

SESSION TWO

Policy on Baptism

The Evangelical Covenant Church has no formal creed to which it expects all of its members to subscribe other than the acceptance of the Scriptures as the “Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct.” The Covenant, however, has traditionally valued the historic confessions of the Christian Church particularly the Apostles’ Creed, as useful summaries of the essential message expressed in the Holy Scriptures.

This position of freedom within the limits set by the Scriptures and the central tradition of classical Christianity allows the Covenant to maintain unity within a diversity of secondary biblical doctrinal positions. Prominent among these in its potential for creating disunity and misunderstanding is the doctrine and practice of the sacrament of baptism. While the Evangelical Covenant Church comes out of a tradition in which infant baptism has been the primary understanding and practice, the Covenant chooses to respect the biblical positions of both infant and believer baptism equally. The Covenant recognizes this choice as a great challenge for the unity of the church in that these positions as classically stated become mutually exclusive at critical points of theology and practice.

The weight of the challenge to maintain the unity of the church within this diversity becomes the responsibility of Covenant pastors. If the Evangelical Covenant Church is truly to maintain this freedom of conscience for all Covenant people the pastors must be willing to submit their conviction and conscience concerning the doctrine and practice of baptism to the cause of the doctrine and unity of Christ’s church. Since Covenant ministers are the servants first of their Lord, but also of the church, it is their privilege to administer both infant baptism and believer baptism. Devoted Christians have held each of these views and there is room for both in the Body of Christ. As representatives of the denomination pastors give to each its own dignity and legitimacy as an accepted interpretation of biblical baptism. This they do by administering both believer and infant baptism themselves. In this way they maintain the privilege of being the pastor of their entire flock.

Since the Covenant recognizes both infant and believer baptism as true baptism it requires all of its ordained and licensed pastors to respect and administer both of these recognized forms of baptism. In accordance with the above principle the following requirements apply to all Covenant pastors:

- 1) While Covenant pastors may, and must hold their own convictions concerning baptism, Covenant pastors must guard against presenting their own view in such a way as to disparage the other.

- 2) A Covenant pastor must be willing to administer both infant baptism and believer baptism.
- 3) A Covenant pastor must protect the right of the minority or majority (whatever its persuasion) to full participation and expression within the life of the church, always within the limits set by the Holy Scriptures and the principle of Christian freedom.
- 4) A Covenant pastor has the responsibility to exercise pastoral discernment in individual cases. All Covenant pastors are called to be conscientious stewards before God of their biblical convictions. At the same time pastors must place the freedom of conscience of his or her whole flock and the unity of the Church above personal convictions in all matters which do not disturb the central truths of the faith.

This policy was adopted by the Covenant Annual Meeting in June 1998, is now the general policy for the Covenant, and is the standard for future credentialing.