

Dual Confessional

To be Dual Confessional is to recognize there are two confessional statements that are accepted by Providence Church as doctrinally trustworthy: The Westminster Confession and The London Confession of 1689. In these confessions there is much material that is held in common (including the doctrines expressed in the historic creeds: Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, Creed of Chalcedon, and Athanasian Creed; and the confessions' clear teachings on the sufficiency of Scripture and the doctrines of grace) but there are several points of disagreement particularly in the area of the sacraments or ordinances. The differences that exist between these confessions are also found between members of Providence Church.

Baptism

Christ's command to be baptized (Matthew 28:19) is so clear that the repudiation of it is serious enough to keep a person from local church membership. Neither baptismal practice credobaptism (credobaptism is baptism after a personal confession of faith) or paedobaptism (baptism of an infant or child not yet capable of a personal confession of faith) involves baptismal regeneration (spiritual rebirth) or the guarantee of saving grace. Regarding the meaning of baptism, the credobaptist London Confession of 1689 says it is "a sign of his fellowship with Him, in His death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into Him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life." While the paedobaptist Westminster Confession of 1647 says about the meaning of baptism that it is "not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life."

Dual Confessional and Baptism

Providence Church recognizes that sincere, well intentioned Christians, on the basis of their study of Scripture, have come to different conclusions with respect to the timing and mode of baptism. Given the principle differences between the positions, Providence Church recognizes that it appears logically impossible for both the credobaptist and paedobaptist positions to be equally faithful and consistent with the overall teaching of Scripture and, to the degree that this is the case, are in error. We know that as each individual person embraces one of these baptismal positions, the tendency is to place this doctrinal stance as a barrier of fellowship and communion toward those holding the opposing position. We do not regard the biblical commands regarding timing and mode of baptism to require breaking fellowship with one another. Providence Church has therefore chosen to allocate the decision of timing and mode of baptism, not administration, to each individual family or to the individual.

The Christian Family and Household Membership

Due to our dual confessional nature, membership in Providence Church is by Christian family household or by individual adult if there is no other family present in the Church. In relation to church membership, we define a Christian family as one which has at least one baptized believing adult with spouse or baptized believing adult who is a parent or guardian of the children. Infants and children of such families are “holy” and are a vital part of the local church community. We desire to have children present in our corporate worship and to have them participate in the service as much as possible to foster Christian growth and to provide the needed nurture and care in the community of faith.

Membership in the Universal Church

Membership in the universal church is through regeneration (spiritual rebirth) and the work of the Holy Spirit who baptizes us into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Membership in Providence Church

Providence Church is a local church and a Christian body of baptized believers functioning as a living organism with local government (elders and deacons). Certain practices are to take place in that organism: gatherings for worship, the regular practice of communion, church discipline, prayer, and sharing of God’s Word. There should be the use of the gifts of the people, sharing of resources including tithing, and discipleship. Thus we define membership in the following way: A person is a member of Providence Church if one (1) confesses the Lordship of Jesus Christ and is baptized, (2) attends Providence Church regularly and partakes in the Lord’s Table, (3) acknowledges the government of Providence Church. A person who joins Providence Church should also (4) desire to use one’s gifts in Providence Church, and (5) want to share resources with those in need in Providence Church and with the Church’s ministries. If a person or family fits this definition, it would be good to meet with the elders and affirm to them the desire to be considered a member of Providence Church. The elders will then corroborate that desire. In addition to the members mentioned above, the children of those who are members are included in the household membership of Providence Church until or unless they establish their own home, choose to abandon Providence Church membership, change local church membership or are excommunicated.-

Open Communion

Providence Church practices Open Communion, which permits participation in communion by all confessing baptized Christians who are not under discipline by another Bible-believing, non-heretical church (as defined by the historic Creeds).

Credobaptists and Communion

Credobaptists in Providence Church respect the statements regarding baptism in the London Confession of 1689. Regarding communion, the London Confession states that “ignorant and ungodly persons” should not be permitted to the Table. Ignorant children of member parents or guardians should accordingly be considered non-communicant (not participants in the Lord’s Supper) members of

Providence Church. The London Confession adds, “Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith...”

Paedobaptists and Communion

Within the paedobaptist tradition of the universal church there has been, and continues to be, disagreement regarding who should be permitted to come to partake of the communion meal. Appealing to the Westminster Confession of Faith, some believe that the “ignorant” should not be permitted to the table. The ignorant would include the baptized children of parents who are membered in Providence Church. Such children should be considered non-communicant members of Providence Church.

Others in this tradition depart from the Westminster Confession and believe that baptized children should be permitted to partake in communion once old enough to ingest food. Such a practice is consistent with family participation in the Old Covenant meals and feasts. These children are considered communicant (participants in the Lord’s Supper) members of Providence Church.

Within these parameters, Providence Church permits this exception to The Westminster Confession and allocates the option to paedobaptist families to bring or not to bring their baptized children to the Communion Table on the basis of their diligent study and understanding of Scripture.

Choosing a Confession

Parents, guardians, or individual adults are free to choose which trustworthy confession they will adhere to according to their diligent understanding of Scripture and their own conscience. We expect families to discuss with the elders their position on the participation of their children in communion.

Whatever practice parents decide upon they are encouraged to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Those who practice credocommunion should not wait until their children are old enough to make a verbal confession of faith to begin training their children in the faith. Likewise, those who practice paedocommunion should not presume God’s grace but diligently instruct and nurture their children in the faith. We do not hold to sacramentalism (salvation through practice of the sacraments); salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

Concluding Comments

Given the differing views on the issues of baptism and communion that are held by the confessions embraced by Providence Church, there will be times when there will be teachings from the pulpit with which some may disagree. We expect those who preach on these issues will do so in a gracious and non-condescending manner where there is known disagreement.

Given the differing views in Providence Church, the elders encourage the members to remain teachable and to not be afraid of openly discussing these issues. These deliberations should be conducted with humility, gentleness, patience, and with forbearance to one another in love and the bond of peace.

