

Water Baptism



A teaching paper from the Anglican parish of Bondi and Waverley.

Christian Churches have always practiced water baptism.

Since the very beginning of Christianity water baptism has been used to signify some aspect of belief. It is something that Christian Churches (and quite a few of the cults which have moved out of Christianity) have in common. Not surprisingly, there are also many different ways of understanding *what* this practice signifies.

As a result, there are many questions: *What* is happening in water baptism? *How* is it actually practiced? *When & where* is it done? *Who* does the baptising? *Who* should be baptised?

This teaching paper does three things.

Firstly, it overviews the use of the word “*baptise*” in the New Testament. Secondly, it assesses some current practices of Christian churches in the light of this overview. Thirdly, it explains the direction we take on water baptism at Bondi Anglican church.¹

Before we start looking at **Baptism** in particular, it is important to maintain a mature awareness of the fact that there are areas of **freedom** in Christian belief. Even tightly held convictions must not be imposed on others if Jesus does not require them as a part of following him. Even if we see someone’s view to be incorrect, if it can be disputed without affecting the meaning of the gospel, we are not to pass judgment on someone who holds a different view. That is the point made in Romans 14, where we read “*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.*” (Romans 14:1), and “*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.*” (Romans 14:19).

Unfortunately, the way Christians dispute and pass judgment over approaches to water baptism has led to strong prejudice and friction. Mutual edification is often forgotten. Some people have actually suggested as a result that water baptism is something that is symbolic of the divisions in Christianity. We need to be praying that this kind of unhelpful disunity **won’t** be seen amongst us.

At the same time, we need to feel free to question unhelpful water-baptism practices.

Bondi and Waverley Anglican Parish has congregations made up by people from a vast array of backgrounds. This issue is an important one, but we don’t want to have fruitless disagreements. We want to have unity based on the truth of Gods Word, the bible. So, what is the stance we take on water baptism?

In the twenty centuries of the Christian Church, there have been a great variety of views and practices of Water Baptism. This variety is seen both in the technical details and theological thinking behind different ways of doing water baptism. The details of water baptism change in terms of the timing, the volume of water and the way the water is used. This is understandable, and we see the same sort of variety in other Church practices and liturgy. For example Communion or Lord’s Supper has a wide variety of practice, with the frequency, the way it is celebrated, the type and volume of bread and wine (or grape juice) vary considerably. This variety of practice has carried over into the different churches that see themselves as part of Evangelical Christianity.

Far more significantly, there is variety in the theological explanation of what is actually happening at someone’s water baptism. Evangelical Christianity cannot accept every single one of the alternatives as equally valid. At the same time we need to maintain this issue as an area of freedom. We need to ensure that with all the variety, we don’t practice what will be unhelpful or against clear biblical teaching. At the same time, it is not necessary to insist on a uniform practice in any of these things as long as the variety in practice does not change the central truths of Christian belief.

Some of the explanations given by churches for the way they practice water baptism can actually work against the Gospel. For example, the idea that someone is not truly Christian until they are water-baptised in a certain way, or the idea that water baptising infants mysteriously makes them into Christians. Both of these understandings tend to undermine the message of the Gospel.

¹ Note this paper was first written in the context of planting churches that needed to work out a solid policy on water Baptism from scratch.

John... the “Water Baptiser”

It is clear that water baptism was initially associated with a clear, public confession of sin and repentance towards God. That is the whole point of John (the Baptist’s) mission to Israel. He called Jews back to their God. As they turned back, they were water-baptised in the Jordan river.

John’s message and water baptism was preparing the way for Jesus’ mission. Those Members of God’s chosen nation, Israel who came to be baptised in the Jordan river did not see it as a magical rite or with any power in itself. Rather it was a graphic symbol of their confession of sin and change in direction. Each of the Gospel accounts emphasises this (Matthew 3:10; Mark 1:8; Luke 3 118; John 1:15 26).

That is why Jesus himself went through water baptism, to identify fully with a sinful Israel that needed to repent. John the baptiser recognised the irony: *“I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?”* Jesus responds to John’s question with *“Let it be so now, to satisfy all righteousness”*.

What we have is clearly a record of what Jesus does and says. It is not presented in the Gospel accounts as a model of water baptism that all Christians must follow. It is what Jesus went through to launch his public ministry.

The water baptism of John is specifically contrasted to the mission of Jesus. John’s message sees Jesus in terms of baptism, but *not* water baptism: *“I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”* (Matthew 3: 11; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3: 15-17; John 1:26-27).

It is interesting to note that in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ water baptism is *not* emphasised, while his mission to baptise with the Holy Spirit *is*. We have John the water baptiser saying, *“The reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel...”* (1:31) *“The one who sent me to baptise with water told me “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.”* (1:33).

Here we see that the baptism Jesus is on about is spiritual. But despite this, we also know that Jesus (or more accurately, his disciples) continued to baptise other disciples with water; (John 3:22; 4:3). Little is made of this detail within the Gospel account. Why? Because water-baptism is not a central part of the mission of Jesus.

Different uses of “baptism”

Baptism also occurs in the Gospel accounts at other places apart from water baptism. It is used as a metaphor for being overwhelmed or completely overcome. Jesus uses the word *Baptism* in this metaphoric sense to respond to James and John after they make a big request of Jesus. They say to Jesus *“do whatever we ask!”* So Jesus responds with *“You don’t know what you’re asking, can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?”* (Mark 10:38). He is referring to the judgment and curse on our behalf that he will bear on the cross. This is made more explicit in Luke’s Gospel; *“I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed”*. (Luke 12:50).

There are also ways the Greek word *“baptism”* is used to simply mean *“washed”* or *“ceremonially cleaned”*. So in describing the Pharisees’ traditions Mark uses the baptism word. He writes *“...they do not eat unless they wash (are baptised). And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing (baptising) of cups, pitchers and kettles.”* (Mark 7).

We can see from this initial overview that the word *baptism* in the New Testament is not limited to what we see as the conventional debate that has developed around the word.

Jesus... the “Baptist”

The central idea of Jesus’ Baptism is *not* one of water. We’ve seen that in John the Baptist’s preaching. We also see that there is no account of Jesus actually water baptising anyone at all. Yet we have Jesus in his final teaching to his followers commanding them to *“...go and make disciples*

of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19).

This is where it gets a little bit tricky. It is hard to determine whether Jesus is referring to a specific water baptism or is simply equating someone becoming his disciple with being baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To put it another way: Is Jesus commanding his disciples to water baptise all the disciples they make? That is, are “*baptising them...and teaching them to obey*” two extra actions on top of “*make disciples*”? Or is he saying “*Make disciples and as you do this, you will be baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey.*”

The two ongoing actions “*baptising*” and “*teaching*” actually hang off the main verb “*make disciples*”~ so the command is to make disciples... baptising and teaching are what happens as they carry out that command. That is- all who have become a disciple of Jesus have by definition been baptised in the name of the father son and Holy Spirit.

If the baptism “*in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*” that Jesus is talking about is water baptism, then those who have not been water baptised are not disciples of Jesus. However, if it is another way of saying “*make disciples*”, then water baptism becomes a less central matter. The central issue is if someone is a disciple of Jesus, because if they are, they have been baptised in the Holy Spirit or overwhelmed by him.

The Baptism Jesus is talking about here is therefore not about a rite with water. It is the overwhelming change that happens when someone becomes a Disciple of Jesus, and Father Son and Spirit take that person’s life over. This was tightly linked with water baptism.

Acts... and baptism

As we read the accounts in Acts it is important to remember that they are not meant to be taken as prescriptive. They are narrative accounts that record what happened in the early years of the Christian Mission. If we were to attempt to take Acts as a book establishing normative church practice we would soon run into all sorts of difficulties.

With the beginning of this post-resurrection account of the Church, we see Jesus again contrast his new kind of spirit baptism with the water baptism of John. Speaking to his disciples after he rises from the dead, Jesus says “*For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts1:5).

This is not to suggest that water baptism was simply done away with. It was obviously important in the Apostles minds, as it figured in their decision to find a replacement for the traitor Judas “*Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us.* (Acts 1:21-22).

After the dramatic filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter addresses the Jewish crowd and explains that Jesus really was the anointed one, the Christ. He calls them to “*Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38) While it is not specifically stated, it seems likely that this “*baptism*” is water baptism, symbolising the new status as forgiven and spirit-baptised people. So the water baptism happens as an external sign of the invisible spirit baptism that happens when people become Christian.

Note that if this is water baptism, it is actually an integral part of their response to the preaching about Jesus. It actually falls at the same point in time as they “*accepted the message*” (v41) although the next report of Peter preaching the need to repent has no mention of baptism. In short, their water baptism occurred at the same point in time as their spirit baptism into Jesus.

This is confirmed by the accounts of Philip’s preaching to the followers of Simon the Sorcerer in Samaria. They believe the truth and are said to be baptised: “*But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptised*” (Acts 8:12-13).

This was significant because up until this point there were no non-Jewish believers. The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to investigate. It is only after they pray and place their hands on the Samaritans that “*they received the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 8:17). There is no call for another water baptism after their reception of the Holy Spirit. In an interesting epilogue, Simon the ex-

sorcerer (who has actually already been water baptised) sees this event and wants to buy the power to do the same. His water baptism obviously did not mean Christian maturity. You can be water baptised and still miss the point of spirit baptism.

A little later in the book of Acts, an Ethiopian eunuch actually requested water baptism himself from Philip after Philip had explained the good news about Jesus. Philip was happy to oblige- so water baptism can be a helpful part of beginning to following Christ. (Acts 8: 36).

As part of Paul's dramatic conversion and calling, we have the simple report that he *"got up and was baptised"* (Acts: 9:18)... this is spelt out a bit by Paul's own account of Ananias' command recorded in Acts 22:16 *"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name"*. Water baptism was again tightly associated with the beginning of Christian life or spirit baptism into Jesus.

The issue of who could receive water baptism was a real one for the early church. When Gentiles first hear the message of Jesus as Peter preaches to Cornelius and his family and friends. *"The Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message"*. Peter sees this and asks *'Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have'* So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:47-48). An angel had already told Cornelius that Peter would bring a message *"through which you and all your household will be saved* (Acts: 11:14).

Peter justified his acceptance and fellowship with Gentiles by saying to the Jewish Christians *"Then I remembered what the Lord had said 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit'"*. The issue wasn't really the timing or type of water baptism, but whether non-Jewish people who were normally cut off from God's people could actually become a part of the people of God. Water Baptism powerfully displayed the unity in Jesus the Gentiles already had with Jewish disciples through their spirit baptism.

The phenomenon of non-Jews becoming Christians and being baptised along with their household or family continues in the book of Acts. So Lydia from Phillippi *"...opened her heart to respond to Paul's message, When she and the members of her household were baptised she invited us to her home."* (Acts 16:15). The Philippian Jailer believed *"then immediately he and all his family were baptised"* (see Acts 16:29-34). We see here that whole family units become Christians and are baptised together. After Paul's preaching in Corinth we have the report *"...many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised* (Acts 18:8).

In the final reference to baptism in Acts, Paul meets about 12 men in Ephesus who had never even heard of the Holy Spirit, but they had been water baptised by John. Paul explains to them that; *"John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is in Jesus.'* On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19: 15). Straight after this, Paul places his hands on them and the *"Holy Spirit comes upon them"* (Acts 19:6).

So they were water baptised by John as they repent, then they were *"baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus"*. This second baptism does not appear to be one with water. Only after this do they receive the Holy Spirit and also speak in tongues and prophesy but there is no mention of a third baptism with water after they receive the Holy Spirit. Their water baptism happened before they are spirit baptised into Jesus.

Romans... and baptism

In Romans, Paul uses *"baptism"* in the context of being united with Christ in his death: *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"*. Paul is writing to Christians, and equates their becoming Christians with being baptised into Christ. If this is not the case, then those Christians who never have water baptism have no assurance of resurrection life. This is an unlikely reading. So Paul assumes Baptism into Christ is the same as becoming a Christian- not a water baptism.

Corinthians... and baptism

The lack of emphasis on water baptism is seen clearly in the next reference to baptism, in 1Corinthians 1, where Paul castigates the church for the quarrels and divisions caused by water

baptism there: *“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptise any of you except Crisps and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptised into my name. (Yes, I also baptised the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptised anyone else) For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the Gospel...”* (1 Corinthians 1:13-17).

This is a clear statement that water baptism is not actually part of the Gospel message. It is peripheral and not worth fighting over. The real issue of course in Paul's mind was this; were they *“in Christ”*? If they were, then they should not be quarrelling over the details of water Baptism. The real point of *Baptism* here is again equated with being a part of God's people.

In 1Corinthians 12:13 we read of the fact that all parts of the church body, despite their different functions and gifts have the same baptism. *“For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free.”*

In 1Corinthians 15:29-30 Paul again refers to baptism. It is an unusual text talking about *“those ...who are baptised for the dead”*. It occurs in the context of an argument Paul is making for the absolute necessity of belief in the Resurrection of the dead. He makes no positive or negative judgments about the weird practice of baptising for the dead. He just points out it would be a waste of time with no resurrection *“If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised for them?”* (v29). Paul is not particularly concerned about stopping this variety of water baptism.

Ephesians... and baptism

In Ephesians 4, Paul is urging his Christian readers to *“make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (Eph 4:3). This is after he has spelt out the wonderful truth that God has provided the way to become members of his household in Jesus. He then goes on to say *“There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called to one hope when you were called one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father* (Ephesians 4: 4-6.)

What is the *“one baptism”* that unites all Christians? Well it certainly isn't the way we practice water-baptism... it is what that should point to, the spirit baptism that happens when we become disciples of Christ and turn to him in trust as the Holy Spirit works in us. That is the one baptism all Christians do have. It is at the heart of Jesus' purpose- to Baptise with the Spirit.

Colossians... and baptism

In Colossians 2 a comparison is made between external symbols of being a part of the people of God and the reality, or *“the circumcision done by the bands of men”* and *“the circumcision done by Christ”* (v11-12). Paul says that the *“circumcision done by Christ”* belongs to those who have been *“buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead* (Col 2:12). It would hardly make sense if this were referring to water baptism. The point being made is that just as those who had physically been circumcised were part of Israel, those who are Christians have been baptised not in an external way by man, but by Christ himself. That is the point: Real baptism is what happens when we are immersed into Christ.

Peter... and baptism

In 1Peter 3:21 there is a correspondence seen between the waters around the ark of Noah and baptism. *“God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Christ.”* (1Peter 20-21)

There is a parallel seen between God's Judgment in the floodwaters and baptism. The deliverance into a new life for Noah and his family through floodwaters symbolise baptism. Peter is concerned to stop any false ideas on baptism by stressing that it is not in the outward action or the *“removal of dirt”* that happens with water, but in the inner response of faith to God. The heart of baptism is, says Peter, the way Christians can relate to God with a *“clear conscience”*.

Hebrews... and baptism

In Hebrews 6:2, the writer appeals to his readers to *“Leave the elementary teachings, and go onto maturity”*. One of the things listed as *“elementary”* is *“instructions about baptisms”*. We don't know very much about what these instructions were, but we do know that they were not really a hallmark

of maturity in Christ. The rest of Hebrews talks about the certainty of God's promise because of what Christ have already done.

Hebrews 9:10 also mentions "baptisms" in the context of the external, ceremonial, symbolic actions of the old covenant: "various ceremonial *washings* (the actual word used is "*baptisms*") external regulations applying until the time of the new order". No doubt this use of the word "baptism" is referring to the ceremonial cleaning required according to the Old Testament Law (for example Lev 13 & 14).

Which model?

That brings us to the end of our overview of the New Testament use of the word "*baptism*". It will be obvious that it is certainly not a simple matter. There is difference in the very use of the word "*baptism*" in the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles. Water baptism is never actually explained comprehensively. It is just described as happening and without great detail. If water baptism were such an important issue to have uniform practice in the church, it would be defined very clearly and without ambiguity.

In this overview of "baptism" we see that there is not one model for what water baptism is. There are big differences in the way the water baptisms occurred in the different situations. Sometimes water baptism happens before the Holy Spirit is received, sometimes after. Water baptism is never any guarantee that the person undergoing it is a mature Christian, or has even heard of the baptism of Jesus.

There are no details or requirements given as to the amount of water or the method of water baptism. Sometimes a single person, sometimes a group, sometimes men, sometimes women, sometimes men and women, sometimes a whole family receive it. Infants are never specifically mentioned, either as not being able to go through water baptism or as actually going through it. What we can say is that texts referring to water baptism happening to a whole household and family leave it as a very real probability.

The whole point of "*baptism*" in water however is highlighted as the state of being "*in Christ*" and is pointing to a spiritual, rather than a physical event involving water. This is an important point to note, as the actual teaching in the New Testament on the significance of baptism is not to do with the details of water baptism (as we have seen above), but the reality of the Christian person's baptism into Christ.

With this in mind, it is understandable that churches have developed a number of practices of water baptism. That is not the problem so much as the attempts to justify or prove one model over another. This process can lead some to be exclusivist on a peripheral point at the expense of a central one.

The one test all models of water baptism must pass is whether or not it becomes a barrier to the true gospel message that is at the heart of our spiritual baptism.

For believers...

The approach of believers' baptism is commendable in that it ties in nicely with the idea of the spiritual baptism. There can be no serious doubt about the helpfulness of this model on the basis of the New Testament. Indeed, as we have seen, to believe the message and trust in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit is to be "*baptised*" into Christ in the spiritual sense. If a water baptism can physically symbolise this reality, then it is not unbiblical or unhelpful. Most church systems do not actively oppose believer's baptism. Bondi Anglican is very positive about water baptising people who have become Christians, whatever their age.

According to the texts, water baptism often occurred at around the same time as believing the message. This is where most modern practice is very different: We often wait for a period of years after conversion before even thinking about water baptism. That is no problem in itself apart from the fact that what is presented as "biblical water baptism" is not in very many respects.

The idea of someone "believing" in this approach has generally been defined as someone who has reached an "age of accountability". This is a not a biblical term, and it begs the question: who determines at what age someone is accountable? Does God only extend his grace to those who can speak? The emphasis falls on a personal confession of faith, which in itself is not unhelpful, but can tend to underplay God's sovereign role in saving us, and over emphasise our own response.

Another tendency is to see water baptism as a necessary part of the Gospel. So after someone becomes a Christian, water baptism should follow in obedience to Christ. It can be mis-used when the implication is made that those people not baptised with water as a self-conscious believer are not in fact members of the Christian church. We have seen that the biblical texts don't allow us to say this.

Despite these dangers, this practice of water baptism is not always inappropriate, and very often is a healthy option for those who have become Christians, and have not already been water baptised. It is not in conflict with the truth of the Gospel.

For infants...

The practice of infant baptism cannot be ruled out on biblical grounds. The Bible nowhere forbids it, and there are texts from which it can be inferred that infants were participants in water baptism. It can be used to helpfully symbolise the truths of the Gospel promises for all who believe.

The potential problem with this practice is the tendency to suppose that the water baptism itself imparts or infuses some grace from God. Some churches actually have this implication made explicit as it is written into their baptism liturgy. It has been misused in Church history and can encourage the worst kind of nominal Christianity. So people say things like *"Oh yeah, I'm a Christian ...I've been baptised as a baby haven't I?"* regardless of their views on Jesus and relationship to him.

But this kind of nominalism has also occurred where the water baptism of older people is the norm. Baptist churches can develop a culture where it is expected that groups of youth or young adults will get baptised as a matter of course around a certain age.

It seems inappropriate on the basis of the text of scripture and the **principle of spiritual baptism** to water baptise infants from non-Christian parents. The problem is that it has been standard practice amongst many denominational heritages for many years, and as a result the true meaning of the symbolism has been all but destroyed in many instances. This practice goes back to the institutionalising and merging of Church and Empire during Constantine's reign over the Roman Empire. He made Christianity into the official religion of Rome and so to be born in Rome was to be born in the Christian Church, and so it was assumed Baptism of infants was appropriate.

In the case of Christian families, water baptism of infants can be practiced in a helpful way that is not in conflict with the Gospel. It can highlight the promises God gives to those who will trust Him. In this practice, children of Christian parents may choose to reject the household or family Christian belief when they reach the so called *"age of accountability"*. Or they can continue to live in the Christian heritage in which they were raised, and to which their water-baptism as an infant pointed.

By total immersion ... or?

There is no account in the New Testament that unambiguously states that any of the baptisms conducted were by total immersion... That cannot be argued with. However the very Greek word *"To Baptise"* can mean *"immerse, dip, or submerge"*. It also fits in with the accounts of John baptising in the river Jordan. It is also consistent with the Greek language of the classical times, and generally in the Greek of the New Testament. This being said, we still cannot make the assertion that it **always** meant immersion whenever it was used. For example, the references to *"baptism"* in Hebrews 6:2 and 9:10 when talking of ceremonial cleanings make this clear.

It seems likely that immersion was the method of water baptism from John on. This is not to say that every other amount or method is inappropriate. Immersion ties in symbolically with the passages explaining the reality of the spiritual baptism every Christian has received in Christ. So the text in Romans 6:35 talking of every Christian's identification with Jesus' death burial and resurrection is wonderfully symbolised by immersion, but we cannot push the biblical text to give us immersion as a requirement. Other ways of practicing water baptism may still be used without becoming un-Christian.

Baptism and this Church in Bondi and Waverley.

All of the discussion above will be important for us as congregations. We can go back to the basics and try to let our practice reflect what we find in God's Word. We can tolerate different practices as long as they don't pull away from central Gospel truth.

As we do that, the real heart of baptism can be our focus and we will be defined as a church by the important truths that water baptism merely points to. Alternatively, we can choose one method and stick to that, and in the process become defined by the peripheral details that the Bible doesn't even try to discuss.

We need to understand and accept that there can be a variety of water baptismal practice. It all comes down to being willing to tolerate others doing things in a different way. That is precisely what makes water baptism into a "Disputable matter", there are so many possible methods. There is no call to give up your commitment to one method in favour of another but there is a call to bear with the other person who has another opinion.

Water-baptism of infants of Christian parents can be done in a way that is very helpful. As mentioned above, it can also be done in a very unhelpful way. As an Anglican I want to recognise the good and the bad practice in this area. Anglicans can and do baptise people beyond infancy.

I suggest that the practice of water baptising infants of parents who can say they are Christians and want their infants to become Christians is an extremely helpful practice. I also suggest we should water-baptise those people who have become Christians later in life who have not yet been water baptised. This is essentially what the 27th article of the 39 Articles says.

If people become Christians and want to be baptised in water, we can immerse them. The symbolism is graphic. For those who have never had a meaningful Christian water baptism, an immersion water baptism is a great thing to accompany their new life in Christ.

This is typical of mission situations where people are exposed to the message of Jesus for the first time. At Bondi, we are in a mission situation. We come across many people who fall into this category. This will mean we give people the opportunity for water baptism after they have turned for forgiveness through Christ and to follow him.

Rather than weakening our stance on the Bible and Evangelical witness, accepting the variety in water baptism practice helps. It more accurately reflect the scriptural teaching on baptism and highlight the unity all Christians have in the "one baptism" all this variety points to; our spirit baptism that happens when we become disciples of Christ.

Martin Morgan

For Bondi and Waverley Anglican Church revised in 2014 and 2020 from previous paper written in 1996 for Orange Evangelical Church.

Feel free to contact Martin with any questions; martin@bondichurch.org