

Guidelines for Baptism During COVID-19

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).

Since COVID-19 began to impact our lives, many things changed for the Church and its ministry. However, the call of the Gospel Commission is still central to our mission and deeply ingrained in the heart and passion of Adventist pastors in the Southern California Conference. At first, the leaders of SCC thought we could wait out this pandemic and postpone baptisms; however, we realize now that we need to provide a way to perform baptism in the safest way possible.

The guidelines presented here for performing a baptism during this COVID-19 pandemic are within the subsequent policy parameters suggested by the Adventist Church Manual, 2015:

1. “The Church believes in baptism by immersion and accepts into membership only those who have been baptized in this manner.” (Page 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.” (Page 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.” (Pages 45-49)
4. “An elder should not officiate in the service without first obtaining permission from the conference president.” (Page 75)

The following bullet points are presented as a guideline for baptisms being performed in the Southern California Conference churches. In addition to this guideline, we ask that pastors use their understanding and awareness of the COVID-19 virus to stay safe and keep the baptismal candidate as protected as possible.

- Everyone who participates in or is present for a baptismal service should follow safe protocols, such as wearing masks, sanitizing hands frequently, and practicing social distancing.
- Keep the total baptismal service brief, since we know a big part of staying healthy right now is related to the amount of time you are in the same space.
- It is best to perform a baptism individually with one candidate, or with only a couple at any one event. It is essential to minimize the number in the group that gathers.
- The best place to perform baptisms is outside. Consider a swimming pool or using 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://guardianpoolfence.com/chlorine-put-swimming-pool/?gclid=CjwKCAjwmMX4BRAAEiwAzM4JuGCsEL_JdF9QoIUmrU5BH3HEb73dfA5NZu6mgQCOMKAhqpNiykpRoCfmkQAvD_BwE)

- Baptisms can be livestreamed or recorded for broadcast at later time. However, minimize the number of media technicians present, being 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 in presenting the candidate should be done in a way that avoids talking in close contact; then the baptism should be done quickly without the candidate and pastor being close together in the water for extended time.
- The pastor should wear gloves, a mask, and 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, if the candidate can wear a cloth mask while being baptized, that would be helpful. They also could choose to hold a hanky over their mouth as they are immersed into the water.
- Before the baptism, the candidate should be aware of the safety precautions being taken so they can help in every way possible to make this a safe environment.