



Mutual recognition of baptism: The New Apostolic Church joins the Riva San Vitale Declaration

In 2016, the New Apostolic Church in Switzerland submitted a request to join the 2014 “Riva San Vitale Declaration on Mutual Recognition of Baptism”. The request was accepted by the six church signatories of the original declaration. Today, 8 July 2021, the mutual recognition of baptism will be signed by: District Apostle Jürg Zbinden, President of the New Apostolic Church in Switzerland, Rita Famos for the Protestant Church in Switzerland, Felix Gmür for the Bishops' Conference, Adèle Kelham for the Anglican Church in Switzerland, Patrick Streiff for the Methodist Church, Harald Rein for the Old Catholic Church, and Jörg Winkelströter for the Federation of Lutheran Churches in Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

A path of growing ecumenism

This important sign of unity grew out of dialogue begun with the New Apostolic Church (NAC) in 2002; this covered questions of theology and faith. The in-depth dialogue continued with a specially created dialogue commission from 2014 to 2019. Over the years, the NAC has become increasingly open to ecumenism, with a reworked theology of the sacraments, and publication of a catechism that clarifies their doctrinal foundations. With all obstacles removed, the way stood open to the mutual recognition of baptism.

In his address during the celebratory service on the occasion of the signing, District Apostle Jürg Zbinden stated: “I welcome this step towards greater Christian communion, which focusses on the unifying force within the Church of Christ, and I am moved and grateful that, as President of the New Apostolic Church in Switzerland, I am able to sign the mutual recognition of baptism here today in the Bruder Klaus Church in the city

of Bern, together with the leaders of the other Churches.”

The need to restore baptismal unity

Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, his death, and his resurrection. Baptism is incorporation into the body of Christ, such that our diverse baptismal practices are all part of the one baptism. The need to regain baptismal unity lies at the heart of ecumenical endeavour; it is also central to living out authentic communion within Christian communities. Baptism is an act that cannot be repeated. By signing the Riva San Vitale Declaration “on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism”, the churches are giving a clear signal for the unity of baptism found in Christ.

Baptism is administered with water, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the celebration of baptism, churches are committing themselves to take the symbolism of water very seriously.

The rite expresses the fact that in baptism the Christian participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The New Testament emphasises the ethical implications of baptism by portraying it as a cleansing of the heart from all sin. Baptism seals our common commitment to follow Christ. Through their own baptism, Christians are brought into unity with Christ, with every other Christian and with the church in every place and every age.

A commitment by the Churches in Switzerland

In signing the European Charta Oecumenica in 2005, the members of the Swiss Council of Churches in Switzerland (AGCK.CH) committed themselves to the mutual recognition of baptism. The three national Churches - Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholic Church and Protestant Church - had already made this commitment in 1973.

Forty-one years later, on 21 April 2014, six member churches of AGCK.CH signed the Riva San Vitale Declaration. Today, they are joined by the seventh signatory, the New Apostolic Church.

Arbeitsgemeinschaft christlicher Kirchen in der Schweiz (Swiss Council of Churches)

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