

The Queensland Baptist Forum

The Journal of the Baptist Heritage Queensland

No. 71 Dec 2008

'Women who made a Difference' - Project Completion

After many months of work, we are now in the final stages of our project celebrating the life and work of Queensland Baptist women. We have 24 entries for the book and they are now being edited and prepared for publication.

We will make plans in the next few weeks for a function to launch the book in the first part of 2009. This will be an opportunity for contributors, family members and all those interested to meet together and share in the event. It is appropriate that it will be launched in the same year as Queensland is celebrating the 150th anniversary of its separation from NSW, since women have played such an important part in the life of the state, and in our denomination. It is also the 400th year of the Baptist movement!

The women selected for the book cover the entire period of time that Baptists have existed in Queensland. The first was born in 1837 and the last one died in 2005. They include the first Baptist missionary from Queensland, two World War I Nursing Sisters, the first female optometrist in Queensland, the founder of a prominent girls' school, "the Stamp Lady"

who raised thousands of dollars for missionary work by processing used postage stamps, and the wife of a prominent South Brisbane bus company proprietor. There are also other missionaries, housewives, pastors' wives and a deaconess who was a former missionary to indigenous people.

The project was launched at a function on Sept 21, 2007 held at Clayfield Baptist Church which was addressed by Ros Gooden of GIA. In her address she highlighted the significant contribution made by Queensland to Baptist mission work.

The book will be a companion volume to the earlier book by Rev Mel Williams, "Cameos of Baptist Men in 19th Century Queensland" which featured very prominent people such as James Swan, the Kingsford and Grimes families and T.B. Stevens.



BHQ President, Eric Kopittke presenting Faith Giovas with her prize for the 2008 BHQ Essay Competition. The essay, which easily topped those submitted, is printed in this issue (in a slightly abbreviated form).

Subscriptions of BHQ membership 2009 are now due.

Meeting dates: 2009: Feb 28; June 6; Nov 7
(any changes to be notified)

Baptist Heritage Queensland

The Baptist Historical Society of Queensland
(est. 1984)

Membership (2008)

Individual \$10 p.a. Family \$15 p.a. Corporate \$20 p.a.

Qld Baptist Forum 3 issues p.a.

Free to Members Others \$2 each posted

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CONTENTS

Qld Baptist Forum No 71 Dec 2008

Project Completion p 1

BHQ Prize Essay 2008
By Faith Giovas p 2

BHQ 24th Annual Report p 8

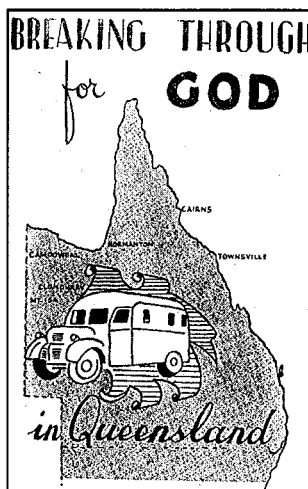
2008 Baptist Heritage Qld Essay Competition Prize Winning Entry by Faith Giovas

In the light of your awareness of the historical development of Baptist distinctive and current circumstances, what does it mean to be a Baptist in Queensland today?

Over 74 000 Queenslanders identified themselves as Baptists in the 2006 Census, making up nearly 2% of the population, a percentage that has been relatively stable for the past ten years. However the 2007 Handbook indicates there are approximately 180 churches with an average church membership of around 88 members. Significantly more attend church regularly, but clearly a large number of those who regard themselves as Baptist are not affiliated with a local church.

Baptist people first came to Moreton Bay in the mid 19th century from Germany and Great Britain. The first distinct Baptist congregation was formed in Brisbane City. By end of the century, over 30 churches had been established and the Baptist Association of Queensland formed (1877).

Queensland Baptist churches generally reflected the characteristics of English Baptist churches until the middle of the 20th century. However after World War II the influence of American Baptists increased and an association with the Southern Baptist Convention of the USA



which began in 1959 continues to the present day. American influence has affected church programs, music, models of ministry and underlying philosophies, some of which have been adopted 'without much discernment'.

In the early 21st century it seems that Queensland Baptists, although still influenced by church life in America, Britain, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, are beginning to develop our own distinctive agenda and culture.

Queensland Baptist Distinctives?

It has been said recently that there is nothing that particularly sets Queensland Baptists apart from other Christian churches. Indeed, a review in 1998 found Baptists were confused about their identity and core values.

As recently as 2000 Rev. Norm Weston described a Queensland Baptist church service with comments such as 'There are no candles, incense or bells to be found', services 'include a pastoral prayer', and the elements used in communion are 'small pieces of ordinary bread' which is served 'to the people who remain in their seats'. Such generalizations are no longer true in 2008.

But our differences go much deeper than what hap-

pens on Sunday mornings. Our diversity can be seen in church leadership models, attitudes to women in ministry, church programs, doctrine (from Reformed/Calvinistic to Arminian), membership, ethnicity, community involvement, openness to charismatic renewal, and so on. In fact this diversity is a reflection of some very distinct Baptist values: religious liberty, individual freedom of conscience and local church autonomy.

Seventeenth century Baptists were among those who fought for religious liberty for all. Their fight to be able to practice their Christian faith according to their individual beliefs included the willingness to endure 'the burning, banishing and imprisoning of men and women'.

Early Baptist statements of faith emphasized 'God alone is Lord of the Conscience' - 'the requiring of an implicit faith, and absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy Liberty of Conscience, and Reason also'. The first doctrinal statement of the amalgamated English Baptist Union (1888) affirmed the authority of Scripture, along with 'the right and duty of individual judgement in the interpretation of it'.

Along with religious liberty and freedom of conscience for individuals, Baptists have also supported the autonomy of local churches. 'That Jesus Christ is the only head of the church and that the Word of God is its only statute book' and that the internal affairs of all churches are 'independent of all other churches and equally independent of state control' were distinguishing principles of the English independents, out of whom Baptists developed. This principle is clearly recognizable in the doctrinal statements issued by Baptists during the 17th century. In Queensland, constitutions of the Baptist Union since 1877 have all included the statement that individual churches have the liberty 'to interpret and administer the laws of Christ' as they see fit.

With these three distinctives underlying our beliefs and practice, it is no wonder Queensland Baptist churches are diverse. In addition we must consider the current social climate which emphasizes the right of every person to make individual choices, together with increasing levels of education which enable people to access information on which to base their decisions rather than relying on their elders for guidance.

Diversity should not be seen as something to be feared. In fact in 1998 the retiring General Superintendent called for 'a greater emphasis on the Baptist distinctive of Liberty of Conscience' which would allow greater diversity in ministry. However diversity does bring with it a perceived lack of cohesiveness among Baptist churches, especially when church members do not understand the reasons behind that diversity.

As we move further into the 21st century and society becomes more complex, it is likely diversity will increase. An appropriate response is not to tighten control,

but to accept diversity as necessary as we try to reach and serve the diverse needs of 21st century people. Despite attempts to find the model for a 'New Testament church', in reality churches differed according to their peculiar history and context, even in the first century.

Our leaders serve us best by reminding us of the Biblical principles that are non-negotiable including, among other important theological truths, liberty of belief and mutual respect. When the common basis is strong, experimentation can be encouraged as we each respond to God's calling. The result should be diverse expressions of 'church' among Queensland Baptists, each contextually relevant to the people they seek to reach.

At the beginning of the 21st century, in the midst of such diversity, there are still historical distinctives which are commonly held by Queensland Baptists.

Baptism of believers and a Regenerate Church Membership

In Queensland today, following a tradition of nearly 400 years, the practice of believers' baptism still unites Baptist churches. Baptism of believers, usually by immersion, separated the first Baptists from the mainline church practice of infant baptism, and was one of the main reasons for their persecution. Early Baptist statements of faith are clear that only those 'who do actually' or 'who do really' 'profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to our Lord Jesus' are suitable candidates for baptism. A similar statement is included in the Baptist Union of Queensland's Constitution as a 'minimum doctrinal requirement' for those churches seeking affiliation.

Similarly Queensland Baptists are united in the long-held belief that the members of the church (both universal and local) are only those who profess salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Historical Baptist documents contain statements affirming 'All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the Gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ ...are and may be called Saints; and of such ought all particular Congregations to be constituted'.

Belief in a regenerate church membership distinguished early Baptists from the state churches, which presumed all those baptized as infants into the church to be members of the church. Baptists are still distinct from the larger denominations in this regard.

Baptizing believers and recognizing that the church consists of those who have a saving relationship with God are two Bible based Baptist distinctives we bring to contemporary Christianity. We need to teach these aspects of our faith and practice with clarity and confidence.

However there are diverse practises in Queensland Baptist churches regarding the relationship between believer's baptism and church membership, particularly for those who have been baptized as infants or in a different tradition. From early days some churches have opted for closed membership, restricted to those baptized as believers by immersion, others practice open membership, and many sit somewhere in between.

Church membership has also become a fluid concept, with most churches having significantly more 'adherents' than 'members'. Queensland Baptist churches differ on

the opportunity for non-members to be involved in the church's ministry and decision-making, with some making almost no distinction between members and adherents. On the other side of the coin, some adherents demonstrate greater ownership of and responsibility for the ministry of their local church than do some members, who rarely contribute except when significant decisions are tabled at members' meetings.

It seems to this writer that both of these practices lead to a watering down of valuable Baptist distinctives. However they represent another expression of freedom of conscience, autonomy of the local church, and contextualization, of which God will be the final judge.

Involvement in Mission and Evangelism

Mission and evangelism have always been a significant part of the Queensland Baptist identity. Denominational leaders have recently confirmed they are still a priority and 'almost every church is more intentionally focusing on evangelism', although a 2004 National Church Life Survey reported Queensland Baptists 'were not as involved in outreach as they claimed'.

The current Board of Queensland Baptists has set as a first priority 'to assist local churches to extend the Kingdom of God through evangelism and church planting' and determined that the emphasis during 2009 will be 'Extending God's Kingdom - wider'.

Baptists did not begin with a missional emphasis - their initial concerns related to holy living and survival in an antagonistic society. However there is evidence that the desire to 'preach the Gospel to the world' was always present, at least among the General Baptists.

It wasn't until after the Evangelical Revival that English Baptists became more outward-looking, with church members involved in evangelism and mission. This change was largely due to the writings of Andrew Fuller and the passion of William Carey in the late 18th century. Together their work resulted in the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792. From the late 19th century the English Baptist Union's 'Declaration of Principle' included, 'That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelization of the world'.

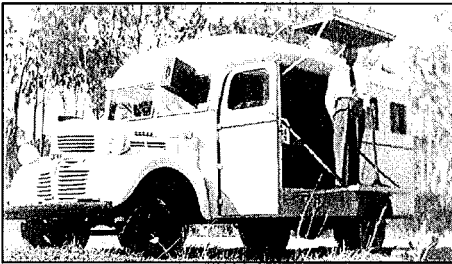
Pioneering Baptists in Queensland were very missional in their outlook, emphasizing community involvement for the benefit of the developing society. Communicating the gospel, especially through preaching, was a priority which brought results. In addition there were efforts to plant churches throughout the state.

The first overseas missionaries were sent out within 30 years of the first Queensland Baptist church being established, and the Queensland Baptist College was initially established in response to a need to train home missionaries to reach new areas of the state. The first full time appointment by the Queensland Baptist Association in 1911 was Home Mission Organizing Secretary; the second was an evangelist.

During the mid 20th century Queensland Baptists were involved in numerous evangelistic campaigns with crusades, literature distribution and a gospel wagon. Although the model was strongly attractational, these campaigns were appropriate for the times and largely successful.

In the second half of the century the focus of evangelism changed to equipping every Christian for 'soul-winning', with various tools used to train 'lay evangelists'. Later the church-growth movement added a different emphasis which focused on developing attractive programs and measured success by numbers.

Whatever the era, Queensland Baptists have had a strong tradition of involvement in mission in the local community, by planting churches, and in cross-cultural mission. Currently this is reflected in two of the three Objects of the Union. However it is probably best seen at a local church level. Whereas in the past churches have largely relied on denominational initiatives, local churches are becoming increasingly proactive in creating mission opportunities. This has resulted in a greater diversity of outreach events, with a greater likelihood of contextual relevance to the specific communities



The Baptist Gospel Wagon

being targeted. 'Mission' is now understood more in terms of church members going out to minister to their local communities, rather than primarily depending on church-based programs to attract non-believers to the church.

Local Baptist churches are also becoming more confident in organizing their own overseas mission trips, especially short-term, and some commission their own missionaries. The Baptist Union church planting department, Mission to Queensland, is also encouraging local churches to take more initiative and responsibility in sponsoring new faith communities within Queensland.

The fact that many Queensland Baptist churches are proactively involved in mission at various levels confirms this is a distinctive which has become a significant part of our culture and heritage. It is a distinctive worth articulating to our congregations who may not be aware that other churches do not place such a high value on taking the Gospel to the world.

While the distinctives of believers' baptism, regenerate church membership and mission in the world are strongly maintained by Queensland Baptist churches, other traditional Baptist distinctives appear to be in jeopardy.

Centrality and Authority of the Word of God

Early in 2008 the General Superintendent of Queensland Baptists wrote 'Baptists used to be known as "People of the Book"'. However the centrality of the Scriptures in Baptist church life seems to be waning, along with the acknowledgement that it 'is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' (2 Tim 3:16). Bible knowledge is decreasing along with both public and private Bible reading and Scripture memorization. The preaching of expository Bible messages has been replaced with discussions

of life issues, sometimes with more reference to popular wisdom than to the Scriptures.

The authority of Scripture over church tradition was the basis of the conflict between the reformers and the established church. The Baptists' London Confession (1644) stated that the faith and practice of individuals and the church together were to follow 'not mans inventions, opinions, devices, laws, constitutions, or traditions unwritten whatsoever, but only the word of God contained in the Canonical Scriptures'. Later statements of faith reiterated 'the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule' of the Scriptures, adding that the preaching of the Word of God is one of the marks of the true church.

In Queensland there has always been an emphasis on training men to preach 'the old fashioned gospel'. During the 1930s a bequest to the Baptist College came with the proviso that it would lapse 'if the said College is inclined to lean to the Modernist instead of the Fundamentalist in its teaching', the 'Modernist' being a more critical approach to Biblical interpretation.

However, despite the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Queensland stating that, as a minimum requirement, affiliated churches must accept 'The Divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testaments, Baptist practice does not seem to follow suit. Part of the cause could be attributed to pulpits being more open to lay preachers with limited theological training. But early Baptists relied heavily on lay preachers without compromising this distinctive.

A more likely cause is the current emphasis on pragmatism. People don't want to hear theories; they are looking for guidance that can be directly applied to their everyday lives. However without a firm Biblical basis, popular wisdom cannot be relied. As Derek Tidball warns, 'we need to be aware that while one pragmatic generation can live of the theological resources of a previous generation, the next generation will not have that resource to draw from, or even be aware that they are missing anything'.

Leaders and pastors should be concerned about this trend in Queensland Baptist churches. We do not need to go back to 'the good old days', but we do need to work harder at interpreting 21st century postmodern life in the light of the Scriptures, and providing contemporary believers with a Biblical worldview and Scriptural understanding which will give them with a firm basis for the future.

Personal Responsibility and Accountability

When early Baptists talked about individual freedom of conscience, it was balanced with accountability to a local body of believers. In contemporary Queensland Baptist churches this distinctive has been lost. It is generally felt that, in an organization where membership is voluntary, no-one has the right to require another to be accountable. Consequently levels of commitment seem to be lower, and standards of behaviour are sometimes indistinguishable from those outside the church.

In early Baptist church history the behaviour of individual Christians was taken seriously by church leaders. Early Baptist confessions of faith include directions regarding the admonition of believers whose lifestyle didn't measure up to their profession of faith. The Orthodox Creed (1678) regarded 'having discipline ... duly executed, by ministers or pastors' as one of the marks of the

true church. Personal trespasses were dealt with according to the pattern of Matthew 18, but unresolved conflicts or unrepented sin could require personal admonition, public rebuke, temporary suspension and, if necessary, excommunication. Church records from 17th century England reveal numerous cases of church discipline resulting in the 'casting out' of members.

In early Queensland history the Jireh Baptist Church 'took seriously the mandate to oversee Christian conduct among its members' and, Parker records, 'the need to live out one's profession in a life of morality and good works' was emphasized.

At the beginning of the 21st century however, the concept of church discipline seems to have been dispensed with, except in rare cases. Even then, churches who discipline their members are sometimes regarded as being 'heavy-handed'. Sweetman considers the move away from 'legalism' as positive, resulting in 'less judgement of people by their external conduct and greater acceptance of a range of attitudes and behaviours'. This writer questions whether that is a good thing.

From the beginning early Baptists recognized that Christian liberty can be used as a pretense for sin. In an individualistic culture such as that which permeates western society today, it is inevitable that there will be an overemphasis on personal freedom. It is the role of church leaders to show clearly from the Scriptures where the line is for followers of Christ, and to challenge believers to measure up. During the years of Christendom the church may have had culture on our side. But the tide has now turned. Believers need to be challenged to reform their lives, just as Paul challenged converts in the heathen Graeco-Roman world, learning what to 'put on' as well as what to 'put off'. The 17th century forms of church discipline are no longer appropriate; however the use of contemporary methods such as mentoring and behaviour contracts will help Queensland Baptists honour God, grow to be more like Christ, and provide an effective witness in the world.

Congregational Government

When the members of a local church have responsibility for determining their own affairs, including the appointment of their pastors and leaders, they may be defined as being congregationally governed. The final authority, under Christ, rests with the members rather than the leaders or an external authority. It is a practice based on the principles of the headship of Christ and the priesthood of all believers.

Congregational government is still generally practised in Queensland Baptist churches, but it is under threat through the increasing corporatization of the local church and the Baptist Union. In both instances there seems to be a move towards presbyterianism, with a strengthening of the role of the church elders or the Board in major decision-making.

a) Local Churches

At the beginning of the 21st century many churches have adopted a highly organized and corporate approach to leadership. Under a strong American influence 'executive pastors' follow the model of a CEO, leading a

church in achieving its goals. Church leaders' meetings discuss mission statements, core values, key strategies and performance reviews, concepts more familiar to secular business practice than to the church.

In themselves these practices may help churches focus more effectively on their goals. But following this model potentially places more power in the hands of the leaders and disenfranchises ordinary members. Church meetings become forums where matters are discussed purely to 'gauge the feelings' of the members. Final decisions rest with the smaller leadership group. In many churches issues worthy of a vote are limited to the appointment of leaders, pastoral calls, property transactions, approving the annual budget and changing the constitution.

In an effort to preserve the practice of congregational government, the Baptist Union of Queensland recently introduced 'minimum standards for admission' for member churches which include annual members' meetings and church members' rights to vote on matters such as those listed above.

The church has always had leaders. In the New Testament we read of Paul's tradition of appointing leaders to oversee new faith communities, encouraging them to exercise appropriate authority. Since the 17th century local Baptist churches have always appointed officers, pastors and deacons. Queensland Baptists have also had a long-standing tradition of appointing pastors, deacons and, more recently, elders, to lead the community of faith. Interestingly, throughout history from New Testament times, church leaders were people of considerable influence within their churches who exercised authority over the members.

It seems that in the present day, when democracy is touted as the panacea to all the world's problems, Baptists have lost sight of another Biblical principle: God gives gifts to each one, just as he determines, 'for the common good'. The priesthood of all believers is not an argument for the right for every member to have an equal say in every decision. We are each called to exercise the gifts given to us, and to respect those who have been gifted and appointed as leaders over us, for the building up of the whole body.

As we move further into the 21st century there are two processes which are likely to influence the way we 'do church'. Increasing legislation, education, and the continual expansion of knowledge will necessitate specialization. Few, if any, church members or leaders will be able to keep up on every front and we will need to increasingly rely on the expertise of specialists in many fields. Secondly the church, like many other organizations, will need to be deinstitutionalized if it is to survive. 'Fuzzy edges' is a term already in use among emerging church specialists. 'Community' will have greater appeal than 'organization'. The church will be a ministry base, with every member actively involved, rather than an institution that needs to be kept running.

In this context of change the challenge of leadership is to organize the local church in such a way that every member's gifts are recognized and developed. It is only as we work together in this way that we will effectively minister to each other and to the world.

b. the State Union

At the beginning of the 21st century the Baptist Union of Queensland seems to be developing along similar lines to many local churches. There has been a strengthening in the role and authority of the Board, decreased opportunities for the involvement of individual church members in decision-making and ministry, and increasing regulation of churches and pastors.

At the same time reviews have noted decreasing interest and support of the denomination on the part of local churches and their members. There is also a degree of suspicion among those who feel they are on the outside looking in. Lack of involvement and lack of ownership obviously go hand in glove. But the social context of decreasing interest in volunteer organizations and denominationalism must also be taken into account.

Historically English Baptists had no formal connections for the first 40 or 50 years. An Abingdon Association meeting in 1652 articulated the reasons why Baptists developed a pattern of holding 'communion with each other'. It is the most effective means by which 'The worke of God, wherein all the churches are concerned together, may be the more easily and prosperously carried on by a combination of prayers and endeavours'. However the statements of faith of the Particular Baptists clearly pointed out that these associations 'are not entrusted with any Church-power ... or with any jurisdiction over the Churches themselves'.

An amalgamated English Baptist Union did not form until 1813 when a focus on overseas mission 'forged the Baptists into a denomination'. Hinton, one of the motivating forces behind the founding of this Union, proposed that there must be 'harmony of Religious Principles' and 'Unity of Exertion' among the affiliated churches: 'we must set before us some great and common objects of pursuit, and direct to these our unremitting attention'.

In Queensland the Association of Baptist Churches formed in 1877 in response to the need for a greater co-operative effort for 'the advancement of the spiritual life of the churches and united efforts to extend the kingdom of Christ'. Early objectives included offering opportunity for joint action and providing assistance to weaker churches, training for ministry, and ministerial superannuation.

At the beginning of the 21st century the objectives of the Baptist Union are not dissimilar, although they have expanded with the size of the denomination and complexity of modern life. The churches of the Union have varying levels of commitment and involvement. In an age of

pragmatism, local churches will work together with those whom they perceive to have common goals or who can help them achieve their goals. For the Union to remain relevant, its officers need to build relationships with Baptist churches on this basis.

All institutions go through life stages. Some find a new vision which brings new life. The alternative, according to Saarinen, is to settle into bureaucracy or even worse, aristocracy, where the vitality has gone, but the structures remain and are strengthened. As an organization that has existed for over 100 years, the Baptist Union of Queensland must find new vision that is meaningful to its constituent churches if it is to remain relevant.

The Baptist Union of Queensland also needs to decide if it is going to be primarily a regulatory authority or a resourcing agency. If its purpose is only regulatory, it will seek uniformity rather than encouraging creativity, and will become irrelevant to local churches. As a resourcing agency it will identify goals which are meaningful to local churches and provide much-needed energy, leadership, encouragement and resources to help Queensland Baptists extend God's kingdom.

At this point in social and Baptist church history, Queensland Baptists must respond to some challenges that have not been encountered in the past.

Postmodernism and post Christendom

Murray describes postChristendom as 'a culture in which the central features of the Christian church are unknown and churches are alien institutions whose rhythms do not impinge on most members of society'. The Church, rather than holding a position of privilege in society, has been marginalised. Those belonging to a church are in the minority and many people find 'God' in other contexts.

Postmodernism describes the culture of Generations X and Y which is radically different from those that have gone before. Postmoderns value community, participation, experience and diversity. They are more interested in the journey of life than the destination.

In the 21st century Queensland Baptists must respond to the new challenge of reaching postmodern people in a postChristendom society. The 'heathen' no longer live only overseas. Baptist church members are finding their neighbours, particularly the children of Generation X, have no understanding of basic Christian concepts and celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. More so than ever before mission now begins in our own community.

One result of the marginalisation of the church in society is a greater desire among churches and parachurch organisations to work together to achieve common goals. This has meant putting aside differences and fears that separated us in the past.

Reaching postmodern people has presented challenges in nearly every aspect of church life: rationalistic thinking, goal setting and organised structures seem of little relevance to people with such a different mindset. However Queensland Baptists' distinctives and heritage equip us well to respond to these new challenges. Our belief in individual freedom of conscience and local church autonomy enable us to easily adapt our structures and ministries to be more relevant to the people to whom we minister. We do not have to wait for a higher church



Sister Emily Lord, Queensland Baptist Missionary 1946-71

authority (other than God) to tell us what to do. Our commitment to the priesthood of all believers means each and every church member can be inspired by God to respond appropriately to current needs.

Our Baptist heritage of involvement in mission and our understanding of the principle of contextualization will also enable us to respond. It was in the 18th century that Andrew Fuller encouraged churches not to copy traditions from 'the Biblical past but rather (churches) were to use their God-given wisdom to devise procedures appropriate to their own situation'. The Queensland Baptist Evangelism Committee records from the 1950s show their concern to develop the "'right kind" of evangelism to meet the needs of the "bewildered and perplexing" times which they faced'. Similarly the 1973 Baptist Union Presidential address called for 'a ministry that was true to the historic faith ... yet relevant and progressive in its methods' and unrepelled 'by the long-haired, bare-footed youths' who come'.

However in the midst of adaptation and experimentation, we need to continue to hold on to our distinctive belief in the Word of God as the final authority, ensuring all we do and say measures up by its standards. If we don't there is the danger we will unite with others on the basis of the lowest common denominator and be guilty of initiating what Spurgeon called a new religion 'which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese'.

Constant efforts to contextualize our message and methods can be tiring, and there is an element of weariness among some Queensland Baptists who have been on this journey for a while. As a pastor recently expressed, 'It's not doing things 'outside the box' that's tiring. It's that the box no longer exists.' We know change is needed, but don't yet know the 'shape of things to come'.

However if we remember to constantly 'strengthen the stakes' as we 'lengthen the chords', we will be able to respond to the challenges of a postmodern postChristendom society and impact our culture. As Groves and Morrison wrote, 'The capacity to recreate our culture in response to the dynamic leading of the Spirit is a Baptist distinctive. We are doing nothing other than continuing in the way of our Anabaptist forebears as we examine new ways to bring to reality the liberty that we all share in Christ.'

Women in leadership in the church

Another challenge facing Queensland Baptists is our attitude to women in leadership. In some churches women are accepted in every arena of ministry, including pastoral leadership. In others women are not eligible to serve as deacons, or to lead ministries except under the authority of a male diaconate. Most churches fall somewhere in between with considerable confusion as to why we have such diversity. In 1983 the General Superintendent identified 'poor attitudes to the role of women in ministry' as one aspect of Queensland Baptist church life which needed attention. Twenty five years on some progress has been made in some churches.

The Baptist Union of Queensland allows each church to reach its own conclusions regarding the roles of women in the local church. Until recently women could only be accredited as 'pastoral assistants', even though many had ministry responsibilities in their own right.

Queensland Baptists do not ordain women, the only state in Australia not to do so, although this issue is currently under discussion.

In Baptist church history women served as deacons and sometimes preached among the English Baptists from the early 1600s. Dan Taylor, leader of the New Connection group of Baptists in the late 18th century, defended the right of women to speak in church meetings, concluding 'I am persuaded that there are many things which some women understand better than some men'.

In Queensland in 1912 a woman expressing a desire to follow God's call into ministry by enrolling in Bible College was regarded as unusual. The historian notes 'No woman stood a chance of becoming a Baptist minister in Queensland at this point in time.' The first woman to enrol at the college - in preparation for missionary service - did not do so until 1950.

At the present time, despite equal education and excellence in leadership in secular society, women generally take a back seat to men in leadership throughout Queensland Baptist churches. With the rise of feminism in the 20th century, together with the influence of the homosexual agenda in Australian society, many Baptists seem to be fearful as to what allowing women into leadership will mean for the future of the church. We sometimes forget that the feminist movement had its beginnings in the same non-conformist values and traditions which led to the development of the Baptist denomination.

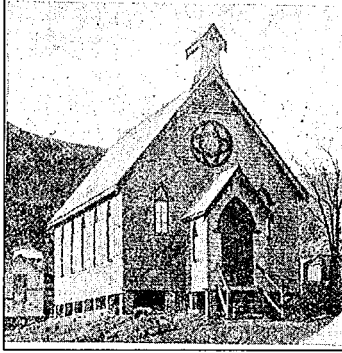
Groves and Morrison refer to the 'stained glass ceiling' faced by women in the Baptist denomination who desire to be involved in leadership, even as lay people. This ceiling is partly theological, partly cultural and partly tradition, and it is sometimes difficult to separate each of these arguments.

Historically Baptists have stood against tradition for tradition's sake. We have also stood for individual liberty of conscience and the autonomy of the local church. As Queensland Baptists move into the 21st century, the denomination cannot continue to place restrictions on women who have been called and gifted by God and on churches who welcome their ministry. Good people who earnestly seek to the truth in God's Word on this matter reach different conclusions. On a matter that relates to practice rather than doctrine, we must return to our Baptist distinctive which allows each Baptist church to make decisions as to how they will function.

But to avoid the current confusion Baptist church members need to hear the basis for this course of action: an over-riding commitment to distinctives that allow diversity while maintaining respect for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In addition it may be helpful for individual church members to be given the resources so they can search the Scriptures to discover what God by his Spirit may be saying to them.

Conclusion

In 2007 the General Superintendent of Queensland Baptists documented the typical historical demise of movements from the first generation of founders, who are motivated by a shared vision, right through to the fourth generation who are nominal members with minimal commitment to the original ideas. If a generation is taken to



Early Townsville Baptist Church

be 40 years, Queensland Baptists as an organization is on the cusp of the fourth generation. Some may believe this is where we have come to.

But I believe the diverse expressions of faith, worship and ministry in Baptist churches across Queensland are an evidence of life, not stagnation, particularly at the local

church level. They also provide evidence that we remain committed to many of our original Baptist distinctives.

These Baptist distinctives, including the Bible as God's authoritative Word, mission, baptism of believers,

a regenerate church membership, religious liberty, freedom of conscience, local church autonomy and personal responsibility, are strengths that we contribute to contemporary Australian Christianity. However, as Loder points out, we need to be aware of the characteristics of the third generation in any movement: they take the privileges and distinctives their forebears established for granted, and begin to look for alternatives. There is a need to educate the current generation as to the values of being 'Baptist' and give them an appreciation of the heritage we share.

Our distinctives, and an ongoing commitment to our distinctives, enable us to respond to the challenges presently facing Christians in contemporary society, and give us hope for the future relevance of Baptist churches in Queensland.

Note: The footnotes and references have been omitted from this version for convenience of publication, but a copy of the full essay, with notes, is available on request.

24th Annual General Meeting, 8 November 2008 Secretary's Report

2008 has seen continued interest in our history by people in Baptist churches throughout Queensland. In 2005 we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the first Baptist church in Queensland with the launching of a new history of Baptist work in Queensland, entitled *Pressing On with the Gospel*. A major consideration now is the 150th anniversary of the setting up of Queensland as a separate State in 1859; 2009 will also be the 150th anniversary of the Ipswich Baptist Church, the first Baptist church to be established in the new State. Another anniversary will be celebrated as well—400 years since the establishment of the Baptist movement.

There has been little change in the membership of the Society, but we look forward to further interest, as more people realise the importance of discovering and remembering our Baptist heritage. Most of our members are of more mature years, and there is a need to inspire more of our young people to take an interest in our historical roots, as one way of reducing the pressure to follow the latest fads in church life and worship.

Officers elected at the Annual meeting in November, 2007 were: President: Mr Eric Kopittke; Secretary/Treasurer: Dr Ken Smith; Publications Officer: Mrs Rosemary Kopittke.

As mentioned in our last Annual Report, as part of our celebrations for 2009 we are compiling information about the work of Baptist women from Queensland. We have discovered a large number of Baptist "Women Who Made a Difference", in the wider society as well as in Baptist circles. The results of the (still continuing) research are being edited by David Parker, and a book covering many aspects of the contribution made by women to life in Queensland will be published in 2009.

One new initiative has been the establishment of a prize for an essay on some topic involving Baptist history. The inaugural recipient of this was Darren Clark, who, at our last Annual Meeting, was presented with a cheque and honorary membership of the society for one year. It is anticipated that this will be an annual event, and look forward to a presentation at the Annual Meeting in 2008.

One important area in which little progress has been made is arrangements for the long-term management and care of Baptist cemeteries. There are a number of these in Queensland, and they form an important part of our heritage.

There are still many areas of Baptist life and work in Queensland where a consolidated work would be helpful, and it is hoped that as we have celebrated the 150th anniversary of the opening of the first Baptist church in Queensland, more people will be encouraged to look to our heritage and unearth the many treasures which may be lying around in our many Churches, all too often forgotten and unappreciated. We need to continue to impress on people the importance of keeping accurate records of events, and preserving them in some permanent form, so that in the future people will be able to look back and be encouraged by our successes, as well as giving thought to reasons for any lack of success.

As we move forward into a new year, we look forward to continuing the work of recording and analysing our history, so that, aware of what has gone on in the past, we may take note of our errors, and preserve and remember the good things, to the glory of our Lord.

Ken Smith, Secretary