**Baptism and Membership Resolution, Headwaters Mission Center, 2021**

Whereas, Community of Christ’s “Sharing in Community of Christ,” 4th Edition, 2018 states that “Christ’s Mission is our Mission” and calls the church to “Invite People to Christ”; and

Whereas, Growth in discipleship is a lifelong journey in response to God’s grace, which has led “…some people already committed to Jesus Christ through Christian baptism to further focus their response through church membership” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:2b); and

Whereas, Many of these committed Christians embrace their previous baptism as the first step on their journey as a disciple of Christ; and

Whereas, While policy changes from 2011 affirm some previous baptisms, the majority of the world’s Christians, having been baptized before the age of eight, continue to be excluded from Community of Christ membership without rebaptism, (Baptism, Confirmation, and Church Membership Policy, effective 1 October, 2011 and revised 14 February, 2012); and

Whereas, As expressed by the Theology Formation Team in its report to the 2016 World Conference on WCR 1301, Doctrine and Covenants 164 expanded the church’s understanding of baptism by reminding us that “the redemptive action of God in Christ—while uniquely and authoritatively expressed through the church—is not confined solely to the church” (164:2a); and

Whereas, We invite all to participate in the Lord’s Supper “in the love and peace of Jesus Christ” regardless of “different or added understandings within their faith traditions” (Invitation to Communion, 2019); and

Whereas, Our current practice of welcoming all Christians to the Lord’s Table (Communion) while denying the validity of baptisms prior to the age of eight is theologically incongruent and diminishes our affirmation of the Spirit of God present in other Christian faith traditions; and

Whereas, Our Enduring Principle of Continuing Revelation calls us to “assess past instruction in the light of new knowledge” and to “see sacraments not as rigid forms but as vehicles of the Spirit” (Theology Formation Team report to the 2016 World Conference on WCR 1301); therefore, be it

**Resolved**, That the World Conference request the President of the Church to give additional prayer and study seeking divine guidance on the issue of the acceptability of persons who were baptized before the age of eight becoming members of Community of Christ via confirmation.

**Background Statement: Baptism and Membership Resolution, Headwaters Mission Center**

Community of Christ is blessed to have Enduring Principles that are essential components of our identity, mission, and message. They define who we are at our core, and some are especially foundational when we consider our baptismal practice and reflect on the question of accepting baptisms received before the age of eight years. We find the principles of Grace and Generosity, Worth of All Persons, All Are Called, Unity in Diversity, Pursuit of Peace, and Blessings of Community to be especially meaningful when we think about how our current practice can and does affect others. We hear the stories and testimonies of members for whom pain was caused by requiring them to be rebaptized. Additionally, non-members who are active in the Church have expressed hurt because rebaptism either denies the validity of their earlier baptism or is not possible for personal reasons.

In our journey together as a Mission Center, Headwaters has reflected on whether we are truly living out the principles we say we uphold. As a result, in 2012 we took an official step forward by submitting a resolution (WCR 1301) to the World Conference of 2013, which requested the First Presidency to continue exploration of the issue of rebaptism, specifically concerning those baptized by other Christian denominations before the age of eight, and also requested that the First Presidency provide periodic updates on ongoing discernment and issue a formal report no later than the next World Conference (2016). The resolution passed, and the Presidency asked the Theology Formation Team (TFT) to consider the theological issues related to the resolution. The Team’s role was to advise the Presidency on important theological issues facing the Church.

The TFT’s special report (H-7a) to the Conference of 2016 presented summaries of two approaches to baptism. The two views are 1) accepting only baptisms received at the age of eight or older and 2) accepting all baptisms, including those received before the age of eight. For each position, the Team listed arguments under the headings “Scripture,” “Experience,” “Tradition,” “Reason,” and “Continuing Revelation.” These are five sources of our Church’s theology and practice, as well as lenses through which the Church seeks to discern God’s will. (The sixth is Common Consent.)

In its main report (found in H-7), the TFT recognized the way Doctrine and Covenants 162 and 164 have broadened the Church’s theology of sacraments and also affirmed the value of our traditional practice of baptizing at age eight or older. The Team’s overall consensus, however, was that our practice of not accepting baptisms received before the age of eight is, in their words, “inadequate.” Their concerns mirrored our concerns: “It does not agree with our best current understandings of the nature of the Church; the nature of God; the nature of the human person; the development of sacraments; …pursuing the mission of Jesus Christ and living out our Enduring Principles.”

Another concern shared by both the TFT and our Mission Center is viewing our current practice in the light of our relationship with other Christian churches. The 1992 World Conference endorsed the church’s participation in local and national interfaith and interdenominational bodies, and the 2002 World Conference supported joining the National Council of Churches. It also created a standing World Church committee on ecumenical and interfaith relations (WCR 1275). We hold formal membership in the National Council of Churches (US) and are a committed ecumenical partner worldwide. This membership attests to our Church’s commitment to valuing and respecting the faith and shared witness of our ecumenical partners, and it does not lessen the value of our faith and traditions. The call in Doctrine and Covenants 161:1b to claim our “unique and sacred place within the circle of those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ” affirms that our place is not in any way endangered by accepting the variety of baptismal forms expressed in the universal body of Christ. Accepting baptisms received before the age of eight would neither change requiring children to wait until the age of eight to be baptized nor change requiring anyone not baptized to be baptized. The church would also only receive as a member through confirmation anyone the age of eight or older.

As requested in WCR 1301, the First Presidency provided updates about implementing this resolution through the Herald and issued a report to the 2016 Conference. Numerous discussions had been held with Church teams and councils, reports were received, and diverse perspectives were shared. The result was that World Church leaders disagreed on whether revising our current membership policy was needed. Therefore, no changes in the policy were made. The Presidency concluded the report by saying that they understood “the need to continue to study, discuss, and prayerfully reflect on the issues raised.”

Community of Christ’s history has always been one of journey and ongoing discernment as evidenced by our belief in continuing revelation. We are called to be a prophetic people in the midst of the continual evolving of our identity and mission, and this call was heard in 2004 in Doctrine and Covenants 162:6b: “The One who created all humankind grieves at the shameful divisions within the human family. A prophetic people must work tirelessly to tear down walls of separation and to build bridges of understanding.” More recently, in his “Metamorphosis” article in the January/February 2020 *Herald*, President Veazey stated that, “given the massive changes in culture and people’s perceptions of church, spirituality, faith, and their own participation in such endeavors, we are in a new time that includes unprecedented change.”

This resolution requests the President of the Church to give additional prayer and study seeking divine guidance on rebaptism and membership. There is precedence for this. A review of World Conference minutes identifies eight times in church history that the Church or one of its bodies (Councils, Quorums, Orders, and the Conference) directly requested that the President of the Church give prayerful consideration to one or more matters that resulted in revelation on these matters shortly thereafter. Specifically, these times resulted in Doctrine and Covenants sections 116, 117, 119, 120, 122, 124, 128, 149, and 149A.

Our current practice and policy is based on Doctrine and Covenants 164:2c, which states, “Individuals previously baptized of water in an attitude of humility and repentance and as an expression of faith in Jesus Christ may become Church members through the sacrament of confirmation of the Holy Spirit.” This implies that the individual needs to be able to have repented and expressed faith in Christ at the time of their original baptism in order to be confirmed as a member of the Community of Christ without rebaptism. This excludes a person baptized as an infant or younger than the age of eight from membership without rebaptism as the First Presidency currently interprets it. Our resolution does not seek to change the Church’s established practice of baptism. Instead, it requests the President of the Church to seek divine guidance. The only way a change in the acceptance of baptisms received prior to the age of eight may be made in the context of Doctrine and Covenants 164:2c is through further revelation, and only the President of the Church can bring that guidance to the Church as a whole.