

COMMON AGREEMENT ON MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF BAPTISM ***Roman Catholic-Reformed Church Dialogue, Round VII***

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.

Together we affirm that Baptism is the sacramental gateway into the Christian life, directed toward the fullness of faith and discipleship in Christ.

Together we affirm that incorporation into the universal church by baptism is brought about by celebrating the sacrament within a particular Christian community.

Together we affirm that Baptism is to be conferred only once, because those who are baptized are decisively incorporated into the Body of Christ.

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.

Together we affirm that the validity of Baptism depends on its celebration according to the apostolic witness by the church and its authorized ministers.

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.

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.

We rejoice at the common faith we share and affirm in this document. We understand that the journey toward full, visible unity depends on openness to the grace of God and humility before the initiatives of God's Spirit among us. Because of these convictions, we encourage Roman Catholic and Reformed pastoral leaders to continue their commitment to regular dialogue about theology and pastoral practice from local to international settings. Pastoral leaders engaged in such dialogue embody our hopes for unity, collaborative effort, and common witness. We believe that respectful dialogue can provide a strong witness to the wider church about our commitment to a relationship in Christ and can stand as a safeguard against the unreflective judgments that have, at certain times in our history, diminished and distorted our relations.

The common Agreement goes into effect for any two of the undersigned bodies as soon as the second body in any pair adopts it according to its respective polity.

Christian Reformed Church in North America:

Signed: Joel R. Boot on 9-29-11
The Rev. Joel R. Boot, Executive Director

Presbyterian Church (USA):

Signed: Grady Parsons on 11 June 2009
The Rev. Grady Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

Reformed Church in America:

Signed: Wesley Granberg-Michaelson on 19 September 2011
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary

Roman Catholic Church (USCCB):

Signed: Francis Cardinal George on 16 November 2010
Francis Cardinal George, OMI, President

United Church of Christ:

Signed: Geoffrey A. Black on September 19, 2011
The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black, General Minister and President