



Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



5 Things to Consider for Baptisms in Natural Bodies of Water

📅 June 05, 2017

The Bible often uses water as a symbol of cleansing the sinner by washing away their sins through baptism. Although we attribute positive connotations to this symbolism, we must acknowledge the dangers that accompany natural bodies of water.

It is preferable for baptisms to take place in an indoor tank, which is not subject to the unpredictability of the weather or the unknown potential dangers that lay within bodies of water. Since it is not uncommon for baptisms to take place in natural bodies of water, it is important that we equip ourselves with our risk control armory to minimize the risks. So, what should we consider when planning baptisms in natural bodies of water?

- 1. Conduct a risk assessment before the baptism** – Check the surroundings and ask yourself: Is there a clear approach to the water? Are there any rocks or potholes under the water that could cause injury to the participants and/or cause them to lose their balance? What creatures are known to inhabit the water and are any of them harmful to humans? Is the bed of the water of a firm foundation or could it potentially give way under weight? Are there any warning signs around the water? Does the body of water lead to a nearby waterfall?
- 2. Inform the local authorities of your plans, if applicable** – Depending on the location of the body of water, some local authorities may require notification of your intentions. They may have requirements as to what activities are allowed in the water. They may have General/Public Liability coverage requirements or even provide a health and safety listing of things to consider when performing the activity. The real benefit is the local knowledge gleaned from the local authorities about accidents that have happened in the past, and ideal ways to avoid those issues.
- 3. Consider the water conditions just before the baptism** – It is a good idea to check the weather forecast on the day of the baptism to see whether any severe weather may suddenly appear. Is the water likely to be turbulent? Is the water temperature conducive to carrying out a baptism? What direction is the current pulling and is it strong enough to drag participants under or away? Are you aware of the times that the tide is coming in or going out? If you do not have sufficient information or the conditions are adverse, it may be worth postponing the event.

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4. **Bring appropriate lifesaving/protective equipment** – Floatation aids and lifejackets should be available. Plan to have enough protective equipment for all those participating in the baptismal services. Is lightweight protective footwear the best for this waterbed or would it be appropriate to wear nothing on your feet at all? Would it be practical to go into the water in just a bathing costume or, if it is cold, should participants wear thicker clothes? Keep in mind thick clothing absorbs water and can be a hazard for an unschooled swimmer as they may be unable to keep themselves afloat. If the water is cold, is a change of warm clothes available for the baptismal candidate, so they are not sitting in a wet towel and potentially getting sick?

5. **Enlist the relevant personnel** - As with *any* event, relevant and appropriate human resources should be employed. When arranging a baptism one should consider the ratio of supervisors to attendees. Do you have sufficient trained lifeguards (if available) or an adequate number of first-aid trained supervisors to assist in an emergency?

These are just a few points for consideration in planning your open water baptisms. Risk control is one of the church's best defenses in our armory against the threat of loss. How we manage the Lord's assets, whether it be church buildings, offices or our church members, is essential to the continuity of our ministry.

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