

Community of Christ

OFFICIAL POLICY

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Baptism, Confirmation, and Church Membership

A person can become a church member one of three ways.

1. Baptism and confirmation by Community of Christ priesthood.

- Only those 8 or older can be baptized by Community of Christ priesthood (who baptize only by immersion).
- 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 in which 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 8 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 (Shared Understanding of Previous Baptism), 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 8 or older when baptized.
 - Community of Christ tradition teaches that a person must be 8 or older 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 8 or older.
- Have been baptized by a Christian minister, clergyperson, or pastor.
- Be confirmed by Community of Christ Melchisedec priesthood.
- Be familiar with and embrace the vision, mission, message, sacraments and basic beliefs of Community of Christ as expressed in resources provided by the church.
- Be familiar with and embrace the principles of “Disciples Generous Response.” They must understand the responsibility of all church members to contribute to Local and World Ministries Mission Tithes according to their true capacity.
- Be actively involved in a Community of Christ congregation or ministry fellowship (typically at least six months) before being considered for becoming church members through confirmation. (It is understood that in some cases, a person may wish to join the church while living in an area that is 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, where 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.

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

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. They were baptized of water as a personal expression of faith in Jesus Christ.
2. They were baptized by a Christian minister, clergyperson, or pastor.
3. They were baptized when they were 8 or older.

Shared Understanding Statement. 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, “Shared Understanding of Previous Baptism,” indicating the date and circumstances of their baptism.

“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's 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.

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

- Complete a time of membership preparation before confirmation.
 - The church will provide guidelines and resources to help persons in this process.
- Sign a “Shared Understanding of Previous Baptism” statement 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 embrace and grow in familiarity with the vision, mission, message, sacraments, 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 8 or older.
- Is by immersion in water.
- Is performed by Community of Christ priesthood (priests or Melchisedec 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.”

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 is to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the disciple’s life and to confirm membership in Community of Christ.

Prior to confirmation, time is taken to prepare people for the sacrament of confirmation and lifelong discipleship as a church member. This preparation includes continued exploration of the vision, mission, message, basic 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. 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.