

# AFFIRMATION OF FAITH REPORT

From Fellowship National Council

## The AoF Review Begins

At FNC2022 (November 16, 2022) in Niagara Falls, ON, conference delegates voted in favour of National Council's motion:

*"That Convention approve the 'Process for Change to the FEBCC Affirmation of Faith' document."*

Thus started a three-year review process to prayerfully consider modification(s) to Fellowship National's Affirmation of Faith (AoF). A statement of faith that has served our association of churches well for 70 years. No changes have ever been made to Fellowship National's AoF. The three-year process has been clearly defined in a document entitled "[Process for Change to the FEBCC Affirmation of Faith](#)".

An AoF Team was formed by February 2023 to help navigate the review process on behalf of our Fellowship family. A 16-member team was chosen by our National and Regional Councils along with three representatives from our three seminaries.

The AoF Team met in March 2023 to start the process. It was decided the team needed to hear from our constituency. A sub-committee was formed to prepare and distribute an AoF survey to our churches, pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and friends of The Fellowship in April 2023. In total, 597 individuals participated (573 English and 24 French respondents).

Significant analysis was completed and a report was studied by our AoF Team at a multi-day retreat in August 2023.

## The need to broaden the scope of our review

The following AoF Report is the fruit of the survey findings, analysis of the AoF Team, and next steps. National Council has agreed with our AoF Team that the work to be done will be more than first anticipated. And so, you will note the proposed Motion at the end of this report to be voted on at FNC2023 in Toronto (November 6-8, 2023).

The "Process for Change" document states in the second bullet on the first page that: *"No one is espousing changes to essential doctrine on this journey. National Council is proposing our member churches consider amendments to a 'few sections' of our Affirmation of Faith, with the possible addition of no more than two or three more sections."*

The AoF Team concluded that more than "a few sections" in our AoF need slight modifications. National Council has agreed with this assessment, and so our delegates will vote at FNC2023 on a Motion to allow this. Further explanation will be provided at the conclusion of this report.

### AoF Team Members

Doug Blair (Chair)  
Paul Carter  
Gabriel Lauter  
Alex Hogendoorn  
Barry Howson  
John Mahaffey  
Jenn Martin  
Jonathan McLeod  
Krista Penner  
Barton Priebe  
Tom Smith  
Jon Stairs  
François Turcotte  
RJ Umandap

### Ex Officio:

Steven Jones  
Rob Cole

*"...there must be great care in how the idea of revision is carried out... we live in a day where trust is easily sacrificed for conformity to shifting culture."*

— Survey respondent

Respondents commented on the current order of the sections – Why start with the “Bible” and why not end with “Future Things”?

**48** respondents commented the following on the “Local Church” section:

- It seems to exclude those who are not baptized by immersion from being considered part of the Church, and
- It excludes churches which practice paedobaptism from being considered a church.


**What kind of revision do you desire?**

**77.38%** preserve current format

**14.12%** extensive reformatting

Almost 100 mentioned the need to add “elders” to the list of offices in the “Local Church” section.

**100s** suggested new words to strengthen and clarify each section in the AoF, e.g. changing “convince” to “convict” in the “Holy Spirit” section.



**the fellowship**

# Affirmation of Faith Survey and Analysis

Key constituent conclusions, concerns and suggestions from the April 2023 “AoF Survey” along with the AoF Team’s analysis and suggestions.

**Who completed the AoF survey?**

- 573 English and 24 French respondents
- 95 lead pastors and 60 church staff
- 177 church leaders and 378 church members

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Many suggested that Scripture references should be added to support each AoF section.

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All 14 sections (Articles) of Fellowship National’s Affirmation of Faith received suggestions for modification from survey respondents. The “Local Church”, “Ordinances”, “Lord’s Day”, and “Man” sections received the most suggestions while the “God”, “Christ”, “Bible”, and “Future Things” sections received the least.

Respondents were located in the following Regions:

- FEB Central (63%),
- Pacific (22%),
- Prairies (10%),
- AEBEQ (4%),
- and Atlantic (2%)

Many commented on the need to “modernize the language” throughout the current Affirmation of Faith.

Many commented on the need to keep the essence of the current AoF while ensuring that any modification(s) strengthen and clarified the document.

Many commented on the word “wine” being changed to the word “cup”.

Close to 100 respondents who commented on the “Lord’s Day” article wanted this section modified, with 24 wanting it removed.

The AoF Team have ground rules for discerning potential modifications; a few are:

- Remain true to the current AoF in belief and practice
- Keep current theological terms
- Maintain a high threshold before removing anything, but an even higher threshold before adding anything

**64** suggested the possibility of deleting or combining specific sections, namely, the “Lord’s Day”, “Civil Government”, “Satan”, the “Church and State”, and “Religious Liberty”.

**26** respondents commented that the “Church and State” section be clarified in light of recent government restrictions and lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**30** respondents commented on the need to expand the “Christ” section to include the attributes and humanity of Jesus.

Some suggested the need to create a resource tool to explain each section.

Many asked that we consider making the AoF “gender-neutral”, e.g. changing from “man” to “humanity”.

If the AoF Team were to consider adding new sections, the survey respondents desired a statement on:

- Marriage/Gender – 114
- No new sections – 44
- Women in Ministry – 22
- Sanctity of Life – 18
- Creation – 16

**34** respondents commented on their difficulty with the phrase, “in the following order” in the “Ordinance” section. Of that number, 21 said “remove it” and 7 said “retain it”.

About **20** respondents commented on the need to include a statement on the “Father” and the “Trinity” in the “God” section.

The AoF Team agreed that we retain historic theological terms/words in any future AoF, e.g. “*vicarious, expiatory, and propitiatory death*”.

Only **8** questioned the need for baptism by “immersion” as a qualification for church membership or allow churches the ability to make exceptions for non-immersed believers seeking membership.

Some commented on the critical importance of the French translation work on any future Fellowship National Affirmation of Faith.

# FNC2023: AoF Presentation and Motion

## Preamble

The delegates of FNC2022 approved a process document entitled “Process for Change to the FEBCC Affirmation of Faith” which clearly defined and guided a three-year review of Fellowship National’s current Affirmation of Faith. The process document stated that “National Council is proposing our member churches consider amendments to a ‘few sections’ of our Affirmation of Faith.”

In light of the breadth and volume of feedback from the AoF survey and the reflections of the AoF Team, it became evident that a more significant review and revision of the 1953 Affirmation of Faith is needed, for the purpose of strengthening it and updating the language for our day. The following principles will be followed by the AoF Team:

- Commitment to maintain the spirit and direction of the 1953 AoF; to not depart from its core doctrinal statements
- To maintain a high threshold before removing anything, and an even higher threshold to add anything. In other words, the draft will not read as a new AoF but will clearly be recognized as the 1953 AoF which has been strengthened and updated
- To maintain theological terms currently in the AoF while adding clarification where necessary  
For example: “total depravity”, “expiatory”, etc.
- To address gaps in the AoF, that have been identified by survey responses or the AoF Team, without adding more than the agreed upon two to three articles  
Examples of gaps: no statement on the universal church. No statement on the humanity of Christ. No statement on God the Father.
- To reframe some parts in the AoF that have been identified by our constituent survey responses or the AoF Team  
Example: Reframe “God” section to “Trinity” and add a statement on God the Father
- To update instances of older language in the AoF that have been identified by the survey responses or the Team  
Suggested example: change all references to “man” or “mankind” to “human being” or “humanity”  
Suggested example: change “magistrates” to “government”

## Motion:

The delegates affirm the intention of the Affirmation of Faith Team to prepare a more significant review and revision of the Fellowship National’s 1953 Affirmation of Faith than what was stated in the *Process for Change Document* approved at the 2022 Fellowship National Conference.

## NEXT STEPS:

- AoF Workshop (November 8 at 2:00pm): Meeting with members of the AoF Team to discuss
- AoF Report regarding FNC2023 will be sent to the churches (December 2023).
- Deadline for Fellowship churches to submit suggestions to the AoF Team concerning possible modifications to the Affirmation of Faith (by February 28, 2024). Send to Rob Cole, AoF Team secretary: ([rcole@fellowship.ca](mailto:rcole@fellowship.ca)).
- AoF Team meeting in Toronto (March 2024)