

## **COMMON AGREEMENT ON MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF BAPTISM**

### **Roman Catholic-Reformed Church Dialogue**

1. Together we affirm that, by the sacrament of Baptism, a person is truly incorporated into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13 and 27; Ephesians 1:22-23), the church. Baptism establishes the bond of unity existing among all who are part of Christ's body and is therefore the sacramental basis for our efforts to move towards visible unity.
2. Together we affirm that Baptism is the sacramental gateway into the Christian life, directed toward the fullness of faith and discipleship in Christ.
3. Together we affirm that incorporation into the universal church by baptism is brought about by celebrating the sacrament within a particular Christian community.
4. Together we affirm that Baptism is to be conferred only once, because those who are baptized are decisively incorporated into the Body of Christ.
5. Together we affirm that baptism is a sacrament of the church, enacted in obedience to the mission confided to it by Christ's own word. For our baptisms to be mutually recognized, water and the scriptural Trinitarian formula "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28: 19-20) must be used in the baptismal rite.
6. Together we affirm that the validity of Baptism depends on its celebration according to the apostolic witness by the church and its authorized ministers.
7. Together we affirm, as a sign of our unity and as a witness to ecumenical commitment, the practice of inviting the presence and, where appropriate, the participation of members of our respective communions in the celebration of Baptism. At the same time, we affirm our responsibility to respect the integrity of the distinct baptismal practices of the communions in which the rite of Baptism is administered.
8. Given our mutual recognition of Baptism, we encourage using baptismal registers in the local church community and, when requested by another church for a pastoral need in the life of an individual, providing written attestations of Baptism, including the liturgical formula used. Such cooperation and mutual accountability honors the dignity of the sacrament of Baptism.

### **Pastoral Recommendations: Tangible Expressions of Mutual Recognition of Baptism**

1. In our Agreement, we have given the grounds for formal mutual recognition of the validity of our baptisms. The following are recommended to the consideration of our communions on the basis of the ecumenical commitments that bring us to the dialogue table. *It is understood that these recommendations should be implemented in accordance with existing regulations.*
2. We recommend that our local communities maintain the custom of keeping baptismal records and providing baptismal certificates when requested at various times in the Christian life of our members. Compatibility in the form and content of these documents would be sign of ecumenical cooperation and a safeguard of the

validity of what we celebrate together as Christians.

3. We recommend that prominence be given to the placement of the baptismal font and water near the worshipping assembly as a sign of continuity in faith.
4. We recommend the practice of inviting members of our respective communions to reaffirm their Baptism together at times of prayer for Christian unity.
5. We recommend, where the custom of baptismal sponsors, witnesses, or godparents has been maintained, that these be selected from our respective communities of faith as a sign that Christians belonging to our communions are truly members of the Body of Christ. This is particularly important when welcoming interchurch families and their congregations to a celebration of Baptism.
6. We recommend the active participation of the families of those to be baptized in the selection of readings, intercessory prayers, and music as a way of giving tangible evidence of the unity that we share in Christ.
7. Mindful that the active participation of clergy and laity of the respective communions of the spouses is at present allowed in interchurch weddings, we also recommend the practice of inviting clergy or lay guests to offer prayers, proclaim a Scripture reading, preach, and/or confer a blessing in the rite of Baptism, maintaining respect for the rites of each communion.
8. We recommend the participation of clergy in local ministerial associations in order to facilitate the pastoral dialogues that need to take place to foster ecumenical cooperation at Baptism and at other important times in the faith journeys of Christians. Ministerial associations can be a means for fostering life-long spiritual accompaniment in faith both for clergy and for the laity whom they serve. In addition, such associations may find other creative symbolic ways to foster ecumenical sharing in a town, neighborhood, or village.
9. At the funeral rites of members of our communions, including other Christians with whom we are in ecumenical dialogue, we recommend the use of a prayer or rite (e.g. sprinkling of the casket, the white pall, etc.) as a final commendation that calls to mind the enduring gift of grace received in Baptism.
10. We recommend the use of those liturgical options already available in our official ritual books for the celebration of Baptism that enhance ecumenical awareness on the local level.
11. Mindful that in many instances local congregations may not be able to implement all these recommendations at the present time, we recommend a patient and prudent process of discernment among laity and clergy. We recognize that the journey towards full, visible unity depends on openness to the grace of God and humility before the initiatives of God's Spirit among us, which are themselves based on Baptism. Let us above all work to promote the works of charity and service not only to those who are of the household of the faith, but also to all people and to all of creation.