

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE GUIDELINES FOR BAPTISM

During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In light of all that is transpiring globally with the pandemic and its aftereffects, we remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: *“And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come”* (Matthew 24:14, NLT).

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world” (*Acts of the Apostles*, 9.1).

Water baptism is a core belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Not only did Jesus set the example of water baptism by being baptized Himself, but He later commanded the Church to *“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, NIV).

Since the COVID-19 virus first spread, the Church has encountered daunting challenges as it finds ways to move its mission forward. However, the call of the Gospel Commission is still the core purpose of the Church, and it is deeply ingrained in the hearts of pastors in the Northern California Conference (NCC). In light of COVID-19, we seek to carry out our mission in innovative, socially responsible, and safe ways.

The guidelines presented here – for performing a baptism during this COVID-19 pandemic – are within the subsequent policy parameters suggested by the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th edition (2015):

1. “The Church believes in baptism by immersion and accepts into membership only those who have been baptized in this manner.” (p. 44)

2. “The pastor, with the assistance of the elders, is expected to plan for and lead out in all spiritual services, such as Sabbath morning worship and prayer meeting, and should officiate at the communion service and baptism.” (p. 32)

3. “In the absence of an ordained pastor, an elder shall request the conference president to arrange for the baptism of those desiring to unite with the church.” (p. 75)

4. “An elder should not officiate in the service without first obtaining permission from the conference president.” (p. 75)

NCC administration presents the following guidelines for baptisms performed in NCC churches. As Christians, we have a responsibility to take care of each other and ourselves. We ask that you partner with us as we seek your safety and the protection of our new believers and members. In addition to these guideline, the NCC expects that our churches will comply with the guidance of state and local authorities in responding to the COVID-19 virus.

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- ✓ Everyone who participates or is present for a baptismal service should follow **safe protocols** such as wearing masks, sanitizing hands frequently, and practicing social distancing.
- ✓ Keep the entire baptismal service brief, since we know a big part of staying healthy right now is related to the amount of time people occupy the same space.
- ✓ It is best to perform a baptism with only one candidate or one couple at any one event. It is essential to minimize the number in any group that gathers.
- ✓ The best place to perform baptisms is outside. Consider a swimming pool or a portable baptistry outside. However, if this is not possible, then using the church baptistry is allowed if proper precautions are taken. While chlorine in the water helps to sanitize the virus, most baptistries have limited chlorinated water. (Please use the proper amount of chlorine: <https://bit.ly/3kRJMaI>)
- ✓ Baptisms can be livestreamed or recorded for broadcast at a later time. However, minimize the number of media technicians present, and be sure to practice *safe protocols*.
- ✓ As long as our churches remain closed to in-person gatherings and services, only individuals who are living with the candidate should be present with the pastor for the baptismal service.
- ✓ Any comments made when presenting the candidate should be done in a way that avoids talking in close contact. The baptism should be done quickly so the candidate and pastor will not be close together in the water for an extended period of time.
- ✓ The pastor should wear a mask or a face shield at all times while in the water with the baptismal candidate.
- ✓ Many baptismal candidates may not be able to wear a mask since they are being baptized. However, a candidate can cover his/her mouth while being baptized or choose to hold a handkerchief over his/her mouth as he/she is immersed in the water.
- ✓ Here are a couple of options that a pastor may consider when performing a baptism during the COVID-19 pandemic: The pastor – in the presence of the candidate and with proper physical distancing – pronounces the words of baptism, and the candidate bends his/her knees to go under the water while the pastor rests his/her hand on the candidate's head or shoulder. Another option is for the pastor and the candidate to follow the same process without the pastor touching the candidate.
- ✓ Before the baptism, the candidate should be aware of the safety precautions being taken so he/she can help in every way possible to make this a safe environment.

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