

Learning points from joint Nordic Lutheran project 'Baptism in Times of Change'

20th January 2022

The following recommendations on baptism in the contemporary Lutheran folk churches is the result from a joint Nordic research project, conducted 2020-2022 by a group of national researchers (see more at www.churchesintimesofchange.org). The recommendations were presented for discussion with a larger group of engaged practitioners, academics, representatives from the LWF communion office, and church leaders in the Nordic area on 19th-20th January 2022. Our hope is that this will contribute to the development of how baptism should be viewed and practiced in a time of change in the Nordic Lutheran folk churches.

The recommendations take as point of departure the themes identified in the annotated bibliography, identifies challenges and relevant questions, and points to examples or 'good practices' in relation to baptism, without necessarily entailing endorsement from all participants in the consultation. Furthermore, the recommendations are not binding policies for participating churches as each national group needs to continue working on how they will use the recommendations in their own context and constituency. In short, the recommendations are best viewed as learning points from a joint study and discussion.

Thus, a main outcome of the joint research process and the consultation is the following list of refined and critiqued recommendations, brought back to the participating churches by the national groups.

A. Church in wider society (statistics, qualitative aspects, societal change)

Churches are recommended

1. to consider the profound social changes transforming our societies as a renewed call to be churches in mission.
2. to view our Nordic societies as inviting us to theologize contextually.
3. to explore contemporary idioms in dialogue with biblical and traditional symbols in order to make Christianity relevant to people in modern society.
4. to learn to be churches in a pluralistic society sharing public space and working together with people of other faiths and convictions.

B. Theology (Lutheran, ecumenically, contemporary)

Churches are recommended

5. to work with theologies of baptism in ways that are accessible and understandable.
6. to develop a rich and comprehensive understanding of the gifts of grace and discipleship received in baptism as giving us new relationships to participate in God's mission in the world.
7. to develop the relationship between baptism and all of creation including the wider human family as well as the ecological environment.
8. to develop an understanding of baptism not exclusively related to infant baptism but including baptism of children, youths, and adults.
9. to work with the understanding of baptism together with ecumenical partners.

C. Communication (meeting members, education, campaigns)

Churches are recommended

10. to improve dialogue-oriented communication on baptism, including the theological aspects of baptism.
11. to communicate about baptism in a way which emphasizes belonging, community, and relationship.
12. to equip members to consider their own baptism as a 'mission to communicate'.
13. to develop programs to teach Christian faith for baptized and non-baptized.

D. Practice (liturgical development, new forms of baptismal practice)

Churches are recommended

14. to explore greater variation in baptismal practice, e.g. special baptismal services, drop-in services, and services outside the church building.
15. to reflect on the role of and provide resources for godparents.
16. to explore ways to relate to multifaith families and parents opting for delayed baptism, affirming that the child 'belongs to the kingdom of God'.
17. to develop liturgies and hymns suitable for various ages and circumstances.
18. to constantly review and revise the liturgical language and practices of baptism.