

Baptised Together in Christ: A joint statement of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand

In 2017 the Roman Catholic Church in New Zealand and the Lutheran Church of New Zealand together commemorated the Reformation under the theme: From Conflict to Communion. At an ecumenical service the two Churches made five commitments:

1. Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.
2. Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith.
3. Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal.
4. Lutherans and Catholics should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.
5. Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.

In accord with these commitments the Roman Catholic Church in New Zealand and the Lutheran Church of New Zealand present this joint statement on the sacrament of baptism.

1. Common Affirmations

- i. Together we affirm that baptism is a sacramental gift of God, instituted by the command of Jesus Christ: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19). We therefore affirm the baptism of each person who is baptised in the name of the Triune God.
- ii. Together we affirm our faith in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins as confessed in the Nicene Creed (Acts 2:38).
- iii. Together we affirm that in baptism through water and the word a person is immersed in Jesus Christ and journeys with Christ through his death and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:3–4, Colossians 2:12).
- iv. Together we affirm that in baptism a person is given salvation and eternal life (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Titus 3:5).
- v. Together we affirm that in baptism a person becomes a new creation clothed in Christ with a new identity as a child of God (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 3:27).
- vi. Together we affirm that through baptism a person becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit and the baptised share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).
- vii. Together we affirm that through baptism a person is incorporated into the Body of Christ which is the Church, and the baptised remain a single body and a single family (1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 2:19).
- viii. Together we affirm that baptism should be offered to people of all ages and we practise the baptism of both adults and infants (Acts 2:39).

- ix. Together we affirm that baptism both generates faith and is received by faith, and we promote the teaching of Christian faith both before and after baptism in appropriate forms (Mark 16:16).

2. Differences in Understanding and Emphasis

- i. Catholics and Lutherans both speak of the sacrament of baptism as initiation into the Christian life. Catholics speak of seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, eucharist, reconciliation, holy orders, matrimony and the anointing of the sick) which are outward signs of inward grace celebrated during the journey through life. Lutherans speak of two sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) which use physical elements with the word of God to bring gifts of forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.
- ii. Lutherans and Catholics both speak of baptism as conveying the forgiveness of sins that is necessary for salvation. Both teach that baptism does not prevent a person from committing sin that requires forgiveness through repentance and faith. Lutherans understand that a person is cleansed in baptism from the sinfulness that corrupts human nature and is given a new nature. This baptismal grace is reclaimed repeatedly through repentance and absolution. Catholics understand that baptism includes the cleansing of original sin and the sacrament of reconciliation celebrates the forgiveness of actual sins following baptism.
- iii. Catholics and Lutherans both assert that through baptism a person becomes a member of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Catholics recognise the Church where the apostolic succession as mandated by Jesus continues through the local bishop in communion with the Bishop of Rome, but at the same time the Christian faith of all baptised Christians is affirmed. Lutherans recognise the Church as the assembly of saints in which there is a true proclamation of the Gospel and a faithful administration of the sacraments.

3. Learning from One Another

- i. Lutherans and Catholics both administer baptism according to rites that are based on biblical directives and ancient Christian practice. There are many elements in common in the baptismal rites of the two Churches. There is, however, the opportunity to learn from the rites of one another and to consider practices that may not have been preserved (e.g. the anointing with oil, the baptismal garment, the Easter vigil).
- ii. Catholics and Lutherans are both committed to the instruction of candidates for baptism and of parents who bring their children for baptism, as well as the ongoing Christian education of those who have been baptised. There is the opportunity to study the instructional materials produced by each Church and learn from each other's catechetical practices.
- iii. The Catholic and Lutheran Churches can learn from one another and speak with a common voice on issues of concern in modern society, with the conviction that they share one baptism and one faith.

4. Pastoral Practices

- i. Catholics and Lutherans may be invited to attend and participate in services in each other's churches. They are encouraged to do so as sisters and brothers who share their faith and their commitment to living in the grace of a common baptism.

- ii. A parent couple that includes both a Catholic and a Lutheran partner are encouraged to bring their child for baptism in the Church of their choice. They may seek to have both of their pastors/priests participate in the baptismal service.
- iii. Where persons from the other Church are invited to serve as godparents to a child who is being baptised, they are encouraged to take this responsibility with full commitment.
- iv. Christians are encouraged to speak of being baptised into the Christian Church, into the Christian faith, or into Christ. They may say that they were baptised in the Catholic or Lutheran Church but are discouraged from saying that they have been baptised Catholic or baptised Lutheran.

Adopted by the Lutheran Church of New Zealand and the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference 2021