

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.
- 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?

HOW TO
MAKE RAINSTICKS

www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/music/rainstick/

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.

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.

- 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 misconceptions. Record the definitions on chart paper.

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 this prayer 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

Should we allow people who have been baptized by immersion in other Christian churches to have the <i>choice</i> 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

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:

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

Use the back of this sheet for thoughts you want to share.