

BAPTIST METHODIST AGREEMENT ON BAPTISMAL POLICY WITHIN LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS

Originally finalised after long consultation between the Baptist Union Advisory Committee on Church Relations and the Methodist Church Ecumenical Committee, revised in 2009.

A. We recognise the necessity of:

- i. Maintaining the integrity of both Methodist and Baptist understandings and practice of baptism;
- ii. Having a flexible and sensitive approach in this very delicate area;
- iii. Maintaining and developing good relationships and unity within the congregations of the sharing churches.

B. We note that:

- i. It is the practice of the Methodist Church to baptise infants and to confirm them on confession of faith or, when infant baptism has not occurred, to baptise and confirm believers. In both cases these services make provision for pouring, sprinkling or immersion in water.
- ii. It is the practice in Baptist churches to hold a service for infants and their parents (variously known as “The Dedication Service”, “The Service of Infant Presentation and Blessing”, “The Blessing of Infants”, etc) and to administer believer’s baptism on the candidate’s personal profession of faith in Christ.
- iii. Standing Order 010A (5)¹ of “The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church” makes clear that “it is contrary to the principles and usage of the Methodist Church to confer what purports to be baptism on any person known to have been already baptised at any time”.
- iv. Whilst welcoming “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” (the so-called Lima Document) as a “notable milestone in the search for sufficient theological consensus”, the BUGB Council in November 1984 dismissed as wholly unacceptable in its present form the statement that, “Any practice which might be interpreted as ‘re-baptism’ must be avoided”. In this way the Council sought to protect the freedom of an individual’s “informed conscience” in matters concerning baptism and to allow for the possibility of a change of conviction here.
- v. Whereas those Baptist ministers “Authorised to serve” as Methodist ministers (SO 733) are expected to administer infant baptism in appropriate circumstances those with “Associate” (Methodist) status (SO 733A) have greater flexibility here. This latter category may accordingly be more acceptable to (most) Baptist ministers in Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

¹ Reference corrected 5 May 2020

C. Procedures:

- i. Since baptism, whether of believers or infants, is such an important step, any persons involved (candidates or parents of infants) should proceed with the full knowledge of all the options that are available to them. Candidates for believer's baptism and confirmation shall, wherever possible be trained together and shall thus be made aware of the teaching of both churches.
- ii. It shall be left to the discretion of the Baptist membership to baptise as believers any who have previously been baptised as infants in other churches. In the interests of the unity of the congregation this should not be applied to Methodist members except as provided under 4 below.
- iii. Whenever a Methodist member wishes to make a public confession of faith (other than through those opportunities normally provided by the services of the Methodist Church) then the Methodist Church Council shall arrange an appropriate opportunity such as The Service for the Celebration of Christian Renewal.
- iv. If, despite the above provision, any Methodist maintains a conviction about being baptised as a believer, this shall only be after a full consultation between (1) the candidate AND (2) the Baptist minister and Church Meeting and the Superintendent Minister and Church Council. This consultation will, of course, be pastoral in nature and not in the way of a tribunal. In view of SO 010A (5)² such a service should not take place unless the Methodist member is willing to have his/her membership transferred to the Baptist roll.

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² Reference corrected 5 May 2020