

Highland Mennonite Brethren Church Ministry Manual Baptism & Membership Guidelines

These *Baptism & Membership Guidelines* assist Highland Mennonite Brethren Church (“Highland Church”) and persons wishing to be baptized or become members (“Candidates”) at Highland Church in preparing for Baptism and Membership Sunday. Baptism is a public declaration that you have turned from a life of rebellion against God and His ways in order to follow Jesus in humble obedience just as Jesus followed God the Father by the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The faith declared in baptism needs to be lived out in loving relationship with God and fellow believers, and in the world at large. Through membership a person covenants (i.e., formally joins in relationship) with the local church community. It signifies that a person desires to live in loving relationship with fellow believers for mutual support, ministry, spiritual growth, encouragement, accountability, mission, and more.

1. BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP CLASSES

Whether you’ve decided to be baptized and/or become a member at Highland Church, or simply want to know what baptism and/or membership at Highland Church is all about, talk to one of the pastors who periodically - or upon request - facilitate classes to prepare Candidates for this next step and/or to answer any questions you may have.

As part of the classes, you will review the following:

- ***APPENDIX 1 - CONFESSION OF FAITH OF THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCHES***
- ***APPENDIX 2 - MISSION, CORE VALUES, AND VISION OF HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH***
- ***APPENDIX 3 - MEMBERSHIP COVENANT AT HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH***

2. BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

If you are in agreement with Highland Church’s Confession of Faith; Mission, Core Values, and Vision; and wish to be baptized and/or become a member at Highland Church, complete ***APPENDIX 4 - BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION*** and submit it to one of the pastors or the church office.

- A Baptism & Membership Sunday will be set according to your availability and the church calendar;
- You will be asked to prepare a testimony to publicly share with the congregation on Baptism & Membership Sunday; and
- Before Baptism & Membership Sunday you will share your testimony with several Leadership Team members at an informal interview.

3. TESTIMONY PREPARATION

Many people express some level of nervousness about publicly sharing their testimony in front of the congregation. Below are a few suggestions to guide you in that process. Feel free to share whatever you think will be an encouragement to the congregation, and also what will express truthfully what your experience of being a Christian has been like.

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In particular, it is important for you to include the following:

- Tell of where you grew up and what type of upbringing you had;
- Give your current family details (but only what you are comfortable sharing);
- Communicate what your walk with Jesus is currently like (right now);
- Share why you wish to be baptized, or when you were baptized as a result of your confession of faith in Jesus Christ; and
- Mention your desire to commit to this specific church (Highland Mennonite Brethren Church) through membership.

If it takes you more than 5-7 minutes to read your written testimony out loud it might be a good idea to shorten it a bit.

Pastoral staff will read and perhaps help you strengthen your written testimony.

4. WHAT TO BRING ON BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP SUNDAY

- Your written testimony; and
- If getting baptized:
 - A family member or friend to assist you before and after baptism;
 - A second set of clothing (e.g., shorts/t-shirt) of a fabric and colour that will not turn see-through when wet;
 - A bath towel; and
 - Personal care items (e.g., hair dryer, brush/comb).

5. WHEN TO BE WHERE ON BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP SUNDAY

- Arrive early to meet with pastoral staff for final instructions;

5.1. If getting baptized

- Your family, friends, and special guests are welcome to sit in front pews;
- Participate in the worship service as a congregant until invited to either
 - share your testimony from the stage before you prepare for baptism; or
 - prepare for baptism and then share your testimony from the baptistery;
- To prepare for baptism, make your way downstairs to change into your second set of clothing (Men's and Women's Washrooms serve as change rooms);
- Have your assisting family member or friend accompany you downstairs, in case you need anything while you're getting ready;
- Leave your belongings (except your written testimony and your towel) in the change room and make your way to the stairwell leading up to the baptistery;
- Have your assisting family member or friend accompany you to the baptistery stairwell, ready to pass you your towel when you come out of the baptistery;
- Remain out of sight of the congregation until invited into the baptistery;
- Enter baptistery at the pastor's prompt;
- Share your testimony from the baptistery, if not already shared it from the stage;

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- Answer the pastor's questions;
- Upon the confession of your faith, you will be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by being fully immersed in the water;
- After the pastor makes further remarks and/or prays for you, exit the baptistery;
- Take your towel from your assisting family member or friend and – out of sight of the congregation - towel dry before heading back downstairs to the change rooms;
- Have your assisting family member or friend remain downstairs, in case you need anything while you're getting ready;
- Change into dry clothing, fix your hair and makeup (if applicable), and – along with your assisting family member or friend - make your way back to the sanctuary to be received into membership.

5.2. When becoming a member

- If you are simply becoming a member, having been baptized before, participate in the worship service as a congregant until invited to come on stage to share your testimony;
- If you are becoming a member following your baptism, come on stage when invited to do so to be received into membership;
- Answer the pastor's questions, which may include:
 - Have you been baptized upon the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
 - Do you acknowledge and accept our Confession of Faith?
 - Is it your desire to work together with us, as God enables, and be received into membership of this church?
- After you have verbalized your affirmation of these questions you will be formally welcomed into membership;
- You will receive a baptism and/or membership certificate;
- The membership will be invited to stand as we together recite ***Appendix 3 - Membership Covenant*** out loud.

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APPENDIX 1 - CONFESSION OF FAITH OF THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCHES

1. **God** - We believe in the one true God, the source of all life, who reigns over all things as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and lovingly cares for all creation. God the Father planned the redemption of humanity and sent Jesus Christ the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, bringing good news to the poor and triumphing over sin through his obedient life, death, and resurrection. God the Holy Spirit empowers believers with new life, indwells them, and unites them in one body.
2. **Revelation of God** - We believe God has made himself known to all people. Beginning with creation and culminating in Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself in the Old and New Testaments. All Scripture is inspired by God and is the authoritative guide for faith and practice. We interpret Scripture in the church community as guided by the Holy Spirit.
3. **Creation and Humanity** - We believe God created the heavens and the earth, and they were good. Humans, God's crowning act, were created in the image of God. Sin has alienated humanity from the Creator and creation, but God offers redemption and reconciliation through Jesus Christ.
4. **Sin and Evil** - We believe sin is individual and corporate opposition to God's good purposes and leads to physical and spiritual death.
5. **Salvation** - We believe God saves all people who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Through his obedient life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, Christ delivers people from the tyranny of sin and death and redeems them for eternal life in the age to come. All creation eagerly awaits its liberation from bondage into the freedom of the glory of God's children.
6. **Nature of the Church** - We believe the church is the covenant community called by God through Jesus Christ to live a life of discipleship and witness as empowered by the Holy Spirit. The local church gathers regularly for worship, fellowship, and accountability and to discern, develop, and exercise gifts for ministry.
7. **Mission of the Church** - We believe the mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations by calling people to repent, be baptized, and love God and neighbour by sharing the good news and performing acts of love and compassion.
8. **Christian Baptism** - We believe baptism by water is a public sign that a person has repented of sin, received forgiveness, died with Christ, and been raised to new life through the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is also a public declaration of a believer's incorporation into the body of Christ as expressed in the local church.
9. **Lord's Supper** - We believe that in obedience to Christ, the church observes the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of his atoning death and to celebrate forgiveness, new life, and the fellowship and unity of all believers.

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- 10. Discipleship** - We believe Jesus calls people who have experienced the new birth to follow him in a costly life of service to God. The power of the Holy Spirit transforms believers from the unrighteous pattern of the present age into a life of joyful obedience with God's people.
- 11. Marriage, Singleness, and Family** - We believe that singleness and marriage are honoured by God and should be blessed by the church. God instituted marriage as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman for the purposes of companionship, encouragement, sexual intimacy, and procreation. Children are gifts from God and should be nurtured by parents in the ways of God.
- 12. Society and State** - We believe that God instituted the state to promote justice and to maintain law and order. Christians' primary allegiance is to Christ's kingdom. Believers are called to witness against injustice, exercise social responsibility, and obey all laws that do not conflict with the Word of God.
- 13. Love and Nonresistance** - We believe that God in Christ reconciles people to himself and to one another, making peace through the cross. We seek to be agents of reconciliation, practice love of enemies, and express Christ's love by alleviating suffering, reducing strife, and promoting justice. Because violence and warfare are contrary to the gospel of Christ, we believe we are called to give alternative service in times of war.
- 14. The Sanctity of Human Life** - We believe that God is Creator and giver of life and highly values each person. Procedures designed to take human life are wrong. We oppose all attitudes that devalue human life, especially the defenceless lives of the unborn, disabled, poor, aging, and dying.
- 15. Stewardship** - We believe the universe and everything in it belong to God the Creator and that we have been entrusted by God to manage its resources. All God's gifts, including money, time, abilities, and influence, are to be received with thanksgiving, used responsibly, and shared generously.
- 16. The Lord's Day, Work, and Rest** - We believe God's act of creation provides the model for work and rest. In work, we use our abilities to glorify God and serve others. In rest, we express thanks for God's provision and trust in God's sustaining grace. In worship, we gather to commemorate the resurrection through worship, instruction, fellowship, and service.
- 17. Christianity and Other Faiths** - We believe God's atoning work in Jesus is the only means of reconciling people with God. God has not left any without a witness to the Creator's goodness and power. Christians treat people of other faiths with respect but urgently proclaim Christ as the only way of salvation.
- 18. Christ's Final Triumph** - We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will return triumphantly at the end of this age to destroy all evil powers, condemn all who have rejected Christ to eternal punishment, and unite believers with Christ to reign forever with God in glory.

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APPENDIX 2 - HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH'S MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

Our Mission, Core Values, Vision		
Our Mission	Our mission is to follow Jesus Christ and help others know, love, and serve Him	
Our Core Values		
1.	by being	
2.	worshipful,	
3.	humble,	
4.	biblical,	
5.	relational,	
6.	sacrificial,	
7.	invitational,	
8.	transformational, and influential	
Our Vision	until our neighbours and their neighbours are in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.	
Our Core Values - Detailed		
Adjective	Phrase	Description
1. worshipful	Unreserved <u>Devotion</u> to God	Description: Our primary focus is on God and our relationship with Him. Focus: reaching UP Scriptures: Mark 12:30
2. humble	Humble <u>Submission</u> to Our Lord Jesus Christ	Description: Our primary allegiance is to the Lord Jesus Christ. We humbly follow Him knowing that He is leading us deeper into life abundant and eternal. Focus: reaching UP, OUT, DEEP Scriptures: Luke 9:23
3. biblical	Faithful <u>Obedience</u> to God's Word	Description: Our primary knowledge of God and His work is from His Word to us. We study and seek to understand and apply the Bible in community and individually. Focus: reaching DEEP, UP, OUT Scriptures: 2 Timothy 3:15-17
4. relational	Authentic <u>Relationship</u> to Others	Description: God calls us into Church community of which Jesus is the head and where the Holy Spirit is active. This community is built and strengthened through our love for one another expressed in our attitudes and actions toward everyone. We value unity; where divisions occur we work toward reconciliation. Focus: reaching IN, DEEP, OUT Scriptures: Philippians 2:1-5

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Our Core Values - Detailed		
Adjective	Phrase	Description
5. sacrificial	Caring <u>Service</u> to Others	<p>Description: The Holy Spirit gifts every Christian with spiritual abilities designed for the building up of the Church body “so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Eph. 4:16). We lovingly serve one another according to our giftedness for the well-being of everyone.</p> <p>Focus: reaching IN, DEEP, OUT</p> <p>Scriptures: Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 5:13-14</p>
6. invitational	Intentional <u>Engagement</u> with Neighbours (both near and far)	<p>Description: We desire to bless others outside our Church community by testifying in word and deed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We desire to see our “neighbours” – whether <i>near</i> the Church building or congregants, or <i>far</i> from us requiring that we go to them – be reconciled with God and join Christ’s Church community.</p> <p>Focus: reaching OUT</p> <p>Scriptures: Matthew 28:18-20; Genesis 12:1-3</p>
7. transformational	Incremental Discipling of Congregants	<p>Description: We desire to see congregants of all ages continue to mature spiritually so that they are ever better able to faithfully follow Jesus Christ. As they are equipped we release them into gifted ministry for the benefit of all.</p> <p>Focus: reaching DEEP, IN</p> <p>Scriptures: Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:27-28</p>
8. influential	Faithful <u>Leadership</u> of the Church	<p>Description: Spiritually gifted, mature, and trained men and women who lead with humility and care for the sake of the well-being and growth of the whole Church community and in accordance with our vision and mission. The congregation supports and encourages the leadership “so that their work will be a joy, not a burden” (Heb. 13:17).</p> <p>Focus: reaching IN, DEEP</p> <p>Scriptures: Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-12</p>

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APPENDIX 3 – HIGHLAND MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

We, the members of Highland Church, have died to ourselves and been raised to life in Christ. Having proclaimed this through the act of baptism, we pledge to love one another, study and submit to Scripture, and serve the mission of God's church in this world.

Through the power of God, we commit ourselves to growing as a community of grace, as we celebrate communion with one another and with Him.

By the light of God's great love, we will discover and use our spiritual gifts and talents, and work to build one another up by following the leading of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

By the mercy and grace of God, we will give sacrificially of our time and treasure, to further the kingdom work of this local sacred community.

So, together, we publicly commit to follow Jesus Christ and help others know, love, and serve Him until our neighbours and their neighbours are in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

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APPENDIX 4 - BAPTISM & MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please review the Confession of Faith of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches; Highland Church's Mission, Core Values, and Vision; and Highland Church's Membership Covenant. If you agree with these and decide to be baptized or become a member at Highland Mennonite Brethren Church ("Highland Church"), please complete this *Baptism & Membership Application* and submit it to one of the pastors or the church office.

- I desire to:
 - Be baptized *and* become a member of Highland Church
- OR -**
- Become a member of Highland Church (I was baptized upon the confession of my faith on _____ DATE _____ at _____ CHURCH, LOCATION _____)
 - I am transferring my membership from MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH ONLY
- I have read the Mennonite Brethren Conference "Confession of Faith" detailing our beliefs and am in agreement with it (attached).
- I will covenant with Highland Church church community as together we seek to fulfill our mission and vision in accordance with our core values (attached). I willingly offer my spiritual and natural abilities and personal resources to assist in building up the church in love to the glory of God.
- I realize that I may voluntarily withdraw from membership or request transfer of membership to another Mennonite Brethren congregation by writing a letter to the Leadership Team of Highland Church. I also understand that the church may remove my membership if I stop being an active and/or positive participant in the church community (after 18 months) or for substantial disagreement with the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith or Highland Church's mission and values.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Office use:

- Interviewed by members of the Leadership Team on _____ (Date)
- Baptized by _____ (Baptizer's Name) on _____ (Date)
- Became a member on the date of their baptism
- Became a member by testimony on _____ (Date)
- Became a member by transfer on _____ (Date)