Pentecost of Luke's time (Exodus 1-12 and Acts 2:1-12).

These affirmations move us to understand that such examples of biblical evidence demonstrates that "God at creation endowed humankind with qualities and characteristics that originate from His own divine being: imagination, intellectual capacity, spirit, emotions, a will with which to engage in acts of deliberation and decision-making, and a moral conscience with which to discern or distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil" (*Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community 1999*).

Such affirmations lead us to understand the necessity to view humankind the way God does, recognizing the value and worth of all humankind affirming the inherent dignity of all human beings.

- **Problem ---**

The disobedience of Genesis 3, the murder of Genesis 4, the family abuse of 2 Sam 11 and the cultural discrimination implied in Matt 27:32 all demonstrate the fact we live in a broken and fragmented community in deep need of redemption and reconciliation. The sin and separation implied in these passages demand restitution only possible in a God-committed relationship.

Such a relationship demands that we seek a comprehensive appreciation for diversity rather than a cursory experience of compliance; "where the content of one's character is more important than skin colour; where live, justice and peace emerge as the pre-eminent norms for all relationships, and where institutional power is humanized by moral values so that it serves the interest of Justice" (*Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community 1999*) (note Jer :22-24).

- **Common Understandings ---**

1) Hermeneutics that proclaims God's intention for racial equality and racial justice.

2) Individual hearts and minds must be transformed by God's vision of racial equality and racial justice.

3) Our Denominational structures must be transformed to enable racial equality and racial justice to be celebrated and lived within the CABC.

### **Conclusion**

This Vision Document reflects the hearts of those on this Working Group and describes our deep desire to eradicate the sin of racism within the structures of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, and where possible, in other places around the world where we have influence. It is our prayer that all who read this document will catch a glimpse of our deep remorse for historic sin and our deep desire for present and future reconciliation. May God touch you as He has reached us.

- **Moving Beyond the Mandate**

The formal mandate of The Racism Working Group expires next year. What is the way forward beyond 2010 for CABC on this matter? What will be the scope and content of the Final Report to Assembly in 2010? As the RWG seeks God's counsel and guidance in preparing the final report of their nine-year term mandate, it is fitting to remind us of Dr. Brad Braxton's message to us at the 2007 historic Combined Assembly: ***"We have a problem and it is bone deep. Once we begin to address the problem, we must finish, or we will be worse off than we were before. God is able!"***

### **Members of the Racism Working Group--2001-Current**

- **Convention Appointees:**

Rev. John Boyd, Rev. Dr. Harry Gardner (2001-2007), Rev. Dr. Malcolm Beckett (2007-2008), Rev. Dr. Peter Reid (2008-present), Rev. Tracey Grosse (2001-2004), Rev. Sherrolyn Riley (2004-present), Rev. Dr. Frank Guinta, Dr. Lois Mitchell, Rev. Dr. Lionel Moriah, Rev. Elias Mutale and Rev. Ogueri Ohanaka (Chair).

- **AUBA Appointees (since 2002)**

Lic. Brian Johnston and Mrs. Doreen Paris

- **RWG Appointee: Nancy Cameron (Scribe)**

## **CONVENTION OF ATLANTIC BAPTIST CHURCHES**

### ***A New Vision for Racial Reconciliation***

**©This Information Brochure has been produced by  
The CABC Racism Working Group**

*(Revised & Updated, August, 2009)*