

After prayer, study, and discussion over two years, the Elder Team recommends a bylaw change regarding membership. The recommended change focuses on article 6.02(c): Baptism by Immersion.

The FAQs provide detail, study notes, and flow of thought regarding the recommended change. Please read through the questions and responses. Two Town Hall meetings are scheduled in ValleyPoint's Main Auditorium on the following dates to discuss and answer questions - Tuesday, April 27th at 6:30pm and Monday, May 3rd at 6:30pm.

According to ValleyPoint's bylaws (article 14.04), any amendments to the articles change requires a vote of affirmation from the membership (80% majority). The membership affirmation will occur at the annual meeting on Monday, May 24th, at 6:30pm.

FAQs:

What is the bylaw change recommended by the elder team?

Summary of proposed substantive changes:¹

- 1) Delete current Section 6.02(c): Baptism by Immersion: Members shall be baptized by immersion as a testimony to their faith in Christ.
- 2) Insert new Section 6.02(c) as follows:

Baptism by Immersion: Being baptized as a believer by immersion is a requirement for membership as a personal testimony to their faith in Christ. After deliberation, the elders may choose to allow membership to the church to those who were baptized as a believer by another form and upon clear personal testimony of trusting in Jesus alone.

What is the Meaning of Baptism? Baptism means identification. It is a clear picture of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. "For when you are baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ" (Colossians 2:12).

Baptism illustrates new life as a follower of Jesus and paints the truest picture of dying to sin and arising to Christ and new life. "When someone becomes a

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Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. The old life has passed away and a new life has begun” (2 Corinthians 5:17). New Testament baptism communicates to a watching world all that Jesus accomplished for us.

Does Baptism Save? Baptism does not save. Faith in Jesus alone is the only means of salvation. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Baptism is like a wedding ring — it is the outward sign of an inward spiritual change. “And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes” (Galatians 3:17). Baptism is a public way to share a person’s personal story of trusting in the work of Jesus.

Who should be baptized? Every person who has believed in Jesus alone to save them should be baptized. “Those who believed and accepted His message were baptized...” (Acts 2:4).

Believers are those who have realized that their sin has separated them from God. They have given up all efforts to reach God through good works or religious activity. They have concluded that Jesus’ death on the cross for their sins is the only thing that can bridge the gap between them and God. A believer is someone who has decided to trust Jesus alone for his or her salvation.

Once a person admits that he or she is a sinner and turns to Jesus for salvation, the Bible says that a person should proclaim their story of life change; the watching world needs to know. Baptism has always stood as a public testimony of people who have moved from being a seeker to being a believer in Jesus.

Why should I be baptized? To follow the example set by Jesus. “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the river” (Mark 1:9).

To follow the command given by Jesus. “Jesus said, ‘Go then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and then teach them to obey everything I have commanded you’” (Matthew 28:19-20). Baptism is the means by which followers of Jesus are identified.

When should I be baptized? As soon as possible. “Those who believed...were baptized...that day” (Acts 2:4).

Baptism events in Acts demonstrate the belief that baptism is to take place after conversion. For example, in Acts 8:26–39, Philip baptizes an Ethiopian eunuch who has just come to faith in Jesus through reading the narrative of

the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Likewise, in Acts 9:17-18, Ananias baptized Paul (formerly Saul) after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus.

In passages such as Acts 2:41, 8:12, and 10:47-48, it is evident that baptism follows an individual's decision to trust Jesus alone for salvation.

Why Does ValleyPoint practice baptism by immersion? The Greek word most closely associated with baptism in the New Testament is the word, baptizo (βαπτίζω - baptize²). A clear understanding of this word is important in the study of baptism. The word itself has the picture of "going under" - "the symbolic requirement of passing under, and emerging from, cleansing water."³

Baptism by immersion effectively symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Going under the water represents Jesus' death and burial; coming out of the water illustrates his resurrection.

Did all baptisms in the New Testament happen by immersion? While baptism by full immersion captures the essence of the word baptize, no prescription of a particular mode of baptism can be found in the New Testament. J.I. Packer asserted, "The command to baptize may be fulfilled by immersion, dipping, or sprinkling; all three modes satisfy the meaning of the Greek verb baptizo."⁴

What is interesting about the Greek word baptizo is that there is indication that some use of this word does not picture full immersion. R.C. Sproul stated,

In Mark 7, we are told that the Pharisees noticed some of Jesus' disciples eating food without first washing their hands. The washing in view was a ceremonial cleansing that was prescribed not by God's law but by the Jewish rabbinical traditions that had arisen. By way of background, Mark notes that the Pharisees would not eat unless they had washed in this ceremonial way, especially after coming from the marketplace (vv. 3b-4). It is interesting that the word translated as "wash" in verse 4 is *baptizo*, and it clearly does not imply full-body immersion. Likewise, in Luke 11:38, we read of a Pharisee who was astonished that Jesus did not "wash" before dinner. Again, the word *baptizo* is used here, and again it clearly does not mean total immersion in water. Sometimes *baptizo* is used in classical Greek simply to mean "to bathe or wash," and we see examples of that usage in these

² James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 18.

³ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: a Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 213.

⁴ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*, 213.

passages.⁵

Is ValleyPoint changing the “mode” of baptism? No. Baptism by immersion is the mode ValleyPoint has chosen to practice. ValleyPoint will continue to practice baptism by immersion as it effectively symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Is ValleyPoint offering multiple options for baptism? No. ValleyPoint will continue to practice baptism by immersion.

Does ValleyPoint practice infant baptism? ValleyPoint does not practice infant baptism. We wait until children are old enough to make the personal choice to trust in Jesus and understand the meaning of baptism.

Infant baptism is often a reflection of the parent’s faith. It is a choice they are making for their child. The beauty of baptism for those who have made a decision to trust Jesus alone is that it is a personal choice – it is an expression of their faith. ValleyPoint encourages those who were baptized as infants to be re-baptized as believers.

Is baptism required for membership at ValleyPoint? As established in ValleyPoint’s bylaws, baptism is required for membership. Article 6.02 lists qualifications for membership. “Candidates may be included into membership upon professing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the completion of the Membership Class, baptism by immersion, and signing and abiding in the Church Membership Covenant.”

It is important to note that baptism is not required for salvation (see question above). For the sake of unity and member engagement, it is required for membership at ValleyPoint.

⁵ R. C. Sproul, *What Is Baptism?*, First edition., vol. 11, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2011), 52–53.