

# CHRISTIANS IN DIALOGUE

## Father, Son and Holy Spirit - An Ecumenical Discussion on Our Common Baptism - 1985

**Based on BEM, World Council of Churches  
Faith and Order Commission 1982**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and in his resurrection. It is incorporation into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord; it is entry into the New Covenant between God and God's people.

Baptism is a gift of God, and is administered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

St Matthew's gospel records that the risen Lord, when sending his disciples into the world, commanded them to baptize [Mat 28:18-20]. The universal practice of baptism by the apostolic Church from its earliest days is attested in letters of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, and the writings of the Fathers. The churches today continue this practice as a rite of commitment to the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people

## **THE MEANING OF BAPTISM**

Baptism is the sign of new life through Jesus Christ. It unites the one baptized with Christ and with his people.

The New Testament scriptures and the liturgy of the Church unfold the meaning of baptism in various images which express the riches of Christ and the gifts of his salvation. These images are sometimes linked with the symbolic uses of water in the Old Testament.

Baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection [Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12]; a washing away of sin [1 Cor 6:11]; a new birth [Jn 3:5]; an enlightenment by Christ [Eph 5:14]; a re-clothing in Christ [Gal 3:27]; a renewal by the Spirit [Tit 3:5]; the experience of salvation from the flood [1 Pet 3:20-21]; an exodus from bondage [1 Cor 10:1-2] and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division, whether of sex or race or social status, are transcended:

Baptised into union with Christ,  
now you are clothed with Christ.  
So there is no more difference  
    between Jews and Gentiles,  
    between slaves and free,  
    between men and women:  
you are all ONE in Christ Jesus.

(Gal 3:27-28)

## **WE OFFER**

Four discussions based on the 'Lima Text', which is the result of fifty years of study and consultation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Over one hundred theologians met in Lima, Peru, in January, 1982.

They represented virtually all the major Christian traditions: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, United, Disciples, Baptist and Pentecostal.

They agreed unanimously to present this statement to the churches, asking for a response to the following questions:

- Does your church recognise in this text the faith of the Church through the ages?
- Can your church use this text in dialogue with other churches which also accept it?
- How can this text help your church in its worship, its teaching and its witness?

It is hoped that, by coming together to share our faith, to listen to one another, and to join in common prayer, we may discover common answers to these questions.

The four discussions are as follows:

1. BAPTISM AND LIFE: Dying and Rising with Christ  
Conversion, Pardon, Cleansing  
Life-long Growth into Christ
2. BAPTISM AND SPIRIT: The Gift of the Spirit  
A Sign of the Spirit  
Celebration of Baptism
3. BAPTISM AND CHURCH: The Body of Christ  
A Sign of the Kingdom  
Mutual Recognition of Baptism
4. BAPTISM AND FAITH: God's Gift and our Response  
Baptism of Believers and Infants  
Renewal of Baptismal Practice

### **AIMS**

- \* To deepen our personal awareness of the meaning of our own Baptism.
- \* To discover the richness of the various Christian Traditions concerning Baptism.
- \* To explore the bonds we already share through our common Baptism.
- \* To pray together as members of the One Body of Christ.
- \* To discover ways in which we can respond to our common calling to witness and service

### **GESTED TIME FRAME**

- |                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| A. Scripture Reading | 20 Minutes |
| B. Lima Text         |            |
| C. Group Sharing     | 60 Minutes |
| D. Closing Prayer    | 10 Minutes |

TOTAL

90 MINUTES

It is recommended that the sessions last for one and a half hours, and that the groups be kept small. It is important that each group has in it people from a number of denominations, all of whom are able to share equally in the discussion.

For the group to function successfully, leaders need to make themselves familiar with the material.

The team of Christians in Dialogue thank the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA for permission to quote from their “Confessing One Faith”.

# Leader's Guide

## 1. Gathering

People coming to a group for the first time will often have some anxiety –

- ◆ Will I know anyone?
- ◆ What will be expected of me?
- ◆ Did I switch off the oven?
- ◆ It is important to help them through this first awkward stage. Have all your preparations done well beforehand so that you are able to greet each person warmly on arrival, introducing them to one another, and perhaps having tea and coffee available.

## 2. Beginning

- A. When all have arrived get the session started by giving them a clear statement of what the group is about -  
Welcome the group
- ◆ who we are;
  - ◆ why we're here;
  - ◆ when we will finish.

It might go like this: "Welcome to my place, and I'm delighted that each of you has been able to make it. We are a group of people from Churches gathered together to reflect and share our ideas on ... (*name of study*). Tonight we will be looking at Study One .....

- B. Then invite the members to introduce themselves saying:
- ◆ who I am;
  - ◆ why I'm here;
  - ◆ what I hope to get out of the program.

Lead yourself by giving a short response to each of the three areas. Then invite each of the others to do likewise. Don't worry if some respond to only one or two of the areas.

- C. Then distribute copies of the program.

Encourage participants to listen to one another's ideas with respect.

## 3. Opening Devotion

- A. You may wish to play some music quietly in the background and give the group a few moments to reflect on the opening devotion. Then call for volunteers to lead it.
- B. You might like to choose an appropriate song for the group to share

## 4. Reflection on the Topic

Invite a couple of people to read the teaching. Encourage the readers to pause between each section.

## 5. Discussion

Allow a few minutes of quiet time to reflect on the questions. Encourage participants to share responses to each question but there is to be no pressure put on anyone to speak. Be sure to make some response to each speaker if only to say e.g. "Thank you John". This makes sure the participant feels that he / she has been heard.

## 6. Closure

Thank the participants for their participation. Check to ensure venue is right for next session.

## Closing Devotion

### Cuppa

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## Father, Son & Holy Spirit

### EVALUATION FORM

The group leader invites the participants to complete the Evaluation Form at the end of the fourth study.

1. What did you appreciate about these studies?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What aspects of these studies did you find difficult?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What was the greatest challenge for you and your Church?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What topics would you like *Christians in Dialogue* to cover in future?

The Planning Committee invites the leader to respond to the two questions below.

1. Name of your group, each Church represented, and the number of people present from each denomination.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Generally speaking, how fully did participants enter into the discussion?

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**Thank you for your response.**

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## SESSION 1: BAPTISM AND LIFE

### Father, Son and Holy Spirit – An Ecumenical Discussion on Our Common Baptism - 1985

#### A. Scripture Readings

*Allow a few moments to become still, and to recognise God's word; then ask someone to read the passages out.*

When we were baptised into union with Christ Jesus, we are baptised into union with his death. By our baptism we were buried within and shared his death; in order that, as Christ was raised from death by the Father's glorious power, so we too might live a new life.

Since we have become one with him in dying as he did, in the same way we shall be one with him by being raised to life as he was.

Our old self has been crucified with Christ, so that the power of the sinful self would be destroyed and we would no longer be slaves of sin. Whoever dies, is set free from the power of sin. Since we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

We know that Christ has been raised from death, and will never die again – death will no longer rule over him. Because he died, sin has no more power over him; and now he is alive: living in fellowship with God. You must think of yourselves in the same way: dead as far as sin is concerned, but living in fellowship with God – through Christ Jesus.

*(Romans 6:3-11)*

When you were baptised you were with Christ; and in baptism you were also raised with Christ, through your faith in the active power of God, who raised him from the dead. You were at one time spiritually dead – because you were sinners and Gentiles. But God brought you to life with Christ by forgiving all your sins. He cancelled the record of our debts; did away with it by nailing it to the cross.

*(Colossians 2:12-14)*

#### B. The Lima Text

##### Dying and Rising with Christ

Baptism means participating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus went down into the river Jordan and was baptised in solidarity with sinners, in order to fulfil all righteousness (Mt 3:15). This baptism led Jesus along the way of the Suffering Servant, made manifest in his sufferings, death and resurrection (Mk 10:38-40, 45).

By baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ where their sins are buried, where the "old Adam" is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is broken. Thus those baptised are no longer slaves to sin, but free. Fully identified with the death of Christ, they are buried with him and raised here and now to a new life in the power of the

resurrection of Jesus Christ, confident that they will also ultimately be one with him in a resurrection like his (Rom 6:3-11; Col 2:13, 3:1; Eph 2:5-6).

### **Conversion, Pardon, Cleansing**

The baptism which makes Christians partakers of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection implies confession of sin and conversion of heart. The baptism administered by John was itself a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk 1:4).

The New Testament underlines the ethical implication of baptism by presenting it as an ablution which washes the body with pure water, a cleansing of the heart of all sin, and an act of justification (Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21; Act 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11). Thus those baptised are pardoned, cleansed and sanctified by Christ and are given as part of their baptismal experience a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### **Life-Long Growth into Christ**

Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth into Christ. Those baptised are called upon to reflect the glory of the Lord as they are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into his likeness, with ever-increasing splendour (2 Cor 3:18). The life of the Christian is necessarily one of continuing struggle, yet also of continuing experience of grace. In this new relationship, the baptised live for the sake of Christ, of his Church and of the world which he lives, while they wait in hope for the manifestation of God's new creation and for the time when God will be all in all (Rom 8:18-24; 1 Cor 15:22-28, 49-57).

## **C. Group Discussion**

1. Why does your Church baptise people?  
What does Baptism achieve?
2. What does St Paul mean by dying and rising to new life"?  
What difference does this make to our relationships with one another and the world for which Christ died?
3. How long does it take to become a Christian?  
Is Baptism the beginning or the end of growth into Christ?
4. Are we justified in baptising children to enable parents merely to fulfil a social obligation?

## **D. Closing Prayer**

**Symbol:** A flower or pot plant placed in the centre of the group.

*The leader invites the group to gather for prayer.*

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 6:1-11  
“Alive in union with Christ”

*Quiet reflection....brief prayers from the heart.*

**Leader:** Let us pray

**All:** God our Father,  
you are the course of all life,  
and the giver of all good gifts to us.  
You have gifted each of us  
with the life of Jesus, your Son,  
and called us to witness together  
to the power of your life within us.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus,  
may we continue to grow  
in the newness of life  
you gave us in baptism.

We praise and thank you, loving Father,  
through Jesus, your Son,  
in the power of your Spirit,  
living with you for ever and ever.

Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer:**

Father –  
make your name revered;  
make your Kingdom come.  
Give us each day the bread we need.  
Forgive us, as we forgive others;  
do not let us be tested.

*(Luke 11:2-4)*

**Conclusion:** Let us offer one another the greeting of peace.

## SESSION 2: BAPTISM AND SPIRIT

### Father, Son and Holy Spirit – An Ecumenical Discussion on Our Common Baptism - 1985

#### A. Scripture Readings

*Allow a few moments to become still, and to recognise God's word; then ask someone to read the passages out.*

While Peter was still speaking (to the Roman captain, Cornelius) the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message. The Jewish believers who had come from Joppa with Peter were amazed that God had poured out his gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God's greatness. Peter spoke up: "These people have received the Holy Spirit, just as we did. Can anyone then stop them from being baptized with water?" So he ordered them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.

*(Acts 10:44-48)*

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found some disciples there, and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit," they answered. "Well, then, what kind of baptism did you receive?" Paul asked. "The Baptism of John" they answered. Paul said, "The baptism of John was for those who turned from their sins; and he told the people of Israel to believe in the one who was coming after him – this is, Jesus."

When they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them; they spoke in tongues and also proclaimed God's message.

*(Acts 19:1-6)*

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord. There are different ways of working, but the same God who is at work in them all. To each person, the Spirit gives a sign of his presence, for the good of all. To one, the Spirit gives the ability to speak wisely; to another, the ability to express knowledge. The same Spirit gives one person faith, and another the gift of healing. One can work miracles, another can speak out God's message, another can discern between spirits. One receives the gift of tongues, another can interpret them. But it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each one as he wishes. Just as a single body has many parts, and they all make up one body – have been baptised into the one body by the same Spirit; we have all been given the same Spirit to drink.

*(1 Corinthians 12:4-13)*

## **B. The Lima Text**

### **The Gift of the Spirit**

5. The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism. It is the same Spirit who revealed Jesus as the Son (Mk 1:10-11) and who empowered and united the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2). God bestows upon all baptised persons the anointing and the promise of the Holy Spirit, marks them with a seal and implants in their hearts the first instalment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit nurtures the life of faith when they will enter into its full possession, to the praise of the glory of God (2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14).

### **The Sign of the Spirit**

14. In God's work of salvation, the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, participation in Christ's death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the receiving of the Spirit. Baptism in its full meaning signifies and effects both. Christians differ in their understanding as to where the sign of the gift of the Spirit is to be found. Different actions have become associated with the giving of the Spirit. For some it is the water rite itself. For others, it is the anointing with chrism and/or the imposition of hands, which many churches call confirmation. For still others it is all three, as they see the Spirit operative through the rite. All agree that Christian baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit.

### **The Celebration of Baptism**

17. Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
18. In the celebration of baptism the symbolic dimension of water should be taken seriously and not minimalised. The act of immersion can vividly express the reality that in baptism the Christian participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.
19. As in the case in the early centuries, the gift of the Spirit in baptism may be signified in additional ways; for example, by the sign of laying on of hands, and by anointing or chrismation. The very sign of the cross recalls the promise gift of the Holy Spirit who is the instalment and pledge of what is yet to come when God has fully redeemed those whom he has made his own. (Eph 1:13-14). The recovery of such vivid signs may be expected to enrich the liturgy.
20. Within any comprehensive order of baptism at least the following elements should find a place: the proclamation of the scriptures referring to baptism; an invocation of the Holy Spirit; a renunciation of evil; a profession of faith in Christ and the Holy Trinity; the use of water; a declaration that the persons baptised have acquired a new identity as sons and daughters of God, and as members of the Church, called to be witnesses of the Gospel. Some Churches consider that Christian initiation is not complete without the sealing of the baptised with the gift of the Holy Spirit and participation in Holy Communion.

## C. Group Discussion

1. **What do the two readings from Acts suggest about the connection between the Holy Spirit and baptism? Are these two baptisms – one in water and one in the Spirit?**
2. **Paul suggests some of the ways the Spirit was at work in the Corinthian community. What gifts of the Spirit are you aware of in your own life?**
3. **Christian Baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit (14) How does your Church practise the water sign? What does this sign mean to the congregation?**
4. **Does your Church have further ways of signifying the gift of the Spirit?**

## D. Closing Prayer

**Symbol:** A picture or photograph of people placed in the centre of the group.

*The leader invites the group to gather for prayer.*

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Corinthians 12:3-13  
“Different gifts, but the same Spirit”

*Quiet reflection ...brief prayers from the heart*

**Leader:** God calls us to a deep and beautiful sharing of faith and hope and love. Despite all our fears and brokenness, let us pray for strength and courage and the grace to support one another in every need and gift.

**All:** We give thanks, O God,  
for all your gifts to us  
especially for the gift of your Spirit  
to each of us.

Open our hearts to the light of your Spirit  
who enables us to accept the gifts of one another  
for the growth of the Kingdom.

Glory and praise to you, O God of love,  
now and forever.  
Amen.

**Leader:** Let us pray the words that Jesus taught us,

**All:** Our Father in heaven:  
make your name revered;  
make your Kingdom come;  
make your will be done  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today the bread we need.  
Forgive us our faults,  
as we forgive others their faults.  
Do not let us be tested,  
but keep us safe from the Evil One.

*(Matthew 6:9-13)*

**Conclusion:** Let us offer one another the greeting of peace.

## SESSION 3: BAPTISM AND CHURCH

### Father, Son and Holy Spirit – An Ecumenical Discussion on Our Common Baptism - 1985

#### A. Scripture Readings

*Allow a few moments to become still, and to recognise God's word; then ask someone to read the passages out.*

Just as a single body has many parts, and they all make up one body – so it is with Christ. All of us – Jews or Gentiles slaves or free – have been baptised into the one body by the same Spirit; we have all been given the same Spirit to drink.

For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. If the foot were to say, “because I am not a hand, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not keep it from being part of the body. If the ear were to say, “because I am not an eye, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not keep it from being part of the body.

If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? As it is, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. There would not be a body if it were all only one part! There are many parts, but one body.

*(1 Corinthians 12:12-20)*

Baptized into union with Christ, now you are clothed with Christ.

So there is no more difference  
    between Jews and Gentiles,  
    between slaves and free,  
    between men and women:  
you are all ONE in Christ Jesus.

*(Galatians 3:27-28)*

Preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

*(Ephesians 4:3-6)*

#### B. The Lima Text

##### The Body of Christ

1. Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through Baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. We are only people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world. The union with Christ which we share through baptism has important implications

for Christian unity. “There is ...one baptism, one God and Father of us all...” (Eph 4:4-6).

When baptismal unity is realised 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.

### **A sign of the Kingdom**

6. Baptism initiates the reality of the new life given in the midst of the present world. It gives participation in the community of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the Kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come. Through the gifts of faith, hope and love, baptism has a dynamic which embraces the whole of life, extends to all motions, and anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

### **Mutual Recognition of Baptism**

15. Churches are increasingly recognizing one another’s baptism as the one baptism into Christ when Jesus Christ has been confessed as Lord by the candidate or, in the case of infant baptism, when confession has been made by the church (parents, guardians, godparents and congregation) and affirmed later by personal faith and commitment. Mutual recognition of baptism is acknowledged as an important sign and means of expressing the baptismal unity given in Christ. Wherever possible, mutual recognition should be expressed explicitly by the churches.

See: Agreed Statements on Baptism  
R/C/Uniting/Anglican/Lutheran

### **C. Group Discussion**

1. “There is one Body, one Spirit, .....one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and fathers of all”. (Eph 4:4-6) Is there more than one Church? Into which Church is a person baptised?
2. Does your Church recognize baptism celebrated in other churches?
3. “You are together Christ’s body – each a different part of it.” (1 Cor 12:27) How can we develop our sense of unity, while preserving the strengths of our own traditions?
4. Have you ever attended a baptism in another church? Did you find it a religious experience?

## **D. Closing Prayer**

**Symbol:** A banner or poster depicting “Jesus is Lord” or a collage of “people” pictures.

*The leader invites the group to gather for prayer.*

**Scripture Reading:** Ephesians 4:3-6  
*“There is one God and Father of all.”*

*Quiet reflection.....brief prayers from the heart.*

**Leader:** We are united in the Spirit of the Lord, called to be his people. Let us pray that his Church may continue to grow in love, and be a sign of the kingdom.

**All:** You have called us to your Church, O God.  
You bring us together  
in shared faith and prayer  
to find the support we need  
to heed the Gospel’s challenge.  
Make us a living Church,  
enriching, taking care of one another  
for the sake of the whole world and its needs.

Join our hearts and minds  
in the Holy Spirit of Jesus,  
the sure promise of our faith  
now and forever.  
Amen.

**Leader:** Let us pray the words that Jesus taught us,

**All:** Our Father, who art in heaven  
Hallowed be thy name,  
Thy kingdom come  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
For ever and ever. Amen

*(Traditional)*

**Conclusion:** Let us offer one another the greeting of peace.

## SESSION 4 - BAPTISM AND FAITH

### Father, Son and Holy Spirit – An Ecumenical Discussion on Our Common Baptism - 1985

#### A. Scripture Reading

*Allow a few moments to become still, and to recognise God's word; then ask someone to read the passages out.*

(Peter said), "All the people of Israel, then are to know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah!". When the people heard this, they were deeply troubled. They said to Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do, brothers?"

Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from his sins and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit. For God's promise was made to you and your children, and to all who are far away – all whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Peter made his appeal to them and with many words he urged them, saying, "Save yourselves from the punishment coming on this wicked people!" Many of them believed his message and were baptised; about three thousand people were added to the group that day.

*(Acts 2:36-41)*

How rich is God's mercy, how great his love for us! When we were spiritually dead in our disobedience, he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved. In union with Christ Jesus, he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world. He did this to show for all time the extraordinary greatness of his grace and his love for us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts: it is God's gift. So no one can boast about it. God has made us what we are. In our union with Christ Jesus, he has created us for a life of good deeds, which God has already prepared for us.

*(Ephesians 2:4-10)*

#### B. The Lima Text

##### God's gift and our response

7. Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift. It looks towards a growth into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). The necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism is acknowledged by all churches. Personal commitment is necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ.

## **Baptism of Believers and Infants**

9. While the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents.

In the course of history, the practice of baptism has developed in a variety of forms. Some churches baptise infants brought by parents or guardians who are ready, in and with the Church, to bring up the children in the Christian faith. Other Churches practise exclusively the baptism of believers who are able to make a personal confession of faith. Some of these Churches encourage infants or children to be presented and blessed in a service which usually involves thanksgiving for the gift of the child and also the commitment of the mother and father to Christian parenthood. All churches baptise believers coming from other religions or from unbelief who accept the Christian faith and participate in catechetical instruction.

## **Renewal of Baptismal Practice**

12. Both the baptism of believers and the baptism of infants take place in the Church as the community of faith. When one who can answer for himself or herself is baptised, a personal confession of faith will be an integral part of the baptismal service. When an infant is baptised, the personal response will be offered at a later moment in life. In both cases, the baptised person will have to grow in the understanding of faith. For those baptised upon their own confession of faith, there is always the constant requirement of a continuing growth of personal response in faith. In the case of infants, personal confession is expected later, and Christian nurture is directed to the eliciting of this confession. All baptism is rooted in and declares Christ's faithfulness unto death. It has its setting within the life and faith of the Church and, through the witness of the whole Church, points to the faithfulness of God, the ground of all life in faith. At every baptism the whole congregation reaffirms its faith in God and pledges itself to provide an environment of witness and service. Baptism should, therefore, always be celebrated and developed in the setting of the Christian community.

## **C. Group Discussion**

1. Baptism involves (a) God's gift (grace) And (b) our response (faith). How is this expressed in each of the Scripture readings?
2. If a faith-response is necessary, how do we justify the baptism of infants? What responsibilities does this place on family and congregation?
3. If Baptism is God's gift, how can we refuse it to infants? What are the responsibilities of believing parents whose children are not yet baptised?

4. “We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” (Nicene Creed). “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5) Is it possible to be baptised twice?

## **D. Closing Prayer**

**Symbol:** Lighted candle placed in the centre of the group.

*The leader invites the group to gather for prayer.*

**Scripture Reading:** Ephesians 2:4-10

“It is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith, God’s gift.”

*Quite reflection....brief prayers from the heart.*

**Leader:** Baptism is God’s gift to us, and we are called to respond to that gift. Let us pray that his life be rooted ever deeper in our hearts.

**All:** We give you thanks, O God our father,  
for your gift of life  
planted in our hearts  
through the grace of Baptism.  
With the flow of baptismal waters in your Church  
nourish the Christian life we share.

Nurture the Church of Jesus,  
for it is the holy ground  
of life’s rebirth and our renewal,  
and a living witness of faith and hope for the world.  
Be with us, living and faithful Father,  
now and forever.  
Amen.

**Leader:** Let us pray the words that Jesus taught us,

**All:** Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and forever.  
Amen.

(from *A Prayer Book for Australia*)

**Conclusion:** Let us offer one another the greeting of peace.