

## The Ordinance of Baptism at Harvest Bible Chapel Barrie

The church has been entrusted with just two New Testament ordinances, The Lord's Table and baptism. With a desire to be as biblically-aligned as possible, we are seeking to release the practice of these ordinances to be exercised with all due discretion outside of the formality of the weekend worship service.

While it has been standard practice to allow the Lord's Table to be observed in small groups, we have been less willing to allow baptism to be observed similarly. There have been a small number of exceptions to the rule over our history, but otherwise all baptisms have occurred by church leaders in the context of a worship service.

At this point, spurred on by the restrictions placed on us by the pandemic, we now see that the New Testament does not prescribe the occasion or baptism apart from conversion itself. At no point do we see, for example, baptism happening in the context of a local church gathering.

In the case of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), the Apostle Paul (Acts 9), Cornelius and his party (Acts 10), Lydia and her household (Acts 16), the Philippian jailor and his household (Acts 16), as well as new believers in Corinth and Macedonia (Acts 18-19), it was an Apostle or a messenger of God (in the case of Paul and Ananias), not a local church who saw to the baptisms immediately following conversion. And in the case of Acts 2, the church did not exist at the baptism of the 3000 but was birthed from those baptisms.

It seems right then, to allow for baptism to happen more freely and less constrained by the schedules, preparation, and traditions that we have in place currently. That said, the elders still bear responsibility before God to shepherd (lead) the church and ensure that right doctrine is practiced. Thus, the following measures must be in place for any baptism to be considered biblically legitimate and therefore be acceptable to the church as the testimony of one's conversion to Christ.

### Protocol:

- 1. Oversight:** If at all possible, baptisms should be performed by a leader at Harvest (eg. an elder, a small group leader or coach, other ministry leader) who is mature and who understands and can explain that baptism is a public event that marks both **initiation** into the visible church and **identification** with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
- 2. Mode:** By immersion if at all possible; the word baptism is a transliteration into English of the Greek word which means to dip, immerse; further, the imagery of baptism by immersion pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (see Romans 6:1-4); exceptions may be made for those who are infirmed in a way that prevents immersion from happening safely; we do, however, recognize the baptism of those who were

baptized post-conversion by other modes since the timing (post-conversion) is more critical than the mode that was used;

3. **Timing:** All baptisms should be performed post-conversion; the biblical pattern is for an individual to confess personal faith in Christ and then to be baptized as a testimony to that conversion;
4. **Wording:** Whatever formula or wording is used, it should include, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” consistent with the Great Commission mandate in Matthew 28:19-20;
5. **Witnesses:** The baptism should be done as publicly as possible with believers and unbelievers observing the ordinance as a means of encouragement for the believers and evangelism for the unbeliever; baptisms could be, for example, livestreamed on social media platforms and/or recorded to be posted and played again for a wider audience; every means possible to broadcast the baptism should be capitalized on including the assembling of baptism clips to show in worship services;
6. **Testimony:** The one being baptized should be able to clearly articulate their conversion testimony indicating that they have, at the very least, rudimentary understanding of the dual purposes of identification and initiation (see above);
7. **Age:** Baptisms should be performed on those who are old enough to have clearly made their own decision; generally, as a best practice, we have looked to baptize only those who are around age 12 to ensure that the decision is made with the right understanding and relative maturity.

The heart behind this change is to watch for the Holy Spirit’s work in the lives of many and to see conversions and baptisms happening more freely while ensuring that the ordinance is consistent with biblical principles. It is perhaps among the last vestiges of the Reformation that the ordinances would also be liberated from the shackles of formality and the grip of the clergy while still being subject to the Word of God.

Notwithstanding these protocols, the pastors and elders will still be pleased to see people baptized as a regular part of our worship services, and we plan to continue that practice making that option available to any who seek to be baptized.

Approved by the board: February 23, 2021