

Article 8 Revision Rationale

Preamble

The national Board of Faith and Life (now the NFLT) was given the task to revise those articles of faith that were identified by the MB pastors in Canada as needing review.

These articles were:

1. Article 5 – Salvation/Atonement
2. Article 8 – Christian Baptism
3. Article 13 – Love and Non-Resistance

The National Faith and Life Team (NFLT) chose Article 8 as the first to undergo review and revision as the practice of baptism and incorporation of new members into the local church covenant community is at the center of the ministry of the local church.

The process of review also served to test the viability of reviewing one article at a time as well as facilitate the definition of best practices/process for such a task.

The NFLT desired the process to be highly interactive – hence the numerous points of feedback and conversation along the way. Such interaction has proved valuable in drafting a high quality statement regarding our corporate convictions around baptism and around belonging to a covenant community.

The philosophy behind this draft contains a strong desire to be faithful to the biblical texts, to honour our particular Christian heritage, to be sensitive to the realities of church life in Canada today, and to elevate the language in the article to be more joyful, invitational, and celebratory – pointing to the ordinance of baptism as a great gift.

The 2020 draft 12 of the Article is the one that the NFLT recommends to the MB Churches of Canada for approval and inclusion in our Confession of Faith.

Details of Change

Christian Baptism (1999 wording)	Article 8: Christian Baptism (2020 DRAFT #11)
<p>Confession</p> <p>We believe that when people receive God’s gift of salvation, they are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism is a sign of having been cleansed from sin. It is a covenant with the church to walk in the way of Christ through the power of the Spirit.</p>	<p>God’s Invitation</p> <p>We believe that when people respond in faith to God’s invitation to repentance, new life, and discipleship, God calls each of them to receive water baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.</p>

Discussion of Changes:

1. 2020 version language is active and invitational, pointing to baptism as an invitation from God to which the disciple is called to respond in faith.
2. The language of sign has been removed as it has proved to lack clarity. Some understood sign as something that points, others as something that stands in place of/signifies or symbolizes. The new draft uses *testify* or *bear witness*, which eliminate the confusion.
3. The language of baptism as covenant was changed to commitment (see Meaning section below)

<p>Meaning</p> <p>Baptism by water is a public sign that a person has repented of sins, received forgiveness of sins, died with Christ to sin, been raised to newness of life, and received the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a sign of the believer’s incorporation into the body of Christ as expressed in the local church. Baptism is also a pledge to serve Christ according to the gifts given to each person.</p>	<p>Meaning</p> <p>Baptism is an act of obedience which testifies that God in Christ has forgiven and cleansed a person from sin, freed them from the power of sin and death, given them the Holy Spirit, and united them with the body of Christ. Baptism by immersion is a powerful testimony that a believer has been washed by the Spirit, has died with Christ to sin and has been raised to newness of life.</p> <p>In baptism the believer publicly bears witness to their own commitment to follow Jesus as Lord, serving Jesus as a covenant member of the local congregation in God’s Kingdom mission.</p> <p>Baptism is the God-given means by which the local church family incorporates followers of Jesus.</p>
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Discussion of Changes:

1. The meaning of baptism section is considerably enlarged to portray the layers of meaning contained in the act of a believer’s immersion baptism.
2. All key words from the 1999 version have been preserved in the 2020 version, though some are moved to other sections of the Article (e.g. repentance is in the **God’s Invitation** section)
3. The language of “pledge to serve” has been replaced with language of commitment to discipleship and service in the context of a local church community.
4. The 2020 version strengthens the connection between baptism and membership, discouraging the practice of baptized but not actively belonging (growing and serving) people in the church.

Guidelines for incorporation of people as members of the covenant community will be produced by the NFLT later in 2020.

The NFLT recognizes that a small percentage of our church currently disconnect baptism from membership. We encourage those churches to move toward meeting the intent of this article in their practice.

5. The 2020 version points strongly to discipleship as the expected norm for the baptized.
6. The language of “testimony” and “witness” has been added to indicate that, in the act of baptism, the believer, the church, and God each witness to profound spiritual truths.
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<p>Eligibility</p> <p>Baptism is for those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and commit themselves to follow Christ in obedience as members of the local church. Baptism is for those who understand its meaning, are able to be accountable to Christ and the church, and voluntarily request it on the basis of their faith response to Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Who</p> <p>Baptism is for all those who repent and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, have received the Holy Spirit, and pledge to live as disciples who obey Jesus in all of life. Baptism is for those who understand its basic meaning, are able to be accountable to Christ and the church, and request it voluntarily.</p>
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Discussion of Changes:

1. This section contains subtle language changes which strengthen the discipleship expectation for the baptized to live “as disciples who obey Jesus in all of life.”
2. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was added in reference to the supporting Scripture passages (Acts 2:38-42, 10:47-48, 1 Cor 12: 12-14, Titus 3:5) and to clarify that the Holy Spirit comes into the life of the believer at conversion.
3. The word “basic” was added to discourage preparations for baptism that are too lengthy, too complex, or seem to require a level of sanctification with the New Testament practice does not. Baptism is therefore connected closer to the salvation process or event than to the process of ongoing transformation into Christ-likeness. See the Pastoral Application FAQs for guidance in practice.

<p>Practice</p> <p>We practice water baptism by immersion administered by the local church. Local congregations may receive into membership those who have been baptized by another mode on their confession of faith. Persons who claim baptism as infants and wish to become members of a Mennonite Brethren congregation are to receive baptism on their confession of faith.</p>	<p>Practice</p> <p>The local church baptizes believers by immersion and joyfully welcomes and disciples them into full participation as members of the congregation. The local church also joyfully welcomes Christian disciples baptized elsewhere, regardless of mode, if they were baptized upon their own confession of faith.</p> <p>The local church invites those who claim baptism prior to their own confession of faith and who desire to be members of a Mennonite Brethren congregation to receive baptism as a testimony to their own faith.</p>
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Discussion of Changes:

1. The 2020 language of the Practice section is more active, invitational, joyful, celebratory, and welcoming.
2. The requirement for believer’s baptism remains.
 This is the most challenging aspect of the article and the NFLT wrestled with a few comments from our pastors which suggested that we accept pre-conversion baptism for those with meaningful confirmations.
 Neither the Scriptures, the scholarly work in our tradition, the understanding of those traditions who apply water pre-conversion, or our collective conscience allowed us to move in that direction. The NFLT will work on providing resources for pastors and potential members to help them walk through the pastoral challenges involved in this area.
 A footnote was added to offer the last sentence offering a direction of discussion in this area. *(This baptism may also acknowledge the hopes and intentions of those involved in their baptism as an infant.)*
 The NFLT is open to begin a conversation with ICOMB to explore whether the application of water pre-conversion could be accepted as “baptism.”
3. The word “membership” is not used at all in the 2020 version. The biblical term “member” and belonging to a covenant community are used to indicate the organic meaning of being part of a local body of Christ.
 Removing the term “membership” is in hopes to remove emphasis on the institutional, roster-keeping aspects of membership which belong behind the scenes in the church office.
 However, the article assumes that those baptized are welcomed into a vibrant life in the community, which means they must be known and somehow tracked.
4. The Scripture references were expanded in order to a) provide a greater breadth of teaching on baptism and belonging and b) to reflect the practice in our churches in the teaching on baptism

<p><i>Matthew 3:13-17; 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:2-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 2:12-13; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:4-6.</i></p>	<p><i>Matthew 3:13-17; 28:18-20; Acts 2:38-42; 8:12; 10:47-48; Romans 6:2-6; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Colossians 2:12-13; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:4-6; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21.</i></p>
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Word Count: 233

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Pastoral Application FAQs.

The Pastoral Application section takes forms of FAQs. The section is expanded to cover many of the specific questions raised about beliefs and practice around baptism and belonging. The questions are answered in short, to-the-point answers. Here is the current list of FAQs.

1. Does baptism save?
2. When should baptism take place in the life of a believer?
3. Do we advise a minimum age for baptism?
4. How much preparation for baptism is enough?
5. How sanctified (or holy) does one need to be in order to be baptized?
6. When, in the baptism process, should we teach the MB Confession?
7. What if a person wants to be baptized but not become part of the local church?
8. Are there times when the local church might baptize someone and not have them become part of this community?
9. What is the difference between being a “covenant member of the local congregation” and “legal membership”?
10. What about those old enough to be baptized and join the local family but not old enough to vote at Annual Meetings?
11. What if the location of the baptism excludes the local congregation? a.k.a. destination baptism.
12. Are those baptized as infants required to be baptized upon their own confession of faith?
13. What if immersion water baptism is not an option?
14. Should our churches facilitate spontaneous baptisms?
15. Can Christians who have been baptized upon their confession of faith be baptized again?