



BAPTISM

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CHILDREN?**

***A Statement by
The Methodist church
in the Caribbean and the Americas***

1. THE MCCA: WHO ARE WE?

The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) is a connexion of Methodist churches which claims and cherishes a place in the Universal Church. It accepts the fundamental tenets of the historical Creeds, of the Church, (the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds), and the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation. It recognises two sacraments, the sacrament of **Holy Baptism** and the sacrament of the **Lord's Supper**.

2. WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is one of two sacraments recognised in our Church.

A sacrament is recognized by the Christian Church as a religious ceremony that specially confers the grace of God. **The Sacrament of Holy Baptism marks the bestowal of grace by God, and God's calling of the baptised person into the fellowship of Christ's Church.** The anticipation is that the person will become a faithful disciple to the end of his/her life. The Methodist Church celebrates both Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments.

In some churches baptism is not regarded as a sacrament in which God's grace is conferred but as an ordinance. Ordinances are symbolic reenactments of the gospel message and are determined by three factors: (a) they were instituted by Christ, (b) they were taught by the Apostles, and (c) they were practised by the Early Church.

The Methodist Church regards Baptism and the Lord's Supper as more than **ordinances**, they are also **sacraments**.

3. WHY DO WE BAPTISE?

i) We baptise because it is a commandment (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16: 15-16).

Jesus, having led the disciples to the mountain and having reminded them of his authority gave them this command:

*¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20).*

From earliest times, the Church has understood this as a continuing obligation to baptise in the name of the Triune God and to live according to the demands of God's Kingdom. We observe that command.

ii) We baptise because Baptism is an initiatory Sacrament.

The baptised person is received into the believing, worshipping community (the congregation of Christ's flock). The person receives the initiating sign and seal of the new covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.

iii) We baptise because Baptism is of significant importance in the life of the church.

Baptism is not just the isolated moment defined by the experience of sprinkling, pouring and immersion when baptism is proclaimed in the name of the Triune God. It is the beginning of a process of formation in Christ which lasts throughout the life of the baptised.

Churches share differing beliefs and practices about baptism but also a common heritage of baptismal life which includes the baptism event, participation in the faith

community, and growth in grace as experienced in the Early Church (Acts 2: 42-27).

4. WHO DO WE BAPTISE?

We baptise persons of any age.

i) We baptise infants and children:

- **Because of the grace of God.**

Methodists believe that the grace of God (God's undeserved love) extends to **all**. (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). We accept for baptism infants and children who are not yet able to confess faith in Jesus Christ who died for all (John 3:16). We have full confidence that through the church's ministry of witness and faith, grace is made available to them and to those who have care of them.

- **Because infants and children are welcomed by Christ.**

People were bringing even infants that he might touch them . . . Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs" (Luke 18:15a, 16).

By baptism infants and children are admitted into the church and made members of the Body of Christ. ***"For as many as are baptised into Christ have thereby put on Christ."*** – that is united with Christ and made one with him. " ***"For in the one Spirit are all baptised into one body"*** (1 Corinthians 12:13).

- **Because of the Promise.**

On the day of Pentecost when 3,000 persons were baptised, Peter said, ***"the promise is for you, for your children and to all who are far away . . ."*** (Acts 2:39).

- **Because the new covenant relationship of God's grace replaces circumcision.**

God made an everlasting covenant with believers, the children of Abraham. Infants and children are covered by the covenant. By God's appointment, infants and children share in the benefits of the covenant relationship. By divine authority, baptism is substituted for circumcision as the initiating sign and seal of the new covenant of grace. Circumcision referred to the cutting away of skin and baptism refers to the washing away of sin (Galatians 5:6).

- **Because baptism is a means of grace -**

by which faith can be awakened in both infants and parents. It can serve to strengthen parents' sense of responsibility for the Christian education of the child.

- **We baptise because Scripture does not forbid the baptism of children –**

but suggests that children were also baptised by the Apostles who baptised many households of faith. (Acts 16:14-15, 31-33).

- **We baptise adults who were never baptised because –**

baptism, as an initiatory rite, does not take into account a person's age.

5. HOW DO WE BAPTISE?

i) **We baptise with water because water is an element which symbolises cleansing, purification and our spiritual rebirth through the Holy Spirit into the Church.**

ii) **We baptise using the three modes (actions) of baptism -**

sprinkling, pouring and immersion because we believe all three are valid once the baptism is done using the Trinitarian formula – ***“In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”***

iii) We baptise by sprinkling because we believe that it is a legitimate and acceptable mode which symbolises the power from on high of the Holy Spirit in baptism (Ezekiel 36:25; Hebrews 10:22).

iv) We baptise by pouring (affusion, effusion) because pouring signifies God's pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:9-10; Luke 3:21-22; Acts 2:38; 19:1-7). Like the other two modes this form of baptism symbolises the washing away of sin (1 Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:22).

v) We baptise by immersion because it dramatizes symbolically and visually the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-5).

vi) We baptise using the Trinitarian formula because it emphasizes God's grace, the work of redemption through Jesus and the new life initiated by the Holy Spirit in the act of baptism. It is rooted in the Great Commission of Jesus:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19).

vii) We do not practise 'second baptism' or re-baptism because baptism is a 'once and for all' transforming experience. We affirm God's grace imparted at the 'first baptism.' To have a 'second baptism' is to infer that the first baptism was not valid.

6. HOW DO WE NURTURE BAPTISED CHILDREN?

i) We require Parents to make commitments because it is an obligation to bring a child to a personal knowledge

of Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Thus, parents take the sacred vow “to bring up the child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

ii) **We require Sponsors to make a commitment** to support the parents in the Christian upbringing of the child, to serve as the link between the immediate family and the wider family of the church and to regularly pray for them.

iii) **We require the Members of the church to make a commitment to,** ‘maintain the common life of worship and service that all the children in the community may grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.’

iv) **We place baptised children in a Cradle Roll** in each congregation to ensure that as many infants and children as possible who have been baptised, are eventually enrolled in the church school and a class for Members-in-Training. It is mandated by the Methodist Church that a register of baptised children be kept and periodically reviewed by the Pastoral Council to ensure that oversight of such children is maintained and suitable instruction given as they are able to receive it, to prepare them for Christian discipleship.

v) **We allow baptised children to participate at the Lord’s Supper because** this is a privilege afforded by the grace of God to all members of the Methodist Church and all baptised persons are eligible.

vi) **We place children in Members-in-Training Classes because** this is in keeping with the process of “making disciples” as commanded by our Lord’s Commission to the eleven disciples (Matthew 28:19). Through these classes, devotion to Jesus Christ, love for the Methodist Church,

participation in worship, fellowship, and other activities of the local congregation are encouraged (2 Timothy 3:14-16).

vii) We hold Confirmation Classes/Service to prepare the baptised to make their first public affirmation of faith. Confirmation is not primarily about becoming a member of the church, since that was done at baptism; but gives those confirmed an opportunity to publicly profess their Christian faith.

viii) We reaffirm our baptism

- When we are confirmed and declare our personal acceptance of Christ who we acknowledge, has been at work in our lives even before we recognized it.
- When from time to time we renew our commitment to the Lord who continues to be at work in our lives.