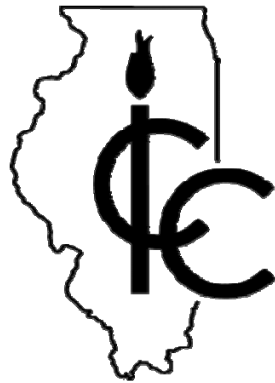


***BAPTISM: AN ECUMENICAL STUDY OF
SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES, AND
OPPORTUNITIES***



**UNITY & RELATIONSHIPS COMMISSION
Illinois Conference of Churches**

2005

TRADITIONS RESPONDING TO THE SURVEY

African Methodist Episcopal Church

American Baptist Church

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Church of the Brethren Episcopal Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church In America

Greek Orthodox Church

Moravian Church

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Roman Catholic Church

United Church of Christ

United Methodist Church

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INTRODUCTION

Baptism is universally recognized as both the foundation of the Christian faith, as well as the cornerstone of *ecumenism*. "Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. We are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world. When baptismal unity is realized in one holy, catholic, apostolic Church, a genuine Christian Witness can be made to the healing and reconciling love of God. Therefore, our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship."
(Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, paragraph 6.)

As a regional, ecumenical body which seeks ways to make visible and effective the unity and mission of the Church of Jesus Christ, the Illinois Conference of Churches has conducted a survey of its fifteen *communions/denominations* and thirty-one *judicatories* to gather information and identify specific and practical discoveries made in the process, note widely agreed upon points of unity, recognize continuing questions for additional work, and propose preliminary conclusions and recommendations. An annotated bibliography and relevant appendices will conclude the paper.

We believe baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task. It is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities. We invite and welcome your participation in this shared effort.

* Italicized words are defined in the Glossary on page 7.

SURVEY RESULTS & FINDINGS IN BAPTISM STUDY

THIRTEEN PARTICIPATING DENOMINATIONS (out of 15)

DISCOVERIES

- ❖ Some traditions (Catholics, ELCA Lutherans, Orthodox, Episcopalians) use the term "*conditional*" baptism when an actual record or written testimony, or the type of formula used cannot be ascertained.
- ❖ Nearly all communions use or allow for godparents except American Baptists and Quakers. The United Church of Christ does not require godparents, but does allow for them.
- ❖ In the Catholic tradition, at least one of the godparents needs to be a practicing, baptized and confirmed Catholic. If the other godparent is from another Christian tradition, he or she is called a Christian witness and they must be a baptized person active in their denominational church. For the Orthodox, a godparent needs to be in good standing and in relationship with a particular Orthodox parish.
- ❖ In marriages of *interchurch couples*, a shared observance of baptism, with clergy and lay representatives of both Churches participating, is sometimes celebrated, and in some cases, a recognition ceremony occurs in the other spouse's church indicating that the baptism had taken place earlier.
- ❖ The Society of Friends is the only Church in the conference that does not have baptism by water. Instead, Friends believe baptism is a spiritual event that unites the believer with Christ as the disciples experienced on Pentecost.

POINTS OF UNITY

- ❖ Baptism is taken very seriously by all the Churches.
- ❖ The actual practices and requirements are very similar.
- ❖ The vast majority require the following to be part of the ritual act: *Trinitarian* formula, the use of water, and the *proper intent*.
- ❖ All include the role of sponsors or the community (except American Baptists).
- ❖ There is almost always some preparation for the parents and godparents.
- ❖ There is always a connection to the community in terms of theology and ritual.

CONTINUING QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

The study points to five areas for continuing conversation:

1. **Baptism of Believers and Infant Baptism:** One real distinction continues between those churches who baptize people at any age and those who baptize only those able to make a confession of faith for themselves. The issue is the difference between "infant" baptism and "believer's" baptism and the possibility or impossibility of mutual recognition by two churches.
2. **God's Action or Human Response:** All respondents acknowledge the necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism. Yet some are more adamant than others that the action is so deeply embedded in God's grace and *undeserved* love that baptism is essentially a celebration of something already freely given by God. This distinction leads some traditions to see an objective change in one's salvation take place in the act of baptism, while others believe the salvation gift is already freely given, whether we choose to celebrate it or not.
3. **Language for Trinity:** Nearly all traditions require the Trinitarian formula be used in the act of baptism, specifically "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." In this survey we have discovered at least one denomination which allows the presiding clergyperson to affirm the Trinity in additional ways, e.g., "in the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer," or "in the name of God the Parent, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit." The issue is that such a baptism cannot be officially recognized by some other churches.
4. **The Use of Water:** All but one of our communions administer baptism with water. Quakers do not practice water baptism since Jesus did not baptize. The Quaker understanding of baptism "is that it is not a single act of initiation but a continuing growth in the Holy Spirit and a commitment which must be continually renewed."
5. **Immersion versus Pouring:** Most of our communions permit any method of baptism as long as water is used. Three groups – Greek Orthodox (except in clinical or emergency situations), American Baptists, and Disciples of Christ — utilize the full sign of immersion. Recent Roman Catholic directives strongly encourage the full sign value of baptism by immersion.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Although there is mutual recognition of baptism among many of the Illinois Conference of Churches, there is not agreement on all of the necessary conditions present for some churches to recognize the baptism of another church.
- ❖ As a symbol of our visible unity and mutual recognition of baptismal unity, let us utilize an ecumenical baptismal certificate, in addition to whatever certificates are used in our own communions.
- ❖ Let us find ways to include ecumenical participation in the observance of baptism, inviting colleagues from other communions to be physically present whenever possible.
- ❖ Let us identify *resources* for families who are already involved in interchurch marriages to *administer* the sacrament of baptism in one church with clergy and lay leaders from both churches taking part, and acknowledge and celebrate the baptism in the other church with leaders from both again taking part.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PLANNING GROUP

Chrism: Consecrated oil used in Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, especially in baptism, confirmation and ordination ceremonies.

Chrismation: The term for anointing with holy chrism after baptism in the Orthodox Church. This is equivalent to confirmation in the Roman Catholic and a number of other Western Churches and is usually administered at a later time.

Anointing after Baptism: Used by Roman Catholics, the Episcopal Church and some other denominations. Chrism or oil is used, but in the case of infants or very small children, it is not considered to be the sacrament of confirmation which comes at a later age.

The Usual Minister of Baptism: An ordained clergy person or another designated leader. In the case of an emergency, a layperson may perform the ritual in most, if not all, denominations.

Placement and Size of Font or Pool: While a number of communions use a small bowl or font in the front part of the sanctuary or chancel area for baptism, the practice is growing among some denominations to have a large pool in the worship space which allows for the practice of adult immersion. In several church bodies the font is located in the entrance or gathering area of the church building symbolizing the person entering into the family of faith, the Body of Christ. Many communions allow for baptism to take place outdoors in a lake, river or stream.

GLOSSARY

Trinity, Trinitarian, or Triune: the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead according to Christian dogma.

Interchurch: between two or more different Christian churches, denominations or communions.

Ecumenism: promoting worldwide or local Christian unity or cooperation.

Denomination: the name designation for a particular religious body adhering to the same faith tradition and united by legal and administrative bonds.

Judicatory: the respective region within a particular denomination or communion which is responsible for the government and administration within its jurisdiction.

Conditional Baptism: performed when an actual record or written testimony, or the type of formula or method used in the earlier baptism, cannot be verified or sanctioned.

Proper Intent or Intention: that the person being baptized – or in the case of infants or young children, the parents and godparents – have the desire for themselves or their children to accept Christ as their savior for the forgiveness of sins and to become a member of Christ's Body.

Undeserved Love: God's unconditional, generous and unqualified gift to sinful humanity which is not earned by any merit of human beings themselves.

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* Denotes excellent recent resources

BAPTISM SURVEY

ILLINOIS CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES

Question 1: Does your church denomination accept and recognize the baptism of individuals baptized in other Christian churches?

ABC	Local church option – some do and some don't
AME	Yes, accept
Brethren	Most do
Disciples	Yes, accept – most do
Episcopal	Yes, accept
ELCA	Yes, accept
Friends	N/A – do not believe in baptism or outward signs
Greek Orthodox	Yes, accept
Moravian	Yes, accept
Presbyterian	Yes, accept
Roman Catholic	Yes, accept, depending on a prior agreement with other faith community
UCC	Yes, accept
UMC	Yes, accept

Question 2: Are there circumstances when your church denomination would baptize a person who has already been baptized in another denomination such as “conditional” baptism? (“Conditional” means it is not certain a baptism actually took place – no written record or witnesses to attest to it – or the formula or method was not the norm, i.e., in the name of Jesus, etc.). If yes, what are those circumstances?

ABC	Local church option – some acceptable
AME	No, if a recognized Christian baptism is received, it is against our doctrine to rebaptize.
Brethren	Yes, if they want triune immersion. Rededication and laying on of hands.
Disciples	Most would not rebaptize, but it is up to the local pastor – if done in congregation and attested to.
Episcopal	Yes, if there is reasonable doubt that a valid baptism was administered or followed. Intent, Trinitarian, use of water, record/witness. “If you are not already, No.” I baptize (with water) in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit.
ELCA	No, but if substantial proof of baptism is not present (do not use the word “conditional”). Same criteria – water, Trinitarian word
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Yes, if the Trinitarian formula was not used
Moravian	No, never again
Presbyterian	Yes. 1) must be Trinitarian, 2) only if there is great uncertainty that it occurred, no official policy as what to do.
Roman Catholic	Yes, if there is a serious doubt about the validity of baptism, conditional baptism as explained above would be administered.
UCC	Yes, local decision. Do not require records in most churches if great uncertainty is there.
UMC	N/A

Question 3A: Conditions to be followed for any baptism in your denomination: Are there any criteria that must be met (i.e., immersion versus pouring, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit versus in the name of Jesus, infant versus believer’s baptism, the use of water or not, a certain “economy or theology of salvation,” etc.)?

ABC	Immersion; adult; profession; Trinitarian
AME	In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. We do baptize infants and children.
Brethren	Infant – a service of dedication with child and family
Disciples	Baptism is for believers by immersion. Special circumstances (physical limitations) may alter the amount of water.
Episcopal	Water immersion or pouring, Trinitarian, infant or adult
ELCA	Infants, parents, persons of faith; Trinitarian; “saved by grace through the faith;” water; counseling with parents
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Immersion is the standard practice except for clinical or emergency. Person of all ages, races and mental status, etc. are entitled to Orthodox baptism in recognition of the fact that all persons are equally Icons of God, Matthew 28:19, and that immersion into the life of Christ is not dependent upon rational or cognitive abilities or decisions, but a gift of divine grace.
Moravian	Infants with water sprinkling is the custom; appropriate variations are allowed
Presbyterian	Trinitarian; infant or adult; individual or parents profess faith in Jesus Christ; all methods of using water are acceptable
Roman Catholic	Water, immersion or pouring; intent; in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; infant or adult. Eastern – “The Servant of God is baptized”
UCC	Local decision; infant or believer; Trinitarian; water; vows of parents, believers and congregation “to teach and live in discipleship, faithful participation in Church and God’s mission”
UMC	Water and Trinitarian formula

Question 3B: What constitutes a proper baptism: intent, water or Trinitarian formula? In what context or space does it normally take place: church or sanctuary, during the church Sunday service or at a separate service with or without other families present?

ABC	Confession of faith is the key (adults); variation in form and location
AME	Water, Trinitarian; takes place usually during Sunday morning service with family present
Brethren	Intent and water, usually Triune, immersion; Trinity and laying on of hands
Disciples	Confession of faith (intent) and immersion when possible are the norm. There is no church law about the words used, although most cases use Trinitarian words.
Episcopal	Intent, water, Trinitarian are norm; normally in church during Mass, with an anywhere exception for emergencies; single family, Eucharistic Community, usually on Sunday or H.D.
ELCA	Water, word, Trinitarian; usually during Sunday services
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	By an ordained bishop or presbyter; according to Orthodox ritual in church; also distant baptism service
Moravian	During Sunday service in sanctuary
Presbyterian	Water, Trinitarian; in Sunday service, rare exception with session approval and representation
Roman Catholic	Water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; intent; usually in a church building. Location of font varies; preferred in community (Mass); adults on Easter Vigil can be separated, but in communal service.
UCC	Trinitarian; in the Church during service; rare exception apart from Church. Trinitarian language <u>may</u> vary by local decision. Many UCC churches use traditional formula.
UMC	Water, Trinitarian, intent by person or parents; sanctuary during Sunday service

Question 3C: Where is the font or pool (lake, river or in the church building – and at what location within)? Is it a large pool or bowl size?

ABC	Varies
AME	Usually in church with a bowl size container; however, could take place in any body of water.
Brethren	Pool in the sanctuary area or a lake/river
Disciples	Large walk-in pool in our chapel near the back entrance of our sanctuary; most Disciples have such pools in the sanctuary chancel area
Episcopal	Usually small and usually near to the entrance; bowl size; new churches have large pool at entrance of church
ELCA	Font in church building often placed somewhere in front of the sanctuary and some are placed at the entrance of the sanctuary
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Front of the nave; large enough to accommodate infants and small children; large bowls
Moravian	Font – front of sanctuary
Presbyterian	Font in front of sanctuary; small bowl or font near pulpit or table
Roman Catholic	Within the church, usually at entrance or near the altar. Can be any appropriate form with flowing water or a space to hold water – adult-size immersion.
UCC	Local decision; font in front; bowl near chancel
UMC	In apse; font could be outside

Question 3D: What are the criteria for the godparents? Is a baptismal preparation class required for the parents and/or godparents?

ABC	No
AME	To agree that they will live before the child in a Christian manner and take the child before the Lord themselves, which is their role
Brethren	Godparent optional; usually family; usually preparation and class
Disciples	No, instruction is primarily for the believer, whatever the age
Episcopal	Yes, for parents, not godparents; baptized and practicing; instruction not necessarily Episcopalian; Yes, preparation – 2 godparents of the same sex, 1 of the opposite sex and godparents must be baptized
ELCA	Baptized Christians who promise to bring up the child in the faith of the parents; pre-instruction encouraged; practice varies
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Godparents must be Orthodox Christians in good standing; there is no formal preparation necessary to become a godparent
Moravian	Instruction depends on congregation
Presbyterian	No criteria other than baptized, professing Christians; godparents are optional; congregation promises support and are “godparents;” yes, for parents, not for godparents (don’t use godparents)
Roman Catholic	One sponsor is to be a practicing Catholic, 16 years old, confirmed, designated by person, parents, pastor – not father or mother of baptized; a person baptized of another denomination may be a witness and vice versa; one male and one female; adults have only one sponsor. Yes, sponsors have pastoral instruction on the meaning and obligation of sacraments.
UCC	No criteria; preparation varies, usually by pastor; often for parents, less often for godparents
UMC	No; preparation depends pastors

Question 4: Concerning situations in which the parents of a baptized child belong to different Christian churches, does your denomination have any specific policies or regulations regarding baptism or its ceremonies?

ABC	Varies with local church
AME	No
Brethren	
Disciples	No
Episcopal	Yes
ELCA	There are no specific policies, but it is assumed that the child will be baptized in the church/denomination where the child will be raised. That is also where the baptism will be recorded.
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Yes
Moravian	Yes
Presbyterian	Yes
Roman Catholic	Yes
UCC	No policy
UMC	No

Question 5: If you answered yes to Question 4, what are they? Policies or regulations? Baptismal ceremony?

ABC	
AME	
Brethren	No, but usually council
Disciples	
Episcopal	Follow the intent of the church; Trinitarian formula, water
ELCA	There is a strong emphasis placed on follow through on behalf of the child who was baptized – particularly regarding Christian support and commitment.
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	
Moravian	At least one parent must be a member of the congregation according to Moravian ceremony
Presbyterian	At least one parent must be active member of congregation; ceremony can be in either church and is an ecumenical act
Roman Catholic	In Catholic tradition, baptism is celebrated by only one person; since in baptism reception into Christ is done in one actual Church or ecclesia community; one church or the other; a minister from another tradition could have a prayer or reading
UCC	No policy
UMC	

Question 6A: Concerning matters of recording baptisms: Where is the baptism recorded (Church of Baptism or Both Church Denominations)?

ABC	The local church
AME	Church of baptism; official church records with membership
Brethren	Church of baptism
Disciples	Church of baptism
Episcopal	Parish, diocesan, provincial
ELCA	Church of baptism
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Parish, diocese and national church
Moravian	Church of baptism
Presbyterian	Church of baptism
Roman Catholic	Baptism book of parish
UCC	Records in church of baptism
UMC	Church of baptism – if child lives in another community, pastor must contact that pastor and district superintendent

Question 6B: What information does your denomination need for a baptism to be recorded: date and place, parents, godparents, minister, Trinitarian, birth date, town of birth, other?

ABC	Date and place
AME	Date and place; parents; godparents; ministers; town of birth; birth date; witnesses other than above
Brethren	Date and place; birth date; town of birth
Disciples	Date and place; minister, birth date
Episcopal	Date and place; parents; godparents; minister; birth date; town of birth; other names of person, witnesses; "In the name of the Father..."
ELCA	Date and place; parents; godparents; minister; Trinitarian; birth date; town of birth
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Date and place; parents; godparents; minister; Trinitarian; birth date; town of birth; religious affiliation of parents and godparents
Moravian	Date and place; parents; godparents; minister; date of birth; place of baptism
Presbyterian	Date and place; parents; minister, birth date; town of birth; those presenting child, if other than parents
Roman Catholic	Date and place; parents; godparents; minister; birth date; town of birth and church affiliation
UCC	Date and place; parents; minister; date of birth; varies by location of church
UMC	Date and place; godparents; parents; birth date; full name of child; address and phone number of parents and sponsors

Question 6C: What is required to confirm that a baptism has taken place in another denomination: certificate, testimony of someone who was there, letter or telephone verification by church of baptism, other?

ABC	Varies
AME	Certificate; verification by church of baptism
Brethren	Letter or telephone verification by church of baptism
Disciples	Simply the statement of person joining the church
Episcopal	Certified, witness or oath of person baptized – letter or telephone
ELCA	Certificate; letter by church of baptism
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Letter of verification from local church or regional judicatory
Moravian	Word of parents required
Presbyterian	Certificate; letter or telephone
Roman Catholic	Certificate; testimony of someone who was there; letter or telephone
UCC	Varies; attested by baptized statements
UMC	Any of these; will accept the word of an adult

Question 7: Can a minister in your denomination assist at the baptism in another denomination?

ABC	Yes
AME	Yes
Brethren	Yes
Disciples	Yes
Episcopal	Yes
ELCA	We are inclined to assist in the baptism of a person in a denomination with which we are in full agreement, or with which we are in a discussion about full communion.
Friends	Yes
Greek Orthodox	No
Moravian	Yes
Presbyterian	Yes
Roman Catholic	Yes, only in a minor role, not actually baptism
UCC	Yes
UMC	Yes

Question 8: Do the sponsors or godparents come from one or both denominations? If one, which one? Both?

ABC	N/A, no godparents
AME	Both, if possible
Brethren	
Disciples	One, the congregation
Episcopal	Both don't have to be Episcopal
ELCA	Both
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Orthodox in good standing with a specific community
Moravian	Both or any
Presbyterian	Both
Roman Catholic	At least one baptized Catholic, the other baptized may be a witness
UCC	No requirement unless local or both
UMC	Both

Question 9: Would your denomination be open to a common baptism certificate to show our oneness in Christ?

ABC	No
AME	It may be possible
Brethren	Yes, some local ones may not
Disciples	Yes
Episcopal	Probably, yes, with criteria
ELCA	No
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	No, verification maybe to say this was a Trinitarian
Moravian	Yes
Presbyterian	Yes, already universal
Roman Catholic	Not known at this time
UCC	Perhaps
UMC	Yes

Question 10: Other comments, considerations, suggestions or information for us to be aware of regarding this matter?

ABC	
AME	
Brethren	
Disciples	Some answers may vary in local places because of autonomy
Episcopal	To be a Christian – not Episcopal; lay person can do it
ELCA	Why do we need one?
Friends	N/A
Greek Orthodox	Authenticate, Yes, see form
Moravian	
Presbyterian	
Roman Catholic	Include name of church, denomination or community in which person is baptized. A person is always baptized into a community of faith
UCC	Largely mainline, but local congregation
UMC	

ILLINOIS CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES

African Methodist Episcopal Church, 4th Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Midwest Episcopal District
American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., Great Rivers Region
Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, Diocese Eastern USA
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Region of IL/WI
Church of the Brethren, District of IL/WI
Episcopal Church, Diocese of Chicago
Episcopal Church, Diocese of Quincy
Episcopal Church, Diocese of Springfield
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Central/Southern Illinois Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Northern Illinois Synod
Greek Orthodox Church, Metropolis of Chicago
Moravian Church, Western District of the Northern Province
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Synod of Lincoln Trails
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Blackhawk Presbytery
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Chicago Presbytery
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Great Rivers Presbytery
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Midwest Hanmi Presbytery
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Southeastern Illinois Presbytery
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Western Yearly Meeting
Roman Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Chicago
Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Belleville
Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Joliet
Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Peoria
Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Rockford
Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Springfield
United Church of Christ, Illinois Conference
United Church of Christ, Illinois South Conference
United Methodist Church, Illinois Great Rivers Conference
United Methodist Church, Northern Illinois Conference

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