EQUIPPING CHRISTIAN LEADERS

ACADIA
DIVINITY COLLEGE

Abner J. Langley & Harold L. Mitton
Chair of Church Leadership
The Chair of Church Leadership is named after two outstanding Acadia University graduates, Abner J. Langley and Harold L. Mitton, who served their Lord with love and dedication. Both served as ministers, as Presidents of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces, and in leading roles with the Baptist Federation of Canada and the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board. Both were involved in ministry and leadership, nationally and internationally. Both led Acadia Divinity College as Principals.
Acadia Divinity College

Acadia Divinity College (ADC) has a distinguished record of theological education. As early as 1830, Baptists in Nova Scotia established a “department of pious scholars” at Horton Academy in Wolfville for ministerial training. With the founding of what became Acadia University in 1838, preparation for ministry was continued under various formats until the School of Theology was officially formed in 1923. When Acadia University was reorganized in the late 1960s, the School of Theology was reconstituted as Acadia Divinity College in 1968. Today, Acadia Divinity College exists as the official seminary of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches and continues as the Faculty of Theology of Acadia University. The University awards all ADC degrees, and all ADC graduate degrees are approved by the Association of Theological Schools in Canada and the United States.

Acadia Divinity College offers theological education at the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral levels, equipping men and women for leadership roles in churches, chaplaincies, denominational leadership, university and seminary teaching, cross-cultural mission, para-church leadership, and other areas of ministry. The College is known for rigorous academic instruction and also for a strong emphasis on practical training. This training is designed to help students clarify their call, establish their ministerial competencies, and refine their character in order that they might be used of God as effective leaders in the local church and other ministry settings.

With rich and varied backgrounds, Acadia Divinity College’s highly qualified professors are published authors, respected leaders in their fields, and actively engaged in local, regional, national, and international ministries. With a diverse student population, representing many countries of the world and including more than 20 Christian denominations, Acadia Divinity College’s reach is global.
The Reverend Dr. Abner J. Langley was a pastor, educator, administrator, and Baptist leader who served as the second Principal of Acadia Divinity College and Dean of Theology for Acadia University between 1971 and 1975.

Dr. Langley was born in Goldboro, Nova Scotia, where he received his early education. Following work in the business field for a brief period of time, he achieved a Bachelor of Theology from Gordon College in 1934 followed by a Master of Arts in Philosophy from Boston University in 1935. In 1936, he came to Acadia University and received a Bachelor of Divinity. Twenty-five years later in 1961, an honorary Doctor of Divinity was conferred to him by Acadia.

Dr. Langley was ordained in 1935 and provided pastoral leadership in several Baptist churches in the Maritime Provinces:

- Immanuel Baptist, Truro, Nova Scotia;
- Central Baptist, Saint John, New Brunswick;
- West End Baptist, Halifax, Nova Scotia; and,
- First Baptist, Moncton, New Brunswick.

He modeled and taught excellence in pastoral care, preaching and church administration, and he took great interest in the lives of students. His primary focus was on preparing pastoral leaders who understood servanthood as the foundation for the advancement of a church’s ministry in a given community. He often reminded students that the mission of the church was global as well as local, his own ministry having been deeply influenced by visits to various mission projects internationally.

For 19 years, from the inception of the College in 1968 until his passing, Dr. Langley served Acadia Divinity College with devotion as Associate Principal, Principal, Head of the Department of Practical Theology, a lecturer in homiletics, and Director of Development and External Relations.

Dr. Langley held many offices within the Baptist denomination: President of the United Baptist Convention; President of the Baptist Federation of Canada; a member of several committees in the Baptist World Alliance; a governor of Acadia University; and Chairman of the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board.
The Reverend Dr. Harold L. Mitton succeeded Dr. Abner J. Langley as the third Principal of Acadia Divinity College and Dean of Theology for Acadia University in 1975 until his retirement in 1985. He continued at the College as Director of Supervised Field Education; a position he held until 1991.

Dr. Mitton was born and grew up in Moncton, New Brunswick. After a brief time in business, he earned a Bachelor of Arts at Acadia University in 1944 and a Bachelor of Divinity in 1946. During his student days, he was Editor of the Athenaeum, played rugby, and was Class Valedictorian. In the summer months, he served as Field Secretary to President F.W. Patterson, recruiting deserving students to Acadia from across the Maritimes.

Following ordination in 1946, he served Baptist churches in:

- Aylesford, Nova Scotia;
- Windsor, Nova Scotia;
- Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island;
- Fredericton, New Brunswick; and,
- Calgary, Alberta.

In 1975, he returned to Acadia Divinity College as Principal and Dean of Theology for Acadia University. The University had previously awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity in 1966.

Dr. Mitton taught various courses at Acadia Divinity College, focusing on the pastoral office, practice of preaching, worship, and spiritual formation. With his focus on the pastoral care of students, staff and faculty, Dr. Mitton effectively demonstrated a collegial style of administration. Following retirement in 1985, he was named Professor Emeritus.

He was highly effective in weaving together his academic leadership with church leadership. His ministry career was also marked by service as President of the Atlantic Baptist Convention (1960) and the Vice-President of the Baptist Federation of Canada (1968). In 1971, Dr. Mitton was appointed to the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board. He was highly regarded as a church statesman and sought out as one of Canada’s finest preachers. His service in Acadia University included exemplary leadership on the Board of Governors for two terms.
The Vision

What does faithful and effective church leadership look like today? This is a particularly salient moment for higher education in church leadership – to help define the role of the church and address the challenges posed by life in the digital age.

Acadia Divinity College is committed to the thoughtful integration of biblical study, theology, and church history with the contemporary practice of ministry. The opportunity to grapple with the underlying principles of leadership that will engage with the spiritual and social issues of today requires the theological education that Acadia Divinity College can provide. Drs. Langley and Mitton recognized that church programs and structures would constantly change.

In 2008, the Board of Trustees of Acadia Divinity College established the Abner J. Langley and Harold L. Mitton Chair of Church Leadership in honour of these two outstanding church leaders. In doing so, the Board recognized that ministry preparation is as much about the development of the leader as it is about their ability to perform certain leadership tasks. Course work provides opportunity for the leader to develop a greater understanding of their spiritual gifts as well as to grow as a person in ministry.

Rooted in their theological understanding of the nature and purpose of the church, students are equipped to develop their particular pastoral identity. They explore their leadership style and ‘call’ to ministry as they apprentice in churches with seasoned mentors who provide counsel, guidance, and encouragement.

Competencies for the performance of leadership tasks are developed over the progression of their theological education and lifetime of ministry. The curriculum of the College reflects practical training for various ministry contexts. These include local church, youth and family, chaplaincy (hospital, military, and prison), global mission centres as well as para-church settings.

Both Abner J. Langley and Harold L. Mitton believed the local church was God’s instrument for hope for those within it and for those around it. They lived this out as pastoral leaders and taught this to their students. Churches have made disciples of Jesus Christ through the leaders these men have trained.
The Reverend Dr. Harry G. Gardner is the first occupant of the Abner J. Langley and Harold L. Mitton Chair of Church Leadership. This honour was bestowed upon him at his installation as the President of Acadia Divinity College and Dean of Theology for Acadia University in January 2008.

Dr. Gardner was born in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, and grew up in Middlefield. Following high school graduation, he attended Dalhousie University where he achieved a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1974. He then became a student at Acadia Divinity College and was taught by Dr. Abner Langley and Dr. Harold Mitton. In 1977, he earned a Master of Divinity degree and was ordained the following year. He later earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in California in 1993.

Dr. Gardner began his early career in the following churches in Nova Scotia:

- Burlington and Victoria Harbour United Baptist Churches;
- Wilmot United Baptist Church;
- Liverpool United Baptist Church; and,
- Brooklyn United Baptist Church.

In 1986, Dr. Gardner moved to Saint John, New Brunswick, and provided leadership through the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches office for 21 years. He served as the Director Church Extension, the Director of Home Missions and Church Planting, and the Executive Minister. In addition, his leadership experience includes national and international roles. He held the position of President of North American Baptist Fellowship in 2007, and he was appointed one of the twelve Vice-Presidents of the Baptist World Alliance in 2010 for a five-year term.

Dr. Gardner is passionate about the mission of Acadia Divinity College to equip Christian leaders. He regularly draws on his pastoral and leadership experience when teaching students in the areas of pastoral ministry, leadership, and Christian spiritual formation.
I believe ADC is committed to the personal growth of every student, and to the teaching, training and establishment of spiritual leaders. Studying at ADC has inspired, encouraged, and sharpened my faith, and encouraged me to be a leader in all areas of my life.

- Douglas Duncan, BTh Graduate 2014

An academic chair at Acadia Divinity College requires $2.5 million to be fully funded.

Please help us endow the Abner J. Langley and Harold L. Mitton Chair of Church Leadership.

Your financial support will enable the College to fulfill its mission of Equipping Christian Leaders.