

Of Water and Spirit

Membership-preparation Lessons for Children Adapted for Interim Baptism and Confirmation Policy—January 1, 2011

With the canonization of Doctrine and Covenants 164 in April 2010, Community of Christ has a new understanding of baptism and confirmation (Doctrine and Covenants 164:2). The official policy will become effective September 1, 2011, but an interim policy governing church practice became effective January 1, 2011, and will run through August 31, 2011. *Of Water and Spirit* will be replaced in the future with a new study guide that reflects the new policy.

Until then, use the lesson suggestions in this document to supplement the material in that book as you prepare children for church membership.

New Policy on Baptism

The new policy allows some children and youth who have been baptized in another Christian denomination to become members of Community of Christ through the sacrament of confirmation of membership. Their baptism must meet these requirements:

- They were baptized of water (immersion, sprinkling, or pouring).
- Their baptism represented a personal expression of faith in Jesus Christ.
- They were at least eight years old when they were baptized. Community of Christ scripture declares that a person must be at least eight to understand the commitment of discipleship (Doctrine and Covenants 68:4a). Infant baptism does not meet Community of Christ criteria for becoming a member through confirmation.
- They have been baptized by a Christian minister, clergy-person, or pastor.
- They have signed the Shared Understanding of Previous Baptism form (attached).

Children and youth, whose baptism occurred in another Christian denomination *before* age eight, are required to be baptized by a Community of Christ priesthood member. Children and youth, who were baptized in another Christian denomination *at or after* age eight and wish to be rebaptized, may do so. Otherwise, they need only to be confirmed.

Increased Emphasis on the Importance of Confirmation

Confirmation of membership is one of eight sacraments in Community of Christ. This sacrament should be performed in a special worship service that highlights its importance. Confirmation of membership is performed by a Community of Christ Melchisedec priesthood member.

Preparation for the sacrament of confirmation of membership is to be emphasized by learning and experiencing Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs. Study guides to help gain that understanding are *Walking with Jesus: Disciples in Community of Christ* (revised edition of *Walking with Jesus: A Member's Guide in the Community of Christ*), *Sharing in Community of Christ*, and the new disciple formation guide at www.CofChrist.org/dfg/.

Ministers performing the sacrament of confirmation of membership are counseled in Doctrine and Covenants 164:2e:

During the confirmation prayer include an acknowledgment of the grace and authority of Jesus Christ through which baptism occurs. Also, bear witness to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which weaves people's giftedness into beautiful patterns of community to enrich their discipleship and to strengthen the fabric of the church.

Interim Changes to *Of Water and Spirit*

New lesson plans for baptism and confirmation of children will be available in the future. Until then, please use the following added suggestions when using *Of Water and Spirit*:

1. On page 9, include Doctrine and Covenants 164:2a–d:
 - a. Instruction given previously about baptism was proper to ensure the rise and cohesiveness of the church during its early development and in following years. However, as a growing number have come to understand, the redemptive action of God in Christ—while uniquely and authoritatively expressed through the church—is not confined solely to the church.
 - b. God's grace, revealed in Jesus Christ, freely moves throughout creation, often beyond human perception, to achieve divine purposes in people's lives. 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.

c. 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.

d. Confirmation should follow a time of intentional preparation that includes exploring the church's mission, beliefs, and understanding of discipleship expressed through covenant with God and others in sacred community.

2. Candidates for confirmation of membership, who have previously been baptized, need to review and sign the form, Shared Understanding of Previous Baptism, noting that their previous baptism met certain criteria. A copy of the form is attached.

3. On pages 48–49, "Sample Service of Baptism and Confirmation" in *Of Water and Spirit*, places baptism and confirmation into one worship service. This practice is permissible. However, when practical, it's preferred for the sacraments to be done in separate services, allowing time to prepare for confirmation of membership with emphasis on learning about the church.

4. A wonderful way to accept a child into membership in Community of Christ is for all members to renew their baptismal covenant and confirmation of membership together. Plan activities and studies for all ages to grow together. Review the counsel in Doctrine and Covenants 164:3a–c:

a. All church members are urged to examine the depth of your baptismal commitment. Having been baptized and confirmed, become fully immersed in the servant life of Christ.

b. Live the meaning of your baptism daily as you grow in the skills and qualities of discipleship. Actively and generously support the ministries of the church, which was divinely established to restore Christ's covenant of peace, even the Zion of your hopes.

c. The Eternal Christ invites those who have yet to experience the blessings of baptism to "Follow me in the way of righteousness and peace." Be baptized of water and the Spirit and discover your spiritual home as a fully functioning member of the body.

Invite children and their families into the ministries and fellowship of the church, for their baptism in another Christian faith community is welcome here. Reach out and embrace them, for their presence enriches our lives and the church.

Community of Christ

Shared Understanding of Previous Baptism

- A Christian minister, clergyperson, or pastor baptized me by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling.
- My baptism was a personal expression of faith in Jesus Christ when I was 8 or older.
- I am familiar with and embrace the vision, mission, message, sacraments, and basic beliefs of Community of Christ.
- I am familiar with and embrace the responsibility of all church members to contribute to Local and World Ministries Mission Tithes according to our true capacity.
- I am actively involved in a Community of Christ congregation or ministry fellowship (typically at least six months).
 - (It is understood that in some cases, a person may wish to join the church while living in an area isolated from other congregations. In these situations, the criteria of “active” will need to be interpreted by the mission center president, in consultation with the field apostle. The primary point is that people desiring to be confirmed should be as “active” as possible, given their circumstance. In some cases, if a person is isolated from the organized ministries of the church, “activity” in the church may be lived out at the mission center level or through ongoing contact with church officers.)

I am a baptized Christian, and I want to become a member of Community of Christ through the sacrament of confirmation.

Name [Signature]

Date

Community of Christ Congregation

Pastor Signature

Previous Church Affiliation: _____ Unavailable

Date or Approximate Date of Baptism: _____

Baptizing Minister's Affiliation (if known): _____

Please send a completed copy of this form to:

Membership Records

1001 W. Walnut St.

Independence, MO 64055-3562 USA

Phone: (816) 833-1000, extension 1442. E-mail: fcooper@CofChrist.org

Process for Collecting “Shared Understanding of Previous Baptism” Statement

Congregational Level

1. Pastor provides copies of the form to priesthood who are working with potential church members.
2. Priesthood members use the document to begin a conversation on conditions of membership and what Community of Christ requires to become a member of the church without baptism.
3. The potential member signs the form.
4. The priesthood member who had that conversation with the potential member makes sure:
 - The pastor signs the form.
 - A copy of the form is sent to Membership Records at International Headquarters.
5. The congregational or mission center recorder keeps a copy of the form for five years.
 - The congregational or mission center recorder makes certain the member’s confirmation is entered in Shelby.
 - Verify the Shelby record is up to date with contact information.
 - Do not use the name of the Christian minister, clergyperson, or pastor who baptized the person.
 - The “Officiant” field in Shelby is filled in “Other” as a code that makes it clear the person was not baptized by Community of Christ priesthood.
 - Enter the previous church as a comment in the notes of the baptism life event, if the information is available.
 - Enter the approximate or precise date of baptism.

World Church Level

1. When the form arrives, a member of the Membership Records team looks up the person to make sure the necessary information has been entered and is ready for a report to access its data.
 - a. Even if the data is in other languages, as long as it is legible, this should be acceptable.
 - b. This step should be tracking what the local recorder has entered, not entering the record.
2. The paper copy is stored alphabetically in a file.