



Community of Christ

OFFICIAL POLICY: Baptism, Confirmation, and Church Membership

Reference: First Presidency

**Replaces Policies: 20.00a,
20.01, and 20.01a**

Distribution: General

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A person can become a church member one of three ways. All three ways involve a time of preparation and study.

1. Baptism and confirmation by Community of Christ priesthood.

- Only those eight years old or older can be baptized by immersion by Community of Christ priesthood.
- Community of Christ priests and Melchisedec priesthood perform the sacrament of baptism.
- Community of Christ Melchisedec priesthood perform the sacrament of confirmation.
- *Community of Christ ministers do not baptize persons without the understanding and expectation that they will be confirmed members of the church.*
- *Anyone already baptized in Community of Christ is not to be re-baptized, except in the very rare case where a member was expelled.*

2. Baptized Christians who desire to be rebaptized and confirmed by Community of Christ priesthood.

- Baptized Christians may choose to be re-baptized by immersion by Community of Christ priesthood before being confirmed.
- Only those eight years old or older can be baptized by Community of Christ priesthood.
- Community of Christ priests and Melchisedec priesthood perform the sacrament of baptism.
- Community of Christ Melchisedec priesthood perform the sacrament of confirmation.

3. Baptized Christians may be confirmed by Community of Christ priesthood.

- Baptized Christians may choose **not** to be re-baptized by Community of Christ priesthood before being confirmed.
- They must review and sign a statement (Statement of Understanding) noting that their previous baptisms met certain criteria.
 - Baptism must be of water (immersion, sprinkling, pouring).
 - Baptism must have represented a personal expression of faith in Jesus Christ.
 - The person must have been at least eight years old when baptized.
 - Community of Christ tradition teaches that a person must be at least eight years old to understand the commitment of discipleship.
 - Community of Christ will not accept infant baptism as meeting the church's criteria for becoming a member through confirmation.
 - People must have been baptized by a Christian minister, clergyperson, or pastor.
- Community of Christ Melchisedec priesthood perform the sacrament of confirmation.

In every case, new members must:

- Have been baptized of water as a personal expression of faith in Jesus Christ when they were eight years old or older.
- Have been baptized by a Christian minister, clergyperson, or pastor.
- Be confirmed by Community of Christ Melchisedec priesthood after a time of preparation and study.

When the baptism and confirmation criteria are met, people become church members and share the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities as all other members.

Members should be able to make the following claims:

- 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 eight years old or older.
- I am familiar with and support the vision, mission initiatives, and basic beliefs of Community of Christ.
- I am familiar with and support the call of all church members to contribute to both local and World Mission Tithes according to our true capacity.
- I am actively involved in a Community of Christ congregation or ministry fellowship.

Accepting Other Baptisms

Doctrine and Covenants 164:2b states:

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.

Criteria. People who have not been baptized by Community of Christ priests or Melchisedec priesthood may be baptized by immersion by Community of Christ priests or Melchisedec priesthood if they wish. However they are not required to do so to become church members by confirmation if the following criteria are met:

1. Baptism of water as a personal expression of faith in Jesus Christ.
2. Baptism by a Christian minister, clergyperson, or pastor.
3. Baptism that occurred when a person was eight years old or older.

Statement of Understanding. The church will not require people to present an official certificate of baptism or the baptizing minister’s credentials. However, people seeking membership by confirmation must complete and sign a short statement provided by the church, “Statement of Understanding,” sharing some information on their baptism and assuring expectations are clear for both the church and the potential member.

“Of Water.” The phrase “of water” allows for Christian baptisms done by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling if the other criteria for baptism are met. Accepting baptism by means other than immersion—while upholding the church standard practice of baptism by immersion—is done in response to Doctrine and Covenants 164:2 (quoted above) and Doctrine and Covenants 162: 2d.

You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. 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. –*D&C 162: 2d.*

To summarize: each person who wants to become a church member through confirmation, whose baptism meets the criteria, must also:

- Complete a time of membership preparation before confirmation.
 - The church will provide guidelines and resources to assist persons in this process.
- Sign the “Statement of Understanding” form to assure clarity of expectations.
- Be confirmed by the proper Community of Christ priesthood (elders and high priests).

Infant Baptism

Community of Christ will not accept infant baptism as meeting the church’s criteria for becoming a member through confirmation.

- The church’s policy on baptism, confirmation, and membership is not intended to define who is Christian. It defines how one becomes a Community of Christ member.
- Nothing in the recent counsel or policy should be used to malign the beliefs or practices of other churches.

Community of Christ Beliefs and Practices on Baptism

Baptism and confirmation are fundamentally important in Community of Christ. They are essential steps in lifelong disciple formation and growth. We believe:

Baptism is how we initially express our commitment to lifelong discipleship. As we yield our lives to Christ in baptism we enter Christian community (the body of Christ) and have the promise of salvation.—*Basic Beliefs of Community of Christ, “Salvation.” 2010*

Baptism has several significant meanings in Community of Christ. Through baptism, God’s generous grace and eternal purposes, revealed in Jesus Christ, are made evident in human lives. In response, we:

- Choose in faith to accept God’s invitation to enter a covenant relationship.
- Evidence our commitment to follow Jesus Christ in a life of active Christian discipleship.
- Display an attitude of repentance and receive the promise of forgiveness.
- Receive the promise of salvation and new life through symbolically engaging in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Use the resources provided by the church to understand the vision, mission, and basic beliefs of Community of Christ.
- Become part of the body of Christ and begin the formal process of becoming a member of Community of Christ.
 - *Community of Christ ministers do not baptize persons without the understanding and expectation that they will be confirmed members of the church.*

In Community of Christ, baptism:

- May occur when a person is eight years old or older.
- Is by immersion in water.
- Is performed by Community of Christ priesthood who use the phrase from Doctrine and Covenants 17: 21c.
 - “Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.”
 - “Holy Spirit” is also acceptable.

Community of Christ Beliefs and Practices on Confirmation

The church invites everyone to enter a covenant relationship with God by following Jesus Christ, and to live out their discipleship as members of Community of Christ. This is done through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.

The sacrament of confirmation recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the disciple’s life, and confirms membership in Community of Christ.

Following baptism, time is taken to further prepare people for the sacrament of confirmation and lifelong discipleship as a church member. This preparation includes continued exploration of the vision, mission, beliefs, history, scriptures, and sacraments of the church.

Confirmation is performed by Community of Christ priesthood members (elders and high priests) who lay their hands on the candidate’s head and offer a special prayer of blessing. Based on Doctrine and Covenants 164: 2c-3, the confirmation prayer:

- Acknowledges the grace and authority of Jesus Christ through which baptism occurs.
- Confirms the presence of the Holy Spirit acting to help people live in covenant with God and others through membership in Community of Christ.
- Seeks God’s blessing to help new members grow in their covenant and generously share their giftedness and resources in support of the church’s mission to *Proclaim Jesus Christ and Promote Communities of Joy, Hope, Love, and Peace* throughout the world.



Community of Christ

Statement of Understanding

- 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 eight years old or older.
- I am familiar with and support the vision, mission initiatives, and basic beliefs of Community of Christ.
- I am familiar with and support the call to all church members to contribute to mission tithes (local, mission center, and worldwide ministries) according to our true capacity.
- I am actively involved in a Community of Christ congregation or ministry fellowship.

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

Name [Please Print]

Date of Birth

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
Independence, MO 64055-3562 USA
Phone: (816) 833-1000 extension 2211 Email: cduke@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 initiate a conversation on conditions of membership and what Community of Christ requires to become a member of the church, honoring a previous baptism.
3. The form is signed by the potential member.
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 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 alphabetically stored in a file.

Please consult the church web site for the most current resources available.