

Catholic, Reformed agree on approach to baptism

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [March 6, 2013](#) issue

Leaders of Catholic and Reformed churches have signed an agreement to recognize each other's sacraments of baptism—a public step toward unity among groups that are often divided by doctrine.

“Baptism establishes the bond of unity existing among all who are part of Christ's body and is therefore the sacramental basis for our efforts to move towards visible unity,” reads the Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism.

The document was signed, after seven years of discussion, at a worship service January 29 at St. Mary Cathedral in Austin, Texas, which opened the annual meeting of Christian Churches Together in the USA, an ecumenical network created in 2001.

Signers represented the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the Roman Catholic Church and the United Church of Christ.

While most of the Reformed denominations already recognized Catholic baptisms, the statement puts an official stamp on mutual recognition of baptisms by each of the church groups. The document calls for extending invitations to each other's baptism ceremonies and attesting to individuals' baptisms when a church requests documentation.

It states that water and a reference to the Trinity—“Father, Son and Holy Spirit”—are required for the mutual recognition of baptisms. “This ecumenical effort, this mutual recognition of baptism, is part of our response to Jesus' prayer that ‘we may all be one,’” said Bishop Joe Vasquez, the Catholic leader of Austin.

The agreement, which applies solely to churches in the U.S., is unusual elsewhere. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the Reformed Church in America and an expert on ecumenical relations, said such agreements also exist in Australia and Germany.

He called the signing a “significant step of healing and reconciliation, and could open the way toward addressing other issues where we remain painfully divided. It’s an ecumenical accomplishment, which [is] rare these days, and worth celebrating.”
—RNS

This article was edited Feb. 19, 2013.