

# Christian Baptism<sup>1</sup>

## God's Invitation

We believe that when people respond in faith to God's invitation to repentance, new life, and discipleship, God calls each of them to receive water baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

## Meaning<sup>3</sup>

Baptism is an act of obedience<sup>4</sup> which testifies that God in Christ has forgiven and cleansed a person from sin, freed them from the power of sin and death, given them the Holy Spirit, and united them with the body of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Baptism by immersion is a powerful testimony<sup>6</sup> that a believer has been washed by the Spirit,<sup>7</sup> has died with Christ to sin and has been raised to newness of life.<sup>8</sup>

In baptism the believer publicly bears witness to their own commitment to follow Jesus as Lord, serving Jesus as a covenant member<sup>9</sup> of the local congregation in God's Kingdom mission.

Baptism is the God-given means by which the local church family incorporates followers of Jesus.

## Who

Baptism is for all those who repent and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, have received the Holy Spirit, and pledge to live as disciples who obey Jesus in all of life.<sup>10</sup> Baptism is for those who understand its basic meaning, are able to be accountable to Christ and the church, and request it voluntarily.<sup>11</sup>

## Practice

The local church baptizes believers by immersion and joyfully welcomes and disciples them into full participation as members of the congregation.<sup>12</sup> The local church also joyfully welcomes Christian disciples baptized elsewhere, regardless of mode, if they were baptized upon their own confession of faith.<sup>13</sup>

The local church invites those who claim baptism prior to their own confession of faith and who desire to be members of a Mennonite Brethren congregation to receive baptism as a testimony to their own faith.<sup>14</sup>

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Matthew 3:13-17; 28:18-20; Acts 2:38-42; 8:12; 10:47-48; Romans 6:2-6; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Colossians 2:12-13; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:4-6; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21.

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<sup>1</sup> Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two ordinances practiced by all Mennonite Brethren churches. They testify to and celebrate God's grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ offered freely to anyone who responds in faith. Baptism is the church ordinance which recognizes and celebrates a believer's entry into this covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and that believer's entry into Christ's body, the church. The Lord's Supper (see Article 9) is the church ordinance which expresses each believer's ongoing renewal of this covenant with both God and the Body of Christ, and the ongoing renewal of the whole church's spiritual and relational life. Throughout Article 8, one sees the word "church" repeated often. Baptism is a church or body of Christ event and not simply an individual event expressing one's own spiritual commitment.

Baptism is a very important act in the New Testament. Even Jesus himself at the beginning of his earthly ministry was baptized as a means of identification with us and with God's purpose in saving and forming a people ("to fulfill all righteousness," Matthew 3:13-17). The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) highlights the importance of baptism by connecting it to the central missionary assignment given by Jesus Christ, to "make disciples of all nations." Baptism is a discipleship step in the context of obeying everything Jesus commanded.

At Pentecost, Peter stood up and addressed the Jerusalem crowd with these words: "Repent and be baptized, **every one of you**, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:38,41). The act of baptism is central to forming the church.

<sup>2</sup> Water baptism is God's command for everyone who desires to be a disciple of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:18-20). Disciples of Christ are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). There is no hint in the New Testament that baptism is optional, an add-on, or an action limited to some special spiritual group. Also, an unbaptized believer never passes an age or a maturity level where baptism is no longer a relevant command for them. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you" is every bit as applicable today as at Pentecost (Acts 2:38).

<sup>3</sup> Baptism has a past, present, and future dimension. It is a person's testimony about what has happened in their life past (faith; cleansing; freedom from sin and death; receiving the Holy Spirit), a commitment about how they want to live in the

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present (desire for spiritual growth; full participation and inclusion into Christ's body and its mission), and a faith affirmation about what they believe will happen in their ultimate future (bodily resurrection into the fullness of God's eternal Kingdom). In the early church, conversion and baptism occurred in very close relation to each other, so they often appear as one event in the Bible. However, they are two separate but closely related steps in the life of a Christian disciple (cf. Acts 8:12; 10:47-48).

Mennonite Brethren understand baptism as an ordinance in the life of the local church which is why it is placed in the Confession of Faith after the Nature of the Church (Article 6) and the Mission of the Church (Article 7) rather than right after the article on Salvation (Article 5). Baptism is a church community ordinance not simply an individual or personal event. In the New Testament, believers never baptized themselves. The church or representatives of the church were given this responsibility, which means that the local church also testifies and makes commitments as it participates in the baptism event.

The New Testament teachings on the meaning of baptism are clustered around four key themes. The person has been **cleansed or freed from sin** (1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; Hebrew 10:22; Romans 6:3-6). The person **has moved from death to new life in Christ** (Colossians 2:12-13; Galatians 3:26-27). The person **has been incorporated into the body of Christ, as expressed in the local church family** (Acts 2:41; Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13). There, the person joins other baptized believers in the **unity and oneness of this "body"** (Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 4:4-6).

<sup>4</sup> Baptism is an act of obedience for both the person being baptized (Acts 2:38) and the church participating in the baptism (Matthew 28:19).

<sup>5</sup> In the baptism event, the believer testifies and affirms that by faith these powerful divine actions are true. The church as it represents God in the event testifies to the saving work of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the person's life. The Holy Spirit comes at the time of a person's salvation in Jesus and the water baptism that follows is a testimony to the presence of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:47-48).

<sup>6</sup> Together with the Lord's Supper, some Christian traditions see baptism as a "sacrament" where God's grace is specially transferred to the baptized individual because of the event. Others see it as a "sign" or "symbol," merely pointing to what happened earlier in a person's life. We hold that baptism, while not salvific or sacramental, is a powerful act of obedience and testimony which deeply impacts every area of one's life. For believers, it is an act of commitment, faith, and obedience. Its observance crowns the process of a person's initial conversion. It also has the power to deeply impact the spiritual and relational life of the church and the individual. Baptism is the external and public step of faith commanded by Jesus as part of salvation. While baptism is not necessary for salvation, it crowns the process of inner faith by giving it a visible and public dimension. Baptism is the observable and recognizable means

by which God adds believers to the church (cf. Acts 2:41; 5:14). By the same token, baptism without personal faith in Jesus is a meaningless ritual (cf. Mark 16:16).

<sup>7</sup> Water baptism represents the work of the Holy Spirit, who baptizes believers into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) by cleansing them from sin. Other New Testament texts also speak of the Spirit's washing that **cleanses and frees from sin**. Christians have been washed and sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:11) through faith made visible in baptism. Christians have been freed from slavery to sin demonstrated in baptism (Romans 6:3-6). Jesus loved the church so he cleansed her by the "washing with water through the word" (Ephesians 5:26). Both Titus 3:5 and Hebrews 10:22 pick up the "washing" image. All of these are in continuity with the practice of baptism in Judaism (observant Jews would regularly enter a pool of water to be spiritually and ritually cleansed) and with John the Baptist's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 2:12-13 associates baptism with moving from death ("buried with him in baptism") to **new life in Christ**. Galatians 3:26-27 speaks of the baptized ones as now having "clothed yourselves with Christ." Baptism is associated here with new life, the life of the kingdom of God, and fullness of life in Christ.

<sup>9</sup> Baptism in the New Testament world had strong associations with **incorporation or inclusion** into a group. Gentiles who wanted to become proselytes or converts to Judaism would be required to enter a pool of water called a mikveh and immerse themselves. Prior to any Christian baptisms, this action of immersion in water had associations with incorporation or inclusion into Judaism. These associations are strongly present in Acts 2:41 as an action of incorporation or inclusion into the church, where the newly converted were baptized and then "about three thousand were added to their number that day."

<sup>10</sup> These qualifications for baptism echo several biblical texts. In Romans 10:9, Paul explains that God saves those who believe and confess that Jesus is the resurrected Lord. In Acts 2:38, Peter calls those who believe to repent from their current life direction and follow Christ because God promises to give the Holy Spirit to those who repent and are baptized. In Acts 10:47, however, because of the undeniable evidence that new believers had received the Holy Spirit, water baptism was their next step. Evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit can vary; but at the most basic level, as Paul clarifies in 1 Corinthians 12:3, those who declare "Jesus is Lord" are already under the influence of the Spirit. As Jesus indicates in John 3:5, water and Spirit each play a part when a person is born from above. Put most simply, Jesus instructs his followers to baptize all those who are becoming his obedient disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

<sup>11</sup> The decision to be baptized is in response to the saving work of God in a person's

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life. The New Testament pattern of baptism takes place after individuals voluntarily repented, received the Holy Spirit, and became disciples of Jesus by faith. This is why Mennonite Brethren do not practice infant baptism, the baptism of young children, forced baptisms, and baptisms on behalf of others. The only New Testament evidence that might support the practice of infant baptism involves five references to “household baptisms” (Acts 11:13-14; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16) and the analogy between Old Testament circumcision of male infants born to Israelite parents. Mennonite Brethren, along with all those in the Believers Church tradition, agree that the analogy and these five ambiguous references do not provide adequate support for baptizing infants of believing parents.

<sup>12</sup> First Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:27-28, and Ephesians 4:4-6 link baptism with **unity or oneness in the church**. Baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13 incorporates people “into one body” which brings about sociological unity in the church. Jew and Greek, slave and free are united into one community or family, and one Spirit nurtures all. Baptism has the same consequence in Galatians 3:27-28; the differences between Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female no longer divide. Baptism demonstrates that one’s identity in Christ supersedes every other identity. Being baptized into Christ therefore means that the cultural, socio-economic, racial, ethnic, gender barriers which cause hostility and division between people have been broken down. In place of these divisions God, in Christ, is creating one, new humanity (Ephesians 2:14-16). Different people and social classes are united through baptism into Christ.

The emphasis on “one baptism” in Ephesians 4:4-6 points to church unity, as does one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one God. Baptism unites diverse people into one people because all enter the body of Christ in the same way—through faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism signifies unity in the church, creating one body out of very different people, even former enemies.

<sup>13</sup> The local church welcomes baptized disciples of Jesus who have been baptized upon their own confession of faith in other Christian denominations and Christian traditions to participate and serve in the church. The mode of baptism (immersion, pouring, sprinkling) is of secondary importance to what their baptism symbolized (i.e., their personal confession of faith in Jesus as Lord, their desire to grow in discipleship, and their desire to be part of Christ’s body).

<sup>14</sup> Although Mennonite Brethren consider the biblical support for the practice of baptizing infants as inadequate, they do respect the love and spiritual care this action represents on the part of the believing parents. However, in order to follow the biblical model as we understand it, Mennonite Brethren call every disciple of Jesus to be baptized upon their own confession of faith prior to incorporation into the local church family.

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### 1. Why do we practice believer's baptism?

Believer's baptism is the practice of baptizing individuals old enough to believe in and obey Jesus. MBs understand that baptism is a powerful act that testifies to past repentance, conversion, and belief—as well as to a present and future commitment to discipleship and mission within Christ's body. As a result, we believe that according to the biblical pattern (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38-41), baptism is a voluntary action taken by an individual post-conversion.

Some Christian traditions practice the baptism of infants to believing parents (paedo-baptism) for various reasons: they may hold baptism to have saving power or, like Old Testament circumcision, they hold that baptism includes the infant in the church family. Many such traditions understand that for the event to have meaning, the child must later affirm (or own) this event done to them. Other traditions practice infant baptism with less formal meaning, akin to our practice of child dedication.

We do not believe that the New Testament texts used to support infant baptism (the “household” baptisms [e.g., Acts 11:13-14; 16:14, 31], the “sanctification” of children by believing parents [1 Corinthians 7:14], Jesus' welcome of children to himself [Mark 10:14-16], or the continuity of the New Covenant with Old Testament Israel) provide adequate support for the practice of infant baptism today.

In addition, baptizing infants may lead to some adults later self-identifying as Christians without understanding that living as disciples of Jesus requires a personal surrender.

Therefore, it is our conviction that believer's baptism is the faithful way to live out the New Testament teaching and is practiced as such within our family of churches.

### 2. Does baptism save?

Baptism with water is not salvific (in the sense of making a person a Christian), nor is it sacramental (in the sense of being an extraordinary

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means of grace) but we embrace it as a powerful action overflowing with rich meaning for both the baptized individual and the church community. The water does not itself cleanse, save, unify, or give new life, but it is a rich symbol representing what the Holy Spirit has done and is doing in the life of the believer.

Several New Testament texts convey the close connection between conversion and baptism (“Repent and be baptized, every one of you” [Acts 2:38]; “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” [Mk 16:16] etc.). Hence in the NT, baptism is part of the process of salvation. It is the external and public step of obedient faith commanded by the Lord as part of conversion. While baptism is not necessary for salvation, it crowns the process of inner faith by giving it a visible and public dimension. It is in this sense that we understand 1 Peter 3:21.

However, without the reality of repentance, conversion and belief, the otherwise powerful act of baptism is empty.

Article 8 describes baptism as an “act of obedience” and a “powerful testimony” to things that have happened in the past, are happening in the present, and by faith will be true in the future. The baptismal candidate and the local church testify that God has done a work of grace through faith in the candidate’s life and that the candidate desires to grow as a disciple of Jesus as part of the local family of God. This makes baptism sacred, rich in significance, and covenantal.

### **3. When should baptism occur after a person’s conversion?**

With the exception of very young children (see question 4), there is no need for a long delay between conversion and baptism. All candidates should undergo basic preparation for baptism (see question 5). While this may require more or less time depending on the person, the Scriptural pattern brings conversion and baptism quite closely together.

In Scripture, baptism belongs at the beginning of the journey of Christian discipleship and serves as an entry point into covenant community for the believer. It is not a graduation ceremony that is reserved for the spiritually mature.

While not having a delay is the New Testament pattern, all unbaptized believers even those well along in their Christian journey should respond to God’s invitation and be baptized. It is never too late to be baptized. Paul in his letters (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27) assumes that every believer is baptized. F.F. Bruce’s often quoted statement says it well: “The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the New Testament” (*Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 77).

#### **4. Do we advise a minimum age for baptism?**

Since believer's baptism is a joyful, public action that celebrates the new life in Christ, it is natural to desire to baptize new believers as soon as possible after the conversion experience. In the New Testament church, conversion and baptism are linked as two parts of the same experience.

Historically, as the church grew and children began to place their faith in Christ often at a very early age, keeping the conversion-baptism connection ceased to be a straight-forward matter.

In addition, since baptism is not only a look back to one's salvation, but also a look forward to full participation in the local church as it models and lives out its radical Kingdom mission, this question becomes even more challenging.

Article 8 states: "Baptism is for all those who repent and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, have received the Holy Spirit, and pledge to live as disciples who obey Jesus in all of life. Baptism is for those who understand its basic meaning, are able to be accountable to Christ and the church, and request it voluntarily."

Therefore, baptismal candidates must be old enough to be able to understand that in baptism they testify to their own repentance, confession of Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and their commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus as a covenant member of their local church family. In addition, they must be able to understand that they are testifying to God's saving action in their life (forgiving and cleansing, freeing from the power of sin, and giving the Holy Spirit), and that they are committing to participation in the body of Christ.

A temptation church leaders face is to acquiesce to pressure to baptize young children. Though their understanding of salvation may represent an authentic initial spiritual experience, loving mentors should attempt to determine whether the child actually "owns" their faith or if the child is taking this step merely to please parents or to join in with others taking the same step. Also, these mentors should determine if the child has an adequate understanding that baptism represents a past testimony of what Jesus has done, and a present ongoing commitment both to discipleship and to Jesus' family.

Considerable sensitivity and discernment are needed both to avoid quenching the inner aspirations of the young believer, and to avoid trivializing the ordinance by baptizing children who do not have an adequate understanding of the act.

#### **5. How much preparation for baptism is enough?**

The New Testament accounts do not display long periods of preparation between conversion and baptism. Many of the first Christians were already

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familiar with the meaning of baptism rites and the arc of God's story. However, the early church soon developed a preparation process for candidates who were unfamiliar with the meaning of baptism.

It is significant that each candidate knows about the double focus of the baptism event (looking back at conversion and looking forward to discipleship and mission within the local church) and about the theological and ethical convictions held by the church they are joining. However, for most candidates this preparation should at the most be measured in months rather than years.

There is no need for a long delay between one's conversion and baptism. It is important, however, that the baptismal candidate has a basic understanding of:

1. salvation and baptism,
2. the shared theological convictions of the church they are joining (according to the MB Confession of Faith), and
3. discipleship as part of their life in the local church.

There will be times when it will be difficult to assess whether such basic understanding is in place for baptismal candidates who clearly love Jesus, but who have learning and/or cognitive challenges. In such cases, the leadership of the church community will need prayer and loving discernment as they help these candidates take this important step which blesses both them and their church family.

The Canadian MB Conference offers a range of resources to prepare candidates for baptism.

## **6. How sanctified (or holy) does someone need to be in order to be baptized?**

Baptism is a testimony on the part of the candidate, the local church, and God (through the local church) that this person is a disciple of Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and committed to grow as a disciple in the context of the local church family.

The New Testament pattern is not sanctification and then, at some point, baptism. Rather it is a bowing down in surrender to Jesus as Lord, followed by baptism as a sign of one's willingness to walk on this discipleship journey no matter where it leads.

Local church leadership is called to discern whether the candidate deeply desires to become sanctified through the power of Jesus and his Spirit, rather than assess whether a believer is holy enough to be baptized, or whether God has given adequate victory to the candidate over sin. The issue is the direction of the person's life rather than their level of present perfection.

The posture of submission and surrender to Jesus, along with a willingness to be discipled and accountable to the local church, are the key prerequisites

to baptism. The process of sanctification is a long journey for every believer and is best facilitated by an intentional discipleship process carried out in the context of the local church community.

This means that many of those baptized will still exhibit sinful patterns and behaviours at, and after, their baptism. Since baptism is the powerful act of incorporation, the local church must take seriously its responsibility to teach these newly baptized “to obey everything I [Jesus] have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). This will involve modeling discipleship, loving exhortation, grace, and patient commitment, along with intentional discipleship paths for all in the covenant community.

### **7. When in the baptism process should we teach the MB Confession?**

Neither the candidate nor the church family benefit when the candidate post-baptism expresses surprise to be obligated to shared theological and ethical convictions within their local covenant community.

The baptismal candidate’s early discipleship process should therefore include some understanding of the collectively held convictions of the family of churches they are joining through baptism. Minimally, the candidate should be provided with access to the Confession and ample opportunity to ask questions about the theological and ethical commitments contained within it.

Each local church is encouraged to find the best process to introduce baptismal candidates to the convictions contained in the MB Confession.

See question 5 for more on preparations for baptism.

The Canadian MB Conference offers a range of resources to prepare candidates for baptism.

### **8. What if a person wants to be baptized but not become part of the local church?**

We understand baptism and belonging to a covenant community as a one-step process. While there might be a number of practical reasons for separation of the two, that is not the New Testament pattern, nor is it the Anabaptist practice.

The 3,000 newly baptized believers in Jerusalem were immediately “added to their number” (Acts 2:41,47). According to Acts 2:42-47, being part of their number involved all the kinds of activities we associate with membership in a church family (e.g., teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, mutual aid, worship, mission).

In baptism, God testifies (by means of the local church’s witness) that this candidate is a child of God and joins that child of God to the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:13) as reflected in the local family of God.

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The only exception to this pattern might be Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) who was on his journey home. Since we do not know more about the eunuch's subsequent church journey, we do not base practices on being a member of a covenant community on this text.

To become part of Jesus means being part of his body, the church (see Article 8 Endnote 9). Some may counter by substituting the universal church here rather than the local church, but it is only the local church that can welcome a new believer, commit to encourage, disciple and teach a new believer, and hold a new believer accountable.

For these reasons, we discourage practicing baptisms which do not lead to belonging to the local church. See question 9 for exceptions.

**9. Are there times when a local church might baptize someone and not have them become part of this community?**

Article 8 echoes the New Testament pattern of baptism as the key initiation rite into the local church (the Ethiopian's baptism in Act 8 is a possible exception, not a normative example).

However, there may be worthy exceptions where the baptismal candidate is not denying this important connection but their circumstances may simply not allow them to be active members of their local congregation. Examples of this may include students who have participated in a local congregation while at school and may, prior to their return home, request baptism from this temporary congregation who has nurtured their faith. Others may be moving to a location without a local MB church and request baptism prior to their move.

Bearing in mind that baptism not only looks back to conversion but also looks forward to present and future participation and mission in the local church, the local church needs to carefully discern legitimate extraordinary circumstances at play with certain candidates. In such cases we encourage the church family to do everything they can to support that person from a distance until they are able to join and participate actively in a local congregation.

The key here is that separating baptism from full inclusion in the local community should be a rare exception that happens only by prayerful discernment on the part of leaders.

**10. What does “being a member of a local church” mean?**

Mennonite Brethren around the world understand the church to be a “covenant community” or “covenant family” characterized by belonging, mutual support, shared mission, and mutual accountability as maturing disciples of Jesus. Christian baptism incorporates each believer into this

beautiful, Jesus-centred, missional community and thus discourages a solitary discipleship journey.

To be a member of the local covenant community involves sharing in the life and mission of the church, being discipled in the path of Jesus, exercising one's spiritual gifts for the benefit of all, and giving and receiving loving support and accountability. Covenant community membership is about belonging, receiving care, and contributing as one is able.

It is unlikely that these can happen without local churches knowing which of their attendees have entered this type of relationship. As a result, local churches should keep up-to-date records of those in the covenant community who have joined the church by baptism, and those who have joined upon their confession of faith and a report of their earlier believer's baptism.

Article 8 does not directly address all the details about how local MB churches structure their practices of decision-making and leadership eligibility, but since every baptized member has the Holy Spirit, we believe that every baptized member has a contribution to make in the discernment of God's will. For example, many local MB church families invite all covenant community members (with the exception of those under the legal age in their province) into full decision-making and voting at meetings. All covenant community members of legal age are simultaneously "legal members," able to vote on local church matters and eligible for consideration to represent the local church as delegates at the MB provincial and national levels.

Other MB churches invite covenant community members to a further, more complete embrace of the church's vision, mission, and theological commitments as demonstrated in the MB Confession of Faith, prior to the covenant community member becoming a voting "legal member." Both of these options are consistent with Article 8.

For more resources on covenant community membership and legal membership, see: "Guidelines for Regulations of Members in Mennonite Brethren Churches" on the "Faith and Life Resources" page of our website.

**NFLT Resources:** The Meeting Place practice of covenant community: <https://vimeo.com/366838053>

## **11. What if a candidate desires a baptism location that excludes the local church?**

A careful reading of Article 8 reveals the crucial role of the local church in each baptism. If baptism were only an individual's personal celebration of faith and commitment to Christ, then a private baptism in a special location would be appropriate.

However, baptisms are central to the life and mission of the local church. They serve as an encouragement to the church family and celebrations of

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God's work in the congregation's disciple-making mission.

At baptism, the church is welcoming someone in. A baptism without the local church present is like a wedding without the parents and family present.

We therefore practice baptism in the life of the local church community, in Sunday services or other formal gatherings of the local congregation, accompanied by the testimony of the baptismal candidates and the expression of shared commitments from both candidates and congregation.

In cases where individuals pursue baptism outside the local church gathering, the leadership of the local church must discern the best redemptive path forward. Welcoming the new member of the family after the fact with video evidence of the baptism, in-person testimony, and prayer of welcome into the church family is one example of one such a redemptive path.

**12. What elements should be present in a baptism service?**

A baptism service offers an opportunity for much creativity. The following are important elements that ought to be present whenever possible.

1. Context of corporate worship with teaching on baptism.
2. Testimony of the baptismal candidates' journey to salvation.
3. Affirmations from a few witnesses from the local church family.
4. Formal affirmation of faith in Christ by the candidate in the form of Q&A, e.g. Do you believe that Jesus is your personal Lord and Saviour?/I do.
5. Formal declaration on the part of the baptizer such as "Upon this confession of your faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
6. Prayer for the baptized.
7. Formal acceptance of the baptized into the covenant community.
8. Mutual covenanting on the part of the baptized and the congregation to follow Jesus together.
9. Celebration.

**13. Are those baptized as infants required to be baptized upon their own confession of faith?**

The MB church family teaches and practices only believer's baptism, which we believe is the means by which believers are joined to the church family. [see question 1] We believe this for two reasons.

First, as our Confession states, we understand that the New Testament's teaching and pattern of baptism convey a person's own witness of their decision to respond to God in faith and their understanding of their commitment to live as Jesus' disciple in all of life.

Second, as the sixteenth century Anabaptists studied the Bible, they

came to a firm conviction of practicing only believer's baptism. This was in opposition to the merger of church and state (where infant baptism was equated with citizenship) and to a sacramental theology of baptism (which believed water baptism forgives a person of original sin). As heirs of this Anabaptist heritage, the global MB family continues in this practice because we believe it is faithful to the biblical witness.

While we affirm the significance of a voluntary response of faith prior to one's baptism, we also recognize some Christian faith traditions understand that the biblical command to baptize also involves baptizing infants born to Christian parents in their congregations. We affirm the good intentions of parents who baptize their infants and recognize how this can be experienced as a meaningful event, particularly when these intentions are confirmed through the later faith response of the person baptized.

Nevertheless, for those who desire to be members of a Mennonite Brethren congregation, we invite them to receive baptism as a testimony to their own faith and as an act of discipleship. This public act also witnesses to their identification as a covenant member of the church – the local expression of Christ's Body.

We recognize that some people will not see the need for believer's baptism, whether because they value their infant baptism and subsequent confirmation, because they are concerned about offending their parents or their previous church community, and/or because they interpret the Scriptures differently. We ask our church leaders to walk sensitively with those who have concerns—continuing to study the Scriptures together and expressing love and acceptance—in hopes that they will one day welcome believer's baptism as a meaningful step of discipleship

**NFLT Resources:** Heather's Believer's Baptism Journey <https://vimeo.com/showcase/6787510>

Karen's Believer's Baptism Journey <https://vimeo.com/396718599/e3add00c05>

#### **14. What if immersion water baptism is not an option?**

While immersion baptism conveys rich symbolism of cleansing, deliverance, and movement from death to new life, there may be special situations where immersion is not a viable option.

Since we do not have clear biblical guidance for these special situations, The Didache, a very early Christian instruction manual for the church, can provide some wisdom for us: "Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living [running] water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water

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three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.”

In those exceptional cases where immersion baptism is not possible, we encourage that the alternate mode of baptism be celebrated in the same way as immersion baptism (see question 12).

While exceptional cases should be rare and determined by local leaders in discerning conversation with the candidate, these baptisms should be seen as equal in value and significance.

**15. What about spontaneous baptisms?**

The New Testament points to baptisms that immediately follow conversion (e.g., Acts 8:36-39; 16:33). However, the text also encourages all to “count the cost” (Luke 14:25-34) before making the decision to become disciples of Jesus.

Spontaneous baptisms have some benefits (e.g., listening and responding immediately to the perceived leading of the Spirit) and some drawbacks (e.g., failing to understand the commitment that comes with the decision).

Question 5 highlights the importance of preparation for baptism. In addition, it is important that the local congregation can testify on behalf of the individual as well so it can without reservation welcome them into the covenant community.

These concerns rule out most spontaneous baptisms.

In general, the less familiar a person is with Jesus and the church, the more pre-baptism preparation they need. If a local church wants to invite and practice spontaneous baptism, it needs to be confident that the person requesting baptism in the moment understands the rich meaning and mutual covenantal obligations to their congregation, and that the church is able to affirm that testimony without hesitation. If this is the case, the church certainly should celebrate this with joy.

See also question 11 – baptism locations which exclude the local congregation.

**16. Can Christians who have been baptized upon their confession of faith be baptized again?**

Occasionally believers who were baptized upon their own confession of faith will later in their journey pursue rebaptism. They may wish to publicly convey their new and powerful recommitment to Jesus after a period of spiritual rebellion or apathy. They may wish to be baptized based on a free and adult decision as opposed to baptism due to family or church pressure. They may prefer immersion to the mode they experienced earlier. They may wish to be baptized in a more meaningful location (e.g., Jordan River) than they felt was the case in their baptism.

We hold baptism to be a rich act of obedience to Christ Jesus, pointing

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to one's salvation in the past and to the future life of following Jesus in the context of the local church community. This act of obedience is not qualitatively impacted by how one feels about it at the time, where it happens, or who led it. Therefore, repeating it will not make it more effective.

We encourage church leaders to discern carefully when faced with requests for rebaptism. It may be that the individual was indeed not originally baptized as a believer, in which case the request ought to be honoured. It may also be an opportunity to recognize and affirm the spiritual renewal that may lie behind such requests in other more appropriate ways.