



Conditions of Membership

A Discussion Resource for Families, Youth, and Young-Adult

An Invitation to the Church

The Presidency invites the church to seriously engage in sustained prayer, spiritual formation, group discussion, and scripture study while listening to each other and the Holy Spirit. This process is not intended to be a popular-opinion poll. If so, we simply would conduct a survey. In fact, a first step in true discernment is to set aside preconceived ideas and agendas so we can become more open to God's guidance, whatever it may be.

For the First Presidency
Stephen M. Veazey

<http://www.CofChrist.org/CofM/>

An Invitation to New Generations

“Prepare new generations of disciples to bring fresh vision to bear on the perplexing problems...Their contributions will be multiplied if their hearts are focused on God's will for creation.”—*Doctrine and Covenants 163:4c*

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How Can this Resource Be Used?

- in families*
- in young adult small groups
- at camps—junior, jr. high, sr. high
- for reunion youth classes
- as a Sunday-school text
- as a retreat study guide
- in college ministry small groups
- in congregations for intergenerational discussion

*Young children might find full participation difficult. Adults should pick and choose activities and modify vocabulary when needed.

Send Feedback Forms

The Presidency wants to hear from all who desire to share. Please send correspondences, e-mails, and feedback sheets to the World Church secretary, Andrew Shields.

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Welcome

This four-session resource is designed to help prepare new generations by encouraging discussion and discernment by families or youth groups on the important Conditions of Membership issue. More than that, it provides an introduction and exercise in open-hearted reflection—lifelong practices of becoming open to God’s will for creation. The tools of scripture, tradition, personal experience, and reason support these reflections.

Finding language that was fully inclusive and inviting was a struggle. For example, when “group” is used, it also can mean family, though families can have many looks. Also, the words individuals, participants, and members are used to indicate someone taking part in the groups, but they sound clinical. After all, individuals, participants, and members are God’s unique and precious creation. A facilitator may be a parent or grandparent, a college or young-adult small-group leader, a youth-group leader, or a pastor. Please don’t let language interfere in these experiences. All are welcome.

This resource is not intended to create consensus but is one tool in the continuing discernment process. This process eventually may include deliberation at World Conference.

Notes to the Facilitator

- Watch the video *A Prophetic People Called to Discern* (available online at www.CofChrist.org/CofM/) to help clearly define the purpose of these sessions.
- These four sessions build on each other and should be used in order.
- Objectives are listed at the start of each lesson to provide an overview.
 - A complete list of materials needed is found at the beginning of each session.
 - To suit the particular age group, select, delete, or build upon parts of sessions as needed.
 - As much as possible, arrange comfortable seating in a circle; it makes for better sharing.
 - A well-prepared facilitator improves the flow of the experience.
 - Don’t be afraid to weave your own talents into each lesson.
 - Allow yourself to learn, as well as lead.
 - Find joy in the time you spend with your group.

For Further Study

1. Conditions of Membership: Prayer, Discussion, and Discernment Guide
2. See www.CofChrist.org/discernment

Session One

The Experience of Baptism


Objectives

1. Hear and retell the story of Jesus' baptism.
2. Discuss what is essential to baptism.
3. Learn about other participants' stories of baptism.

Materials

1. *Sing a New Song* hymnal
2. The movie clip *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*
3. Chart paper, markers, pens, pencils
4. Props for the story of Jesus' baptism
5. Copies of the activity sheet, *Sharing My Story of Baptism* (page 6)

Gathering

- Sing together *NS 22*, "Jesus."
- Offer a prayer asking to feel God's presence as you listen to stories of baptism.
- Show the movie clip from *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town - Zachary's Baptism* (available online at http://www.wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16524&substring=zachary). Toby and Cody make arrangements so that Zachary finally can get baptized.
- Being inclusive and interactive, discuss the following questions: What was happening in that clip? What did you see and hear? How many of you have been baptized? Did your baptism look and sound like Zachary's?
- Lead them into sharing what they already know about baptism, what they know about baptism in Community of Christ, and finally what they find most important about baptism. Record their responses on chart paper. (see sample) 

TRANSITION

QUESTION: Where does the Community of Christ model of baptism come from?

NOTE:

The use of an icebreaker or team-building activity may be helpful before this first session, especially if the group contains new faces. Suggestions are provided at the end of Session One.

**FAMILIES:
EVEN YOUNG
CHILDREN CAN LEARN
TO SING THE ONE-
LINE REFRAIN.**

BAPTISM IS . . .

- Commitment to God
- discipleship to Jesus
- water—symbolizes new name of Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- priesthood authority
- confirmation = Holy Spirit
- church membership
- laying on of hands
- Community of Christ—age 8 +
- different baptisms in other churches
- Community of Christ = immersion

Gleaning

TELL THE STORY

Tell the story of the baptism of Jesus. (One version included) Reading with good expression and the use of props makes the story come alive and memorable. Let participants know they will be asked to retell the story, so they need to use active listening.

THE STORY OF JESUS' BAPTISM

Adapted from Matthew 3, 4; Mark 1; Luke 3, 4; John 1 NRSV
from www.echothestory.com

God sent a messenger named John to tell people to get ready because the Messiah was coming. John was a distant cousin of Jesus, born just six months before him. He was a rugged man who lived in the wilderness, ate locusts and wild honey, and wore clothes made of camel hair.

John boldly challenged the Jews, "Don't just say that you love God—prove it with your life.

"Turn from your sins and turn to God!"

He became known as John the Baptizer as he lowered those who had confessed their sins into the Jordan River. Baptism was a symbol of being washed clean from your sins and choosing a new way of living.

When Jewish leaders asked John if he was the Messiah, he responded, "No! But someone is coming soon who is far greater than me—I'm not worthy to untie his sandals or even to be his slave.

"You see... I baptize with water, but he will baptize with God's Spirit!"

Soon after that Jesus came to be baptized. When John saw him he said, "I'm the one who needs to be baptized by you." But Jesus insisted, so John baptized him in front of the crowds. When Jesus came out of the water, God's Spirit came down from the sky—it looked like a dove floating down, and it rested on him. Then a voice from heaven said, "You are my son who I love—you bring me great joy!"

RETELL IT

After telling the story, invite the group to participate in the retelling by saying, "To help us really enter this story, we are going to retell the events in the order they happened while it is still fresh in your mind. You will be surprised at how much you remember! What happened first in the story?" The retelling does not need to be exact; it should be a quick overview, catching key events and dialogue in order. If someone jumps ahead in the story, affirm them and ask them to hold that thought while you ask the group what happened before that. If the group misses something, you may want to fill it in. This may seem a bit redundant, but it is an excellent exercise to help them think deeply about the story and gain new perspectives. (*adapted from Shaped by the Story by Michael Novelli, 2008*)

FAMILY ALTERNATIVE

HAVE FAMILY MEMBERS ACT OUT THE STORY.

TALK ABOUT THE STORY

- Ask group members to close their eyes and put themselves in the scene. Who or where are they in the story? For example: in the crowd, the dove floating down, John the Baptist.
- What do we learn about John from this scene?
- Why do you think people came to be baptized by John?
- What do we learn about Jesus from this scene?

FAMILY ALTERNATIVE

CHILDREN MAY DRAW PICTURES.

REMEMBER YOUR STORY OF BAPTISM

Personal stories of baptism are important to remember and share. Give each participant a copy of the activity sheet, *Sharing My Story of Baptism* (page 6). Allow time to reflect on and answer the guiding questions. If some individuals have not been baptized or don't remember their baptism, invite them to partner with someone else. They may act as recorders who write down their partners' thoughts or share what they know about baptism.

SHARE YOUR STORY OF BAPTISM

In a spirit of worship, invite individuals to share their stories with the group. Be sensitive to those who may not wish to share.

OPTIONAL WATER ACTIVITY

Visit a baptismal font, lake, or pool where baptisms occur. How is the setting different from where Jesus was baptized? How is it the same? Wash hands in a pan of water, sink, or outdoor faucet. Reflect on how the water feels, how we use it, and the purposes it serves for our bodies and our world. (For example, we drink it, wash in it, cook with it; without it we cannot live more than a few days; water shapes the earth; the human body and earth itself are 70 percent or more water.)

Going

Maintaining the spirit of the moment, read the following passage, which provides closure to this experience:

As the Spirit called us to the baptismal font
Now let it send us out as
People who have been forgiven,
Who have felt divine grace,
And are ready to serve a hungry world.
—Lu Mountenay

Sharing My Story of Baptism

What did you do to prepare for baptism, and who helped?

Where were you baptized, and how old were you?

Who baptized you, and how was that person chosen?

How did you feel when you felt the water?

What is your strongest memory of that day?

What is the most important thing baptism has given you?

The Story of My Life

*Suggested Team-Building Activities

Concentration

Part of working together entails how well we pay attention to each other and our surroundings. To practice concentrating, the following activity is suggested:

Gather about 20 objects and put them on a tray. When the group is ready to play, uncover the tray. Give everyone two minutes to memorize what is on the tray. Then take it away and pass out paper and pencils. Individuals will have five minutes to write everything they can remember that was on the tray. After that bring the tray back so the members can see how accurate they were.

The Story of My Life

Provide the handout, *The Story of My Life*. Ask group members to answer the questions. When they finish, allow all to share their answers.

1. My favorite TV program when I was in grade school was/is...
2. My best subject in grade school was/is...
3. The chore I didn't/don't like was/is...
4. My favorite room in the house was/is...
5. While I was in grade school, the fun thing we did/do as a family was/is...
6. The person who helped/helps me with my homework was/is...
7. The first thing I remember wanting to be when I grew/grow up was/is...
8. My hero at age 7 was/is...
9. My favorite aunt or uncle was/is...
10. My mom's favorite food was/is...

Session Two

The Question Is Asked

Objectives


1. Understand why the question of rebaptism is being asked.
2. Discover current opinions about rebaptism.
3. Symbolically set aside preconceptions about rebaptism.

Materials



1. *By Request* hymnal
2. Rainsticks
3. The DVD *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*
4. Copies of *Conditions of Membership in Community of Christ* activity sheet (page 10)
5. Chart paper, markers, pens, pencils
6. Copies of *Ask the Question* activity sheet (page 11)
7. Supplies for burning, cutting, or shredding paper
8. Container to keep the destroyed paper

Gathering

- With a quick and energetic tone ask participants to share highlights from session one's baptismal stories.
- Sing together R-8 "Rain Down" from the *By Request* hymnal, verses one and three. 
- During the refrain, invite those with rain sticks to join in. www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/music/rainstick/
- Pray for the worldwide church as we engage in seeking the mind and will of God on an important matter.
- Show the movie clip from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (chapter 10) in which Toula's fiancé, Ian, decides to be baptized into the Greek Orthodox Church. The scene, humorous and touching, shows elements of Greek Orthodox baptismal rites, including chrismation (anointed with chrism, a sacred balsam-scented oil).
- Discuss how today's movie clip differs from the last session's clip. In what ways is it similar?

Gleaning

- Share with your group the background on conditions of membership for Community of Christ.
- Give each participant the activity sheet, *Conditions of Membership in Community of Christ* (page 10). Ask them to read all or part of it independently. You may want to have younger participants follow along as you read the text aloud.) After reading the text, have individuals go back and circle or underline the passage(s) that stood out or most interested them. Break into groups of three or four. Ask one person in the small group to share a selected passage without telling why it was chosen. Group members should try to figure out why the passage was selected. After the group finishes, have the individual explain the choice. Continue until each participant has a chance to share a passage.

How
TO MAKE
RAINSTICKS

Background on Conditions of Membership

The existing Community of Christ practice of rebaptism for those who want to become members is grounded in the scriptures, policies, and traditions of our denomination. We find some of the reasons for these practices in a book we call the *Doctrine and Covenants*. These practices began in the early years of Community of Christ in response to questions about the truth of various denominations and how someone becomes a Community of Christ member.

- Join together as a whole group. Discuss feelings or ideas that surfaced in the small groups.
- Ask members to suggest possible definitions for the key words, *resolution* and *rebaptism*. Clarify any

RESOLUTION:
a formal expression
of opinion that
usually is voted on
by a group

REBAPTISM: an
additional baptism
that may be
required by some
denominations
as a condition of
membership

TRANSITION QUESTION:

What if you had a friend who wanted to join Community of Christ and already had been baptized in another church?

Growing

- Hand out the activity sheet, *Ask the Question* (page 11). Without discussion, have participants decide, on a scale of 1–7, where each stands on every question.
- Explain to group members that the answers on the activity sheets represent their opinions—their voices. As they continue to explore, their focus now will be on recognizing God’s voice. To recognize God’s voice means freeing themselves, to make sure they haven’t already answered the question without listening for God’s voice.
- As a symbolic gesture of their willingness to be open, have all members, one at a time, destroy (burn, shred, tear) their activity sheets. (Please observe safety precautions and **keep the destroyed paper; you’ll use it in the next session.**) Affirm to the group that God recognizes the effort it takes to set aside existing beliefs and will be present in their discernment.



Going

Look forward to session three by sharing the prayer in the left column with the group.

Lord Jesus,
Please open my eyes
as you did the blind man,
so that I may see.
Open my ears
as you did the deaf
and dumb man,
so that I may hear
what you are speaking to me.

May you make my senses
aware of others
and of all that is around me.
May all that I experience
lead me closer to you.

—Poul Wilson

Conditions of Membership in Community of Christ

INTRODUCTION

Every three years the church holds a World Conference in which delegates represent the members from all nations. The World Conference may ask for consideration about some parts of church law. The First Presidency also may ask to hear discussion from the World Conference or the members.

During the 2007 World Conference delegates passed the following resolution, asking the First Presidency to examine the issue of rebaptism for the worldwide mission of Community of Christ:

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.

BACKGROUND

Our members have various beliefs and experiences that shape their views about the need for rebaptism:

- Some believe Community of Christ should keep its current practice of rebaptism. They believe it has a uniquely approved priesthood and sacraments because it is the true restoration of early Christianity.
- Some became Community of Christ members through rebaptism and found their experience precious and transforming. Rebaptism, for them, was not a denial of any previous Christian commitment. It was an expression of their decision to live their discipleship through the beliefs and sacraments of Community of Christ.
- For others, the requirement for rebaptism is a barrier to Christians who want to become Community of Christ members. To them, the requirement for rebaptism implies that a person’s first Christian commitment was invalid or inadequate.

All the viewpoints stated above can find support in scripture, reason, tradition, and personal experience. So, the opportunity before Community of Christ is to engage in prayer, study, discussion, and listening, as a way to understand God’s will and to discover the best direction. Our task is to listen together to the voice of God.

This process may be uncomfortable for those with strong opinions and those who may not have considered this issue before. Listening to various points of view may present new ideas or create new questions we have not pondered before. The call is for all of us to do our best to listen for the voice of God and to be patient, open, and kind as we take this journey together.

OUR TASK

The First Presidency now asks members of Community of Christ around the world to discuss the practice of baptism as the way to become a member. Your thoughts and comments will help the First Presidency decide in these matters. Following prayer, reflection, and seeking to understand God’s will, the First Presidency will provide instructions for today about requirements for membership in Community of Christ.

Ask the Question

Put a check by the points that are most important or essential to baptism.

- The use of water
- The way the water is used
(sprinkled, poured, partly or completely covering the body)
- The words that are said *(baptizing in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit/Holy Ghost)*
- The spirit of the baptismal service
- The person's spiritual attitude or commitment to Christ
- The priesthood authority of the person doing the baptizing
- Confirmation of membership and the Holy Spirit with laying on of hands

Other thoughts:

Should we allow people who have been baptized by immersion in other Christian churches to have the *choice* of being rebaptized in Community of Christ?

YES							NO
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

Should we accept the baptisms of those who have been baptized by immersion in other Christian churches and confirm them members of Community of Christ?

YES							NO
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

Should we accept any Christian baptism (immersion, pouring, sprinkling), except infant baptism, and confirm these people as members of Community of Christ?

YES							NO
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

Should we accept any previous Christian commitment (believer's baptism, infant baptism) and confirm people members of Community of Christ after a time of preparation?

YES							NO
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

The Main Question

Considering the worldwide mission of Community of Christ, should it continue to be necessary to rebaptize Christians who want to become members?

YES							NO
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

Share Your Thoughts:

Session Three

Recognizing God's Voice

Objectives

1. Realize that a spiritual practice must be practiced.
2. Understand what discernment is.
3. Quiet our minds and listen for God.
4. Hear God's voice in scripture.

Materials

1. Destroyed paper from session two
2. Copies of *Recognizing God's Voice through Scripture* activity sheet (page 14)
3. Flashlight
4. Sticky notes, markers, and chart paper
5. If *lectio divina* is done in small groups, an additional facilitator will be needed for each group.
6. *Listen: A Centering Activity* video clip
7. An inexpensive flashlight for each participant

Gathering

- Show participants the destroyed paper from the last session. Remind them that it represents the intentional setting aside of their opinions on rebaptism to enable them to recognize the voice of God.

- Sing together "Spirit of the Living God."

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

- Pray for the First Presidency and the World Church Leadership Council as they listen to understand the voices of the church and the voice of the Creator who faithfully guides the church.

TRANSITION QUESTION:: *Discernment is recognizing God's voice. In what ways (body, mind, spirit) have you recognized or felt God speaking to you?*

Gleaning

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

As a facilitator you will ask all participants, one at a time, what they wished they knew how to do. For example, shoot three-point basketball shots, play the piano, speak Spanish. When they answer, shine the flashlight on them and give them that skill. After each person has been given a desired skill, ask the question: "Is this really the way to master a skill?" Make the point that mastery takes practice.

And then say, "Today we are going to use one example of spiritual practice called *lectio divina* to help us recognize God's voice. This may be the first time for some of you; while others already may have some experience with spiritual practices. It doesn't matter because all of us get better at recognizing God's voice when we practice."

**DISCERNMENT:
TO RECOGNIZE
OR COMPREHEND
MENTALLY.
FOR EXAMPLE:
RECOGNIZING
GOD'S VOICE**

CENTERING ACTIVITIES

(May be used as preparation for *lectio divina*)

Show the video clip *Listen: A Centering Activity* (available at www.CofChrist.org/CofM/) where participants are encouraged to listen with openness for the voice of God.

Take the key words from the prayer to the whole line and then back down again ending with Be...

Write out or repeat the prayer, "Be still and know that I am God."

Be...
Be still...
Be still and know...
Be still and know that I...
Be still and know that I am...
Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am...
Be still and know that I...
Be still and know...
Be still...
Be...

Growing

LECTIO DIVINA

To introduce the ancient, spiritual practice of *lectio divina*, read aloud the directions for *Recognizing God's Voice through Scripture* Activity Sheet (page 14). Stay together as a whole group for the first scripture (Doctrine and Covenants 20a–d). Lead your group through the *lectio divina* process on the activity sheet. Invite members to explain how this time was meaningful. Ask them to pay special attention to what others share.

If there are enough participants and facilitators, the second *lectio divina* experience may be done in small groups. Assign a different scripture from page fifteen to each group. After completing the second *lectio divina* process, the group should decide on one word from the scripture that spoke to members and write it on a sticky note. Have a member from each group summarize aloud the scripture and put the sticky-note word on the chart paper for everyone to see. (This process allows all to hear a summary of each scripture.)

Going

Give each participant an inexpensive flashlight and ask the simple question, "Why am I giving you this flashlight?" (Remind them that through practice recognizing God's voice becomes easier.)



Recognizing God's Voice through Scripture

Lectio divina is Latin for divine reading. This ancient practice helps us slow down, listen, and pray, looking for God to be revealed through the word. The goal of this centering time is to release all expectation and to become more aware of God's presence. Two suggested centering activities can be found on page 13. Before you begin, take a moment to clear your mind. Take some deep breaths and pray—inviting the Holy Spirit to speak to you and help you focus during your prayer time.

Lectio: Read the passage slowly several times.

Meditatio: Reflect: What words or phrases stand out to you? What from this passage seems to speak to you directly? Underline them.

Oratio: Pray to let God know that your heart, mind, and soul are open to hearing.

Contemplatio: Listen for God to speak or guide you in some way. Don't rush this listening time. If your mind wanders, refocus by praying and asking God to help you sense God's nearness.

Feel free to write thoughts or feelings from the scripture text: new understandings, new questions, or concerns.

What was helpful about the *lectio divina* exercise?

What was difficult?

How is listening to the scripture in this way different from ways we usually read or listen to scripture?

From this experience, what might be helpful to our understandings of baptism?

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 20:1A–D

This revelation was given through Joseph Smith Jr. in April 1830 to answer the question from those who wanted to join the church but who had been baptized in another church.

1a. 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.

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 20:1A–D ADAPTED

1a. *I tell you I have done away with all old covenants. This is a new and everlasting covenant; the same which was from the beginning.*

b. *Although someone might be baptized 100 times, it doesn't do any good; for no one can have everlasting life by following the Law of Moses, neither by the works they do.*

c. *It is because of dead works that I caused this covenant and this church to be built up unto me; just as it was in the past.*

d. *So, enter in through baptism, as I have commanded, and don't try to tell your God what to do. Amen.*

GALATIANS 3:27–29 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

²⁷And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on the character of Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

BOOK OF MORMON: MOSIAH: 9:39–41 AV

³⁹And now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

⁴⁰Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life:

⁴¹Now I say unto you, If this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?

MOSIAH 9:39–41 ADAPTED

³⁹*So now because you want to be with God, and be called God's people, and are willing to help other people with their problems;*

⁴⁰*And you are willing to be sad with those who are sad and comfort those who need to be comforted and to share God with others all the time and everywhere you go, so that you will have eternal life:*

⁴¹*So if you want all of that, what do you have against being baptized in the name of the Lord; to promise to serve God and keep his commandments, so he may give even more of his Spirit to you?*

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 161:5

Be respectful of tradition. Do not fail to listen attentively to the telling of the sacred story, for the story of scripture and of faith empowers and illuminates. But neither be captive to time-bound formulas and procedures. Remember that instruction given in former years is applicable in principle and must be measured against the needs of a growing church, in accordance with the prayerful direction of the spiritual authorities and the consent of the people.

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

161:5 ADAPTED

Value the practices of the past. Listen to the scriptures because from them we receive power and light. Lessons from the past have value but should be compared with the current needs of a growing church as led by the spirit and the permission of the people.

These scriptures have been adapted for clarity and ease of understanding for children and youth. Adaptations do not represent authorized versions for general use.

CONTENTS

Session Four

To Change or Not

Objectives

1. Build empathy for differing positions on rebaptism.
2. Help individuals discover how their opinions about rebaptism have changed or stayed the same.
3. Give feedback on the Conditions of Membership. (Note: Some individuals may wish to continue the discerning process.)

Materials

1. *Sing a New Song* hymnal
2. *Baptismal Stories to Consider* activity sheet (page 17)
3. Pens, pencils, or markers
4. Copies of *Ask the Question* activity sheet from session two (page 11)
5. Make four signs from definitions: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Personal Experience

Gathering

- Spend time thanking the group for the work it has done and the spirit in which it has met.
- Sing together NS 44, “Seek Ye First.”
- Offer a prayer for God’s continued presence and for our ability to recognize God’s voice.

Gleaning and Growing

- Put the four signs so that everyone in the group can see them. Have individuals take turns reading aloud the *ve* baptismal stories from the activity sheet (page 17). At the end of each story, stop and discuss how scripture, tradition, reason, and/or personal experience played a part in the story. The group quickly may recognize personal experience as a strong influence in all these stories; challenge members to look for the presence of other influences. Then allow a couple of minutes to write responses on the activity sheet. After hearing all *ve* stories, ask those who are willing to share their written thoughts and feelings. This can be done as a whole group or in small groups.

TRANSITION QUESTION:

Do you feel ready to give feedback to the First Presidency on Conditions of Membership, or do you feel the need to continue discerning?

Going

- Ask participants again to fill out *Ask the Question* activity sheet (page 11) from session two. Some will be eager to submit it as feedback for the First Presidency. Others may not feel ready and will want further discernment. Please validate either feeling. (Individuals who want to continue discerning should be directed to the *For Further Study* (page 3) recommendations in the introduction.) Collect the feedback forms from those who choose to turn them in. Send them to the First Presidency. (See the introduction (page 3) for directions on where to send them.)
- Ask the group to stand in a circle, join hands, and offer sentence prayers—a blessing for leaders and members of the church in discerning God’s guidance about baptismal practices in Community of Christ. (Have those who wish to pass, squeeze the hand of the person standing next to them.) The facilitator may then close the group by offering a prayer of gratitude for the group and a blessing for each participant.

SCRIPTURE: TO FORM BELIEFS BASED ON YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCRIPTURES

TRADITION: TO FORM BELIEFS BASED ON WHAT THE CHURCH HAS DONE IN THE PAST

REASON: TO FORM BELIEFS BASED ON WISE THINKING

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TO FORM BELIEFS BASED ON WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN YOUR LIFE

Baptismal Stories to Consider

BAPTISMAL STORY #1

When I was younger I was baptized into another church. It was a powerful experience for me, but then I met my friend, Cathy, and she introduced me to Community of Christ. I love this church and think a lot about becoming a member. But I worry that if I am rebaptized it will be as if my first baptism had no meaning. I can't do that.

BAPTISMAL STORY #2

I don't remember my first baptism; it happened when I was a baby. The minister poured water over my head. When I decided to join Community of Christ, I looked forward to baptism by immersion because it was my decision now—not my parents'.

BAPTISMAL STORY #3

Both sides of my family have been Community of Christ members for five generations. I'm so proud of that. I remember feeling excited when I asked my grandmother to baptize me after she was ordained a priest. I felt her connection with God as she lowered me into the water. I'm really afraid that if we stop rebaptism we will become like every other church because Community of Christ priesthood won't have baptized some of our members.

BAPTISMAL STORY #4

I was baptized once and became a disciple of Jesus. I don't understand why I have to be baptized again. My covenant was to Jesus Christ—not to the church.

BAPTISMAL STORY #5

I was baptized once and became a disciple of Jesus, but in Community of Christ I found a new relationship with Jesus Christ—a more powerful one. I am excited to be rebaptized because it beautifully represents my new covenant.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS? WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS?

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