



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

Study Guide on Conditions of Membership July 2025

BACKGROUND

The 2023 World Conference adopted WCR 1324, *Resolution on Baptism and Membership*, on 24 April 2023 which states:

That the World Conference request the president of the church to give additional prayer and study seeking divine guidance on persons who were baptized before the age of eight becoming members of Community of Christ via confirmation after having attained the age of eight.

Part 1

BRIEF HISTORY

This is not the first time that this question has been raised. World Church leaders have been wrestling with this question for over 20 years. As an example, the 1992 World Conference adopted WCR 1221 asking for a study on the conditions of membership and a report to the next conference.

To help the church review what has been happening on this topic, the First Presidency created a brief history: *Our Journey with Conditions of Membership Timeline of Proposals and Actions* (2024). This paper is provided on page 5.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

After reading the brief history, prayerfully consider and discuss the following questions:

1. What did you learn that was new?
2. What steps do you feel have been missing in the exploration that has been taking place?
3. What is the Holy Spirit inviting us to consider since this question continues to be raised?

Part 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

As noted in the timeline, the First Presidency asked the Theology Formation Team to complete a study in response to WCR 1301 adopted on 15 April 2013. The study focused on the theological perspectives on granting Community of Christ membership via confirmation after having attained the age of eight to persons who were baptized outside of Community of Christ before the age of eight.

The team submitted their study results in a report submitted to the First Presidency and 2016 World Conference. The report presented summaries of arguments for two approaches to baptism: 1) accepting only those baptisms received at age eight and above (believer's baptism) and 2) accepting baptisms received before age eight. The team looked at each approach using five of the six lenses for discovering God's will (scripture, experience, reason, tradition, and continuing revelation). For the purposes of this review, the sixth lens of common consent was not considered. This report is provided on page 8.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

After reading the report, prayerfully consider and discuss the following questions:

Reflection questions for the position of accepting only those baptisms received at age eight and above (Believer's Baptism).

Scripture

1. How do you interpret the role of personal agency in the context of baptism as presented in the scriptures cited?
2. In what ways does the practice of repentance before baptism influence your understanding of this sacrament?

Experience

1. Reflect on your personal experience or the experiences of those you know who chose baptism as adults. How did this decision impact their spiritual journey?
2. How does your experience with baptism impact your perceptions baptism for individuals under the age of eight?

Reason

1. How do you interpret the connection between believer baptism and the theological traditions of Community of Christ?
2. How would you explain not granting membership into Community of Christ based on a previous baptism performed before the age of 8?

Tradition

1. How does the principle of personal agency align with your understanding of Community of Christ's theological foundations?
2. In what ways do you think maintaining the practice of believer baptism supports the basic beliefs of Community of Christ?

Continuing Revelation

1. How do you interpret recent revelations regarding the importance of individual commitment in the context of baptism (Doctrine and Covenants 164: 2–3 and 165:3a)?
2. How does the concept of covenant expressed through baptism contribute to the church's unique identity?

Reflection questions for the position of accepting baptisms received before age eight.

Scripture

1. How do you interpret the absence of a specified age for baptism in the Bible?
2. What are your thoughts on the idea that there is only one baptism, regardless of the age at which it is received?

Experience

1. How have you observed God's grace at work in the lives of those baptized as infants (or under the age of eight)?
2. How do you uphold the principles of individual decision and God's grace in your understanding of baptism?

Reason

1. How do you reconcile the practice of open communion with the current baptismal practice of the church?
2. In what ways does the principle of grace preceding personal decision shape your view on baptism?

Tradition

1. How does the church's involvement in the ecumenical movement influence our baptismal practice?
2. How do you interpret the affirmation of the fruits of the Spirit in individuals baptized as infants (under the age of eight) within other Christian traditions?

Continuing Revelation

1. How do you understand the call to deeper community and hospitality towards other Christian traditions in the context of baptism?
2. In what ways do you think expanding the understanding and acceptance of baptism aligns with the recent revelations calling for greater unity and hospitality?

Part 3

PROPHETIC QUESTIONS

In the church's journey, we continue to grow into the challenge to live as a prophetic people and not just a people with a prophet. One way this challenge is embraced is for the church to make time for prayer and study seeking divine guidance on topics that are significant to the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

As you prayerfully consider the two documents that you studied, the reflection questions, and other conversations you may have had, consider the following prophetic questions:

- 1. What is your level of support for allowing persons who were baptized before the age of eight becoming members of Community of Christ via confirmation after having attained the age of eight?**
 1. No support
 2. Limited support
 3. Tentative support
 4. Moderate support
 5. Full support
- 2. Using the five lenses of discovering God's will used in the report (scripture, experience, reason, tradition, and continuing revelation), why do you hold this level of support?**

Please provide your feedback at the online survey available at:

<https://forms.office.com/r/K3bSGMWeSG>

Our Journey with Conditions of Membership

Timeline of Proposals and Actions

1992 World Conference

G-5 “Issues Regarding Conditions of Membership” was submitted by the Central Indiana District. It called for a comprehensive study of matters related to conditions of membership. This resolution was approved and is now WCR 1221. The text of the “resolves” is provided below:

Resolved, That the First Presidency appoint a World Church task force to make a comprehensive study of the conditions of membership in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, particularly the theological questions regarding the status of those previously baptized in other Christian churches; and be it further

Resolved, that this task force have adequate representation of people to ensure a broad perspective from a World Church point of view; and be it further

Resolved, that a detailed report with recommendations be brought back for consideration to the 1994 World Conference.

1993

Graceland University in cooperation with the Church hosted a Theology Colloquy titled “Authority, Membership, Baptism.” Addresses and presentations at the colloquy were published in a book with the same title.

1994 World Conference

In response to WCR 1221, a task force was formed to fulfill the intent of the resolution. The task force submitted a “Report of Issues Regarding Conditions of Membership.” The report was discussed by the World Conference. The First Presidency called for a church-wide dialogue on several issues including conditions for membership.

G-1 “Study of Membership Requirements” submitted by the Kasenga District, Zaire, was referred to the First Presidency.

2000 World Conference

A-4 “Accepting Members from Other Denominations” submitted by Honduras and A-9 “Baptism” submitted by New Zealand, were ruled out of order by the First Presidency because of conflicts with the Doctrine and Covenants, especially Section 20.

2002 World Conference

A-5 “Rebaptism,” submitted by the British Columbia District, was ruled out of order by the First Presidency because of conflicts with the Doctrine and Covenants, especially Section 20.

2004 World Conference

President W. Grant McMurray submitted Words of Counsel to the 2004 World Conference. The document was approved and is now Doctrine and Covenants 162. Section 162:2d states:

It is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace but it is the divine presence that gives life. Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church. In such matters direction will come from those called to lead.

2007 World Conference

G-12 “Rebaptism” was submitted by the South East Africa Mission Center. The title was changed to “Conditions of Membership.” It stated “... that our requirement that individuals must be rebaptized is problematic and growth-inhibiting in many parts of the world.” It called for the First Presidency “...to issue instructions relevant for today regarding requirements for church membership.” The resolution was amended to add a “Whereas” statement. The resolution as amended was approved by the World Conference

2007-2010 Interconference Period

A churchwide study and discernment process regarding conditions of membership was conducted. A resource titled, “Prayer, Study, Listening, and Discernment Guide” was developed as part of a five-phase discernment process.

2010 World Conference

President Stephen M. Veazey presented Words of Counsel to the church which were approved by the World Conference and included in the Doctrine and Covenants as Section 164. It stated in part that:

In harmony with God’s will, the Holy Spirit leads some people already committed to Jesus Christ through Christian baptism to further focus their response through church membership. Individuals previously baptized of water in an attitude of humility and repentance and as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ may become church members through the sacrament of confirmation of the Holy Spirit.

Following the World Conference, the First Presidency developed a draft policy regarding conditions of membership. It was discussed and supported by the Council of Twelve and World Church Leadership Council. This policy stated that people baptized with water when they were at least eight years old may become church members through confirmation. Rebaptism was held as an option if the candidate desired it, but not as a requirement. No consensus was achieved regarding the status of baptisms in other churches conducted before the age of eight.

2013 World Conference

G-2 “Continue to Explore Baptism Practice” was submitted by the Headwaters US/Canada Mission Center. It requested the First Presidency to continue to explore the “possibility of accepting baptisms of those from other Christian denominations who were baptized before the age of eight.” It also requested periodic updates and a full report on this matter before the 2016 World Conference. This resolution was approved and is now WCR 1301.

Following the 2013 World Conference

The First Presidency assigned the Theology Formation Team to continue to explore the church's baptismal practice. It also asked for further reflection on the question of accepting baptisms received before the age of eight. The team specifically was asked to consider the theological issues related to WCR 1301. In the inter-conference period, the Presidency provided interim reports.

2016 World Conference

The Theology Formation Team submitted a report to the First Presidency and the World Conference. The report has been discussed by various leadership quorums and councils.

2023 World Conference

G-4 "Baptism and Membership" submitted by the Headwaters USA/Canada Mission Center and G-4a "Baptism and Membership" submitted by the Canada East Mission Centre were considered identical resolutions. The Presidency ruled that the outcome regarding G-4 also would dispose of G-4a. The resolution "...requested the President of the Church to give additional prayer and study, seeking divine guidance on the issue of the acceptability of persons who were baptized before the age of eight becoming church members of Community of Christ via confirmation." The motion was amended as follows: after the last word insert "having attained the age of eight." The amendment was approved and then, following additional debate, the motion as amended was approved.

2023 WCLC

The World Church Leadership Council discussed issues related to conditions of membership, specifically whether persons baptized before the age of eight should be recognized as being eligible for membership through confirmation after having attained the age of eight. The Council also explored questions about rebaptism and allowing different approaches by fields or nations. A consensus on changing the current policy was not achieved.

2024 March Standing High Council

The Standing High Council explored the issue of whether persons baptized before the age of eight could be eligible for church membership through confirmation. Council members submitted individual perspective papers which were discussed by the Council. There were very articulate perspectives shared which included positions both for and against rebaptizing those who had been baptized before the age of eight, including infant baptisms.

H-7a Theology Formation Team Report on WCR 1301 (from the 2016 World Conference)

To the First Presidency and the World Conference:

The 2013 World Conference adopted WCR 1301 April 15, 2013. This resolution asked the Presidency to continue exploring the church's baptismal practice. It also asked for further reflection on the question of accepting baptisms received before the age of 8 years. The Presidency asked the Theology Formation Team (TFT) to consider the theological issues related to this resolution. The TFT's position on WCR 1301 appears in the team report (see above).

This report will present summaries of arguments for two approaches to baptism. The two views are 1) accepting only "believer baptisms" in the church and 2) accepting all baptisms, including those of infants. The goals of this report are: 1) to let members and delegates glimpse our discussions on baptism; 2) to provide summaries of both positions—keeping the church's current practice and changing the church's current practice—to inform members as the church seeks common consent; and 3) to offer the church an example of basic theological method.

For both positions we list arguments under the headings "Scripture," "Experience," "Tradition," "Reason," and "Continuing Revelation." These are five sources of Community of Christ's theology and practice, as well as lenses by which the church seeks to discern God's will. The sixth is "Common Consent."

Reasons for Accepting Only those Baptisms Received at Age 8 and Above

Scripture

1. Community of Christ scripture gives us the cherished principle of agency, or free choice. This is the traditional foundation of our baptismal practice.
2. The New Testament pattern seems to be that confession of faith and change of life occur before baptism.
3. Much New Testament baptismal symbolism makes best sense when applied to believer baptism (dying with Christ, washing, purification from sin, becoming a member of Christ's body, etc.).
4. Community of Christ practice traditionally interprets Jesus' baptism by John as illustrating believer's baptism.
5. Community of Christ scripture consistently upholds repentance prior to baptism, an action infants cannot take. See Doctrine and Covenants 16:4e; 16:6d; 17:7; 39:2b, and 105:11c.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 105:11c notes that the personal act of believing is essential for baptism to be valid.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 164:2c teaches that "individuals previously baptized of water in an attitude of humility and repentance and as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ may become church members through the sacrament of confirmation of the Holy Spirit." One way to understand this passage is as an affirmation of "believer's baptism." When

understood this way, 164:2c seems to reflect our tradition's belief in agency and baptism as an act of personal decision.

8. The Book of Mormon expressly condemns infant baptism (Moroni 8:5–17).

Experience

1. Baptism is a response to the experience of God's action in one's life.
2. Choosing baptism freely, without coercion, effectively expresses that discipleship is the decision to follow Jesus.
3. Many converts to Community of Christ experience a new or renewed relationship with God. Some decide to be rebaptized. For them this act best expresses a completely new start.
4. Many members of Community of Christ recall their decision to be baptized as one of the most important spiritual experiences of their life.
5. Commitment to ecumenical participation does not require churches to abandon their unique practices. We can seek justice and peace with other Christians and affirm them as genuine followers of Jesus, even if we disagree with their baptismal practices.
6. Sharing at the open table of the Lord's Supper does not require agreement on all theological issues.
7. Believer baptism and the shared act of remembering one's baptism have formed close bonds of community within the church.

Reason

1. One decides to repent. If repentance is necessary before baptism, personal decision is integral to the meaning of baptism.
2. Accepting other Christian believer baptisms conforms to important Community of Christ traditions and beliefs. Accepting infant baptisms is less consistent with those beliefs.
3. The integrity of our community depends on consistent views about baptism and membership.
4. Believer baptism is a reasonable interpretation of most biblical passages about baptism.

Tradition

1. Personal agency (or freedom) and responsible choices are principles deeply rooted in Community of Christ theology. Believer baptism aligns with these principles.
2. Believer baptism most clearly expresses the Restoration belief that baptism finds its basis in the principle of personal covenant.
3. Believer baptism was the most widely represented practice in the ancient church. It was the standard form of baptism until the late fourth century.
4. Community of Christ tradition consistently upholds believer baptism as the proper form of the sacrament: see *Parson's Text Book* (1902); Griffith's *The Instructor* (1904); Knisley's *Doctrinal References* (1951 [1908]); Phillip's *Compendium of the Faith and Doctrine* (1947); Edwards' *Fundamentals* (4th Ed.; 1948); Yale and Brockway's *Ordinances and Sacraments* (1962); *Exploring the Faith* (1970; revised 1987); *Walking with Jesus* (2004; revised 2011); and "Baptism" (www.CofChrist.org/sacraments).
5. Community of Christ faith historically has viewed its form of believer baptism as a protest against nominal Christianity (nominal means halfhearted or "in name only").

6. WCR 1157 (1980) supports involvement with other denominations if this participation does not require the church to “alter or abandon any of the traditional beliefs and practices of the church,” [and not] “endorse any...theological positions...inconsistent with any of the traditional beliefs and practices of the church....”
7. Some notable Christian theologians from churches that baptize infants have criticized that practice. Among them are the famous 20th-century Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, and contemporary German theologian Jürgen Moltmann.

Continuing Revelation

1. Early revelation stressed repentance as an essential part of baptism (Doctrine and Covenants 17 and 32).
2. Recent revelation in 164:2c upholds that individual commitment is essential for baptism: “Individuals previously baptized of water in an attitude of humility and repentance and as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ may become church members through the sacrament of confirmation of the Holy Spirit.”
3. God calls the church today to expand the importance of baptism (Doctrine and Covenants 164:3). Baptism symbolizes the radical desire to choose the way of Jesus Christ, not a casual or social link to a church.
4. Our covenantal view of baptism is part of our uniqueness. Within the wide circle of Christian communities, God calls us to claim our “unique and sacred place” (Doctrine and Covenants 161:1b).
5. Accepting infant baptisms does not seem consistent with themes of recent revelation that focus on deepening our discipleship.

Reasons for Accepting Baptisms Received before Age 8

Scripture

1. The Bible is the foundational book of scripture for Community of Christ. It specifies neither the mode of baptism nor the age at which baptism may be received. Different Christian practices (infant baptism or believer’s baptism) appeal equally to the Bible for justification. For example, Christians who baptize infants note that in 1 Corinthians 1:16 NRSV Paul says he baptized “the household of Stephanas.” Household means everyone within.
2. However, the Bible is clear there is only one baptism: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5 NRSV).
3. The Bible is a rich source of symbols of the meaning of baptism (washing, dying with Christ, incorporation into Christ’s body, etc.). Theologies supporting both believer and infant baptism draw from the diversity of these biblical images.
4. Doctrine and Covenants 161:1b holds that the church of Jesus Christ is “the circle of those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ,” and that our denomination is but one point on this circle.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 162:2d counsels the church that “it is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace but it is the divine presence that gives life” and that the

church must “not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church.”

6. Doctrine and Covenants 163 directs the church to “strive to be faithful to Christ’s vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth” (163:3b) and to shun uses of scripture that “diminish or oppress” others (163:7c). These prophetic insights forbid misrepresenting other Christian sacramental traditions.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 164 expanded the church’s understanding of baptism. It reminds us that “the redemptive action of God in Christ—while uniquely and authoritatively expressed through the church—is not confined solely to the church” (164:2a).
8. God calls the church to interpret scripture responsibly. “Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture.” (*Scripture in Community of Christ*, Affirmation 6).

Experience

1. Community of Christ’s long involvement in the ecumenical movement has helped us learn to respect other Christian traditions and not misrepresent their faith and practices.
2. We have much collective experience of meeting faithful responses to Jesus regardless of baptismal age. Saint Francis and Mother Teresa (Catholic), John Wesley (Methodist) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Lutheran) were Christians who fully lived the meaning of their baptisms (Doctrine and Covenants 164:3b), in each case received as an infant. The age of baptism does not impact the quality of discipleship.
3. Experience shows that God’s grace works throughout the lives of people baptized as infants, children, or as adults, leading all to embrace discipleship more fully.
4. Legalism about baptismal practice does not signal the humility that belongs to the essential meaning of baptism. As in other areas of the Christian life, legalism distorts our relationship with God and with others.
5. Choosing one’s baptism does not produce or guarantee lifelong faithfulness to Christ.
6. Regardless of the age at which baptism was received, Christians commonly testify that they experience a growing need to respond more fully to the meaning of their baptism.
7. Both baptismal practices have intrinsic strengths. Believer baptism upholds the power of individual decision; baptism before age 8 upholds the priority of God’s grace and the power of community in shaping responsive disciples.

Reason

1. Our present baptismal practice conflicts with our Communion practice: we reject some baptisms, but welcome all Christians to the Lord’s Supper. Reason dictates that our Communion and baptismal practices should cohere.
2. Community of Christ shares close relations with other Christian denominations that baptize infants. But contrary to the spirit of the ecumenical movement, we do not accept their baptisms as valid.
3. The criticisms our 19th-century ancestors made of other baptismal practices arose in a religious context different from the 21st century. Past arguments against some styles of baptism were not well informed by the Christian theological tradition. This spirit of criticism is contrary to our call to pursue the peace of Jesus Christ.
4. “God’s grace...freely moves throughout creation, often beyond human perception, to achieve divine purposes in people’s lives” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:2b). The logic of

divine grace is that it precedes and enables all decisions to follow Jesus. Following Jesus is a gift before it is a choice.

5. God's action to unite people to Jesus Christ and reconcile all things in him is not bound or limited by particular forms.

Tradition

1. Community of Christ affirms that God's nature as revealed in Jesus Christ is the center of our faith (Doctrine and Covenants 163:7b) and the basis by which we discern the adequacy of our traditions for the present.
2. The essence of our tradition is a vision of radical obedience to Jesus Christ. The history of Christianity gives us stories of many faithful followers of Jesus, who through the centuries have embodied this same vision regardless of the form of their baptism.
3. For nearly 25 years Community of Christ has sought membership in interfaith and interdenominational groups. The 1992 World Conference endorsed the church's participation in local and national interfaith and interdenominational bodies (WCR 1222). The 2002 World Conference supported joining the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches and created a standing World Church committee on ecumenical and interfaith relations (WCR 1275). Improved relationships with other denominations have helped us understand their sacramental practices better.
4. Community of Christ holds formal membership in the National Council of Churches (US) and is a committed ecumenical partner around the world. We therefore must be open to ongoing ecumenical discussions about baptism. The important World Council of Churches document, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (1982) asks denominations to "refrain from any practice that might call into question the sacramental integrity of other churches" (p. 5). A relevant example is that the American Baptist Churches USA practice believer baptism. But congregations within that denomination may accept into full membership people baptized as infants in other churches. Likewise, the Disciples of Christ practice believer baptism but accept for membership Christians baptized as infants.
5. Some denominations that practice infant baptism are among our most supportive ecumenical partners.
6. The Report of the Conditions of Membership Committee to the 1994 World Conference remained open to accepting those baptized as infants. It argued that "clearly the fruits of the Spirit are in evidence in many people...baptized as infants and confirmed as young adults, and who take their discipleship seriously" (*World Conference Bulletin* 1994, p. 272).
7. Acceptance of Christian baptisms received before age 8 is consistent with the following Enduring Principles of our tradition: Grace and Generosity, Worth of All Persons, All Are Called, Pursuit of Peace, Unity in Diversity, and Blessings of Community.

Continuing Revelation

1. Over two generations, God has called the church into deeper community with the wider Christian church and away from the exclusivism of our 19th-century origins.
2. Continuing Revelation has called the church to assess past instruction in the light of new knowledge (Doctrine and Covenants 147:7). God has called us to seek new light and truth (149:4-5) and to search for greater understanding of the sacraments (158:11c). We must

avoid captivity to time-bound formulas (161:5) and see sacraments not as rigid forms but as vehicles of the Spirit (162:2d). God invites us to “tear down walls of separation and to build bridges of understanding” (162:6b), to “be vulnerable to divine grace” (163:10b), and to seek expanding meanings of baptism (164:2).

3. Doctrine and Covenants 164:2b–c can be interpreted in ways that respect those baptized as infants. For example, 164:2c may equally refer to the faith, humility, and repentance of parents who brought a child for baptism.
4. Continuing Revelation calls the church to deeper hospitality toward other Christian traditions as a mark of oneness in Christ.
5. This means we no longer can express our baptismal theology in isolation from the historic Christian tradition.

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