



# CONDITIONS OF MEMBERSHIP

Prayer, Discussion, and Discernment Guide

*Community of Christ*

# Acknowledgments

The First Presidency would like to express its appreciation to Bruce Crockett, Carolyn Brock, David Brock, and Sandee Gamet for their expertise and dedicated effort in creating this resource. Additional thanks is given to the entire “Conditions of Membership” process support team who managed the design, printing, and distribution of the resource.

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# Conditions of Membership

## Prayer, Discussion, and Discernment Guide

This material is provided to help the church engage in prayer, study, listening, and discernment about conditions of membership. Various options are provided for individuals and groups depending on levels of interest and available time. It is important to emphasize, however, that gaining a clear sense of God's will takes preparation and commitment to time-tested spiritual disciplines.

### Background

Why is the church talking about rebaptism and conditions of membership? Because the 2007 World Conference approved the following resolution:

### World Conference Resolution 1293 Conditions for Membership Approved March 31, 2007

Whereas, The First Presidency is the authority that interprets the scripture and law of the church, including the requirements for church membership; and

Whereas, The Community of Christ invites all disciples to the Communion table regardless of their baptismal circumstances; and

Whereas, There is incongruence in our theology as it embraces those Christians not yet baptized in the Community of Christ and yet does not view their baptism as acceptable for church membership; and

Whereas, Our requirement that individuals must be rebaptized is problematic and growth-inhibiting in many parts of our worldwide church; and

Whereas, For some individuals who desire to be considered members, this requirement for rebaptism diminishes the power, value, and beauty of their previous baptism and commitment to Christ; and

Whereas, The church has received instruction saying, "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" (Doctrine and Covenants 162:2d); therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the World Conference request the First Presidency to examine the issue of rebaptism in the context of the worldwide mission of the Community of Christ; and be it further

*Resolved*, That following prayer, reflection, and discernment of God's will for the Community of Christ, the First Presidency issue instructions relevant for today regarding requirements for church membership.

In response, the Presidency has engaged in study, prayer, and discussion. It also has held preliminary discussion with the expanded World Church Leadership Council (general officers, directors, cultural/national representatives).

The Presidency, while fully understanding its responsibility to interpret scripture and church

law, believes this is a good time for the church to respond more fully to the counsel in Doctrine and Covenants 162:2c: “As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve.”

Therefore, the Presidency wants to involve as many people as possible in prayerfully seeking God’s will on conditions of membership. As it says in World Conference Resolution (WCR) 1293, the Presidency is to examine the issue “in the context of the worldwide mission...” You are an important part of that context!

Our rebaptism policy is grounded in traditions and scriptures, especially Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

## Doctrine and Covenants 20

*Revelation given through Joseph Smith, Jr., prophet and seer to the church, April 1830, at Manchester, New York. This instruction came in answer to Joseph Smith’s inquiry concerning the status of those who desired to unite with the church and who had already been baptized.*

I a. Behold, I say unto you, that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing, and this is a new and everlasting covenant; even that which was from the beginning.

b. Wherefore, although a man should be baptized an hundred times, it availeth him nothing; for

you cannot enter in at the strait gate by the Law of Moses, neither by your dead works;

c. for it is because of your dead works, that I have caused this last covenant, and this church to be built up unto me; even as in days of old.

d. Wherefore, enter ye in at the gate, as I have commanded, and seek not to counsel your God. Amen.

Since this revelation was given, it has been understood to mean that baptisms performed earlier than or outside the church organized by Joseph Smith Jr. in 1830 are “old covenants” that have been “done away.” The “new and everlasting covenant” is established by baptism in “this church,” believed to be the restoration of true Christianity.

When legislation calling for a change in policy was submitted to the 2002 World Conference, the Presidency ruled it out of order, stating:

## Rebaptism

*First Presidency Ruling, April 11, 2002*

The members of the First Presidency have participated with many of you over recent years in an ongoing dialogue on issues pertaining to baptism, membership, and authority. Central to that discussion has been the question of whether baptisms in other Christian denominations can be considered valid for persons who wish to become members of the Community of Christ, but without further baptism. We support and encourage that dialogue



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and its focus on the foundational sacrament of the church, which symbolizes the commitment one makes to Jesus Christ. We are aware that this discussion is particularly active in various cultures where the church is established outside North America.

The proposed resolution A-5, Rebaptism, from the British Columbia District has been developed in the spirit of that dialogue. We recognize the motivation behind the resolution—a desire to grow the church as well as to acknowledge the sacramental significance of baptisms that may have occurred in other faith communities.

However, it is the responsibility of the First Presidency to ensure that all matters presented for consideration by the World Conference are in harmony with the fundamental law of the church as outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants. Therefore, the First Presidency is required to rule Item A-5 out of order on the grounds that it is in conflict with Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which was presented to the church in April 1830 in specific response to a question about the status of those who have been previously baptized in other faiths. This reference clearly limits acceptance of other baptisms and has been so interpreted ever since. This interpretation of baptism in the context of “a new and everlasting covenant,” understood to be expressed distinctly within the Restoration movement, states that “although a man should be

baptized an hundred times, it availeth him nothing. . .” In harmony with our long-standing provisions for interpretation of basic law, any new understanding of this section of the Doctrine and Covenants would require the initiative of the president of the church and the consent of the body.

In the spirit of the call to “each one, reach one” we recognize that there will be various ways in which people may seek to express their commitment to Christ within our fellowship. We will work closely with the Council of Twelve on this matter and will continue to encourage the church to engage in a serious exploration of the meaning of baptism and membership for our movement. In our leadership of the church, we will seek to be open to the direction of the Holy Spirit as to our understanding of baptism in relation to church membership and are prepared to provide additional instruction as we are led. In the meantime, we will enable and actively support a mature and prayerful discussion of this matter throughout the church.

*The First Presidency*

Given the 2002 ruling, why didn't the Presidency rule the 2007 resolution on “Conditions of Membership” out of order? Because that resolution did not seek a particular change in conditions of membership or in interpretation of the Doctrine and Covenants; it asked the Presidency to study the issue prayerfully and provide guidance.



So, a discussion of conditions of membership has been called for. But, why is rebaptism such a persistent topic?

Various beliefs and experiences frame church members' views about rebaptism. Some believe the church should keep the current practice, saying it connects with Restoration history and tradition. From this perspective, the church has divinely authorized priesthood and sacraments because it is the true restoration of the Christian church. Doctrine and Covenants 20 is clear and foundational to church identity and authority. It should be respected as revelation and held as valid at all times.

Others chose to be rebaptized and found their experience to be meaningful and transforming. They testify of the blessing of the Holy Spirit as they were rebaptized and then confirmed members of Community of Christ. Rebaptism, for them, was not a denial of previous Christian commitment; it was an expression of their decision to live their discipleship through the fellowship, beliefs, and sacraments of Community of Christ.

For others, rebaptism is a barrier to Christians who want to become church members. The requirement seems to mean their initial Christian commitment through baptism is invalid or inadequate and must be repeated in Community of Christ.

Also, as the church has grown internationally it has met circumstances that raise questions about policies. In various cultures, conversion to Christianity, especially from other religions, is highly significant, taking unusual courage and faith. Becoming Christian may involve separation from one's family, tribe, or cultural traditions. Requiring rebaptism of people who already have made a clear commitment to Jesus Christ seems to diminish the validity of the most important faith step they've ever taken.

Still others wonder about the discrepancy between the church's Communion practice and rebaptism. All committed Christians are invited

to partake of the Lord's Supper, yet they must be rebaptized to become church members.

Additionally, the church has passed World Conference resolutions that encourage local and international participation in ecumenical organizations. Increasingly, Christian denominations accept each others' baptisms if done in "the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Ghost)." This is the "Trinitarian formula." For some, rebaptism is not helpful to mutually respectful relationships with other churches.

All of these viewpoints can find support in scripture, reason, tradition, and personal experience. So, the opportunity before the church is to engage in prayer, study, discussion, and discernment to help determine direction. The call is to listen together to the voice of God (Doctrine and Covenants 162:1–2).

This may be uncomfortable for the strongly opinionated or those who have not considered this issue seriously. Listening to various viewpoints may raise new ideas or questions. The call is to do our best to listen and be patient, open, and compassionate as we take this journey.

## Discernment Principles and Processes

Church members are becoming more aware of discernment as a helpful spiritual practice. World Conference 2007 provided opportunities to engage in discernment groups. The following summary reviews key discernment principles.

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## Discernment Principles

*(Facilitators: This section also appears on page 61 in the back of this resource as a handout that may be copied for your group members.)*

1. Discernment is both a spiritual discipline and a lifelong spiritual posture for Christian disciples.

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2. Discernment is based on the trust that God is the Source of all we are and are trying to do. God already knows what we are seeking and wants to communicate with us. Letting God be larger, wiser, and greater than us is a key shift in our awareness. We think we know this and then find ourselves still trying to understand or worrying about finding the one true solution.
  3. Discernment includes head, heart, spirit, and body work. We think and speak, we listen and wait, we feel and are moved; we have physical sensations and responses. It is a whole-person process.
  4. Intentional Group Discernment usually incorporates attention to:
    - Setting a context of openness to the Spirit and maintaining that focus.
    - Setting aside personal agendas, conflicts, and preconceived ideas. This is called holy indifference and does not mean we don't care; rather we trust God to know more than we do and are willing to let go of answers we already have.
    - Getting clear about the question to be discerned.
    - Reviewing and sharing relevant history and background.
    - Reflecting on relevant scriptures.
    - Setting times of silent reflection and receptive listening.
    - Using spiritual practices that encourage reflection and listening, including silence, journaling, *lectio divina* (reflective reading of scripture), imaging, centering prayer/breath prayer, and others.
    - Sharing open, honest, nonjudgmental insights from reflection. Listening and relational skills are critical at this time. Each person carefully should be heard and listened to with respect.
    - Opening creative, intuitive gifts to the impress of the Spirit through art, music, movement, or poetry. Insight may come in words, images, symbols, or sounds.
- Reaching tentative consensus. Please note that this resource is not designed to create final consensus; rather it's a tool in an ongoing discernment process related to conditions of membership that eventually may include deliberation at World Conference.
  - Understanding that more discernment will be necessary before the group feels it has heard what was needed and has been faithful in receiving what the Spirit offered.
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## Focus Question

A first step in discernment is to focus on the right question. While many aspects to conditions of membership could be discussed, the following is our primary focus:

**Considering the worldwide mission of Community of Christ, shall we continue the current policy of rebaptizing Christians who want to become members of the church?**

This is the basic question raised in recent decades and particularly in WCR 1293.

## How to Use This Resource

This resource seeks to help individuals and groups engage in prayer, listening, discussion, dialogue, and discernment. This guide offers four options:

**Module One: Individual Prayers, Meditations, and Reflections, page 8**

**Module Two: Prayer and Reflection for Small Groups, page 15**

**Module Three: Facilitated Dialogue Experiences for Small Groups, page 43**

**Module Four: Single-Session Guided Group Discussion, page 49**

In addition, a video, *A Prophetic People Called to Discern*, may be found at [www.CofChrist.org/CofM/](http://www.CofChrist.org/CofM/). It contains a segment titled *Listen: A Centering Activity*, which will be helpful during prayer exercises, as well as an introduction to the discernment process by President Steve Veazey.

You are invited to take advantage of one, some, or all four modules and to repeat the exercises, reflections, and questions. After considering them once, circle back and consider them again! This spiraling process can take us deeper and wider to see, hear, ponder, and feel what we might not have experienced the first time.

The modules are designed for various settings, including home, church, reunions, retreats, mission-center conferences, and weekend or weeknight gatherings. They also are adaptable to Christian-education classes. This is not an ideal format, however, because more time is recommended for each group session than a normal Christian-education hour. However, more sessions can be provided as necessary to cover materials.

Though each module is designed with a specific purpose, small-group prayer and reflection activities can be adapted for personal use, and materials for individual preparation may find place in group settings, with a companion or family.

As the spiral shape of the Temple invites us in and sends us forth, so we are invited to the inward journey that prepares us for the outward journey of decision-making and service: *Understand that the road to transformation travels both inward and*

*outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple* (Doctrine and Covenants 161:3d).

## All Are Invited to Share

All members and friends are encouraged to participate in the discernment process. We invite each to

- pray for the worldwide church as we engage in seeking the mind and will of God on an important matter;
- pray for the First Presidency and the World Church Leadership Council as they listen to understand voices in different parts of the world and the voice of the Creator who faithfully guides the church;
- participate in the individual and group opportunities in this resource (see the suggested activities below);
- send any comments, ideas, or questions to the First Presidency, c/o Andrew Shields, World Church secretary.

## How to Share Feedback

The Presidency sincerely wants to hear from all who want to share. This may be done by offering insights, questions, testimonies, or short papers (five or fewer pages) that present your viewpoint. Please send responses to World Church Secretary Andrew Shields at:

Community of Christ International Headquarters  
c/o Andrew Shields  
Church secretary  
1001 W. Walnut  
Independence, MO 64050  
[presidencyresponse@CofChrist.org](mailto:presidencyresponse@CofChrist.org)

