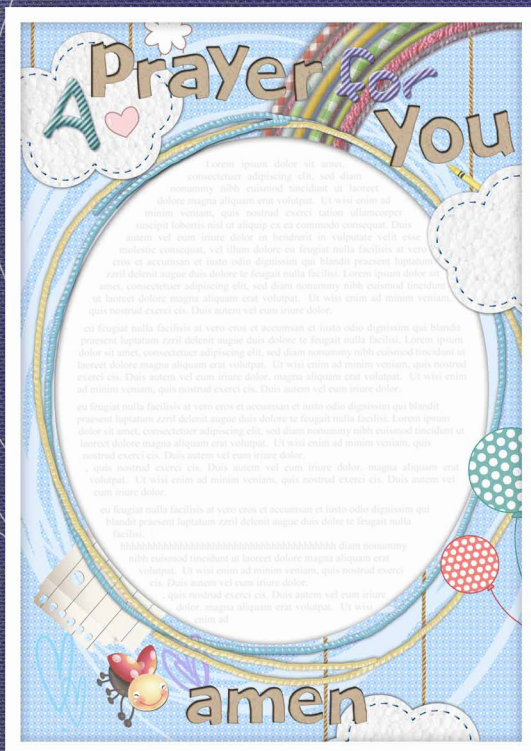


First Steps

GUIDELINES

USING THE SALVATION ARMY FIRST STEPS DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING MATERIAL




PRODUCED BY THE SALVATION ARMY SOUTHERN TERRITORY
MISSION RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
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FIRST STEPS – DEDICATION/THANKSGIVING

When a family has made the decision to have a Dedication ceremony there are a number of key questions that you need to ask and consider. Below are some of these key questions along with information we hope you will find helpful. If you have any further questions or need some support, please contact your Divisional Early Childhood Representative.

WHAT?

What do I need to do?

The decision to have a Dedication ceremony is not made lightly. It is important that we treat this decision with the respect it is due; it is a privilege to walk with and support the family during this time. Once the decision has been made you will need to make some time to meet with the family to discuss the things that need to happen before the ceremony can take place.

We would encourage you to meet with the family on at least one occasion, to go through what the ceremony is and what the family would like to include. Opportunity is given for the family to compose a prayer for their child and you may need to assist them in creating their prayer. An example is included at the end of the document.

What resources will I need?

You will need the Dedication certificate pack that will include two certificates and can be purchased from Salvation Army Supplies. One of the certificates has a space for the above mentioned prayer and the other has a space for a photo (this might be a photo of the child or a photo of the child with their family).

There is a great resource that you might like to use with the family as they prepare for the dedication of their child. Parent Cue is a website that holds lots of resources, e.g. blog, videos, podcasts etc. that are helpful to support parents. In the video section there are six clips that would be helpful for parents as they explore some key parenting strategies to support their child (www.theparentcue.org).

What needs to be included in a Dedication ceremony?

Specific promises and commitments are made by the family before God—refer to The Salvation Army Ceremonies Book, chapter 3, Section 2 for the formal part of the ceremony. We would also encourage you to speak with the family about anything specific they may like to have included in the ceremony to help make it a meaningful time. It is also good to involve those in key roles in the First Steps and wider children's ministries of the corps, in your preparation for this occasion. You may like to think about specific decorations or displays, music, video clips etc. that will help to support the significance of this moment for the family and for the church.

What is a Thanksgiving ceremony?

While a Dedication ceremony is generally requested by Salvationists or other Christian families, there is an alternative known as the Thanksgiving ceremony. This ceremony is generally used by families in your community who many not want to commit to the full Christian promises made in the Dedication ceremony. You will find notes about the Thanksgiving ceremony in Chapter 3, section 3 of the above mentioned ceremonies book. The certificates have been created in such a way that they can be utilised for both ceremonies.



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WHY?

Why is this important?

This is a really special time for a family as they welcome the precious gift of a child into their lives. If they decide that they want to thank God for this gift and have their child dedicated, it is a real privilege to be invited to be a part of this occasion. This is a time where the family needs help and support as they celebrate this gift and also as they look toward the coming years and the child's spiritual development. It is not only support during this special event that is needed but also a faith community that will help and support the child and family in the long term.

The Bible reminds us in a number of places about how important children were to Jesus but also about the importance of sharing the good deeds of the Lord with our children.

'We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders.' (Psalm 78:4)

After the celebration around the dedication, the focus then moves to helping the child on their faith journey—supporting and encouraging them as they explore God and what faith means for them. We want to create a picture based on Deuteronomy 6:5–9:

'And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.'

WHO?

Who is involved?

At the meeting(s) with the family it would be ideal if the whole family is present, e.g. including older siblings etc. Although parts of the discussion will be aimed more at the parents/care givers any other children could be included in suggestions for the ceremony.

Some families might like to have Godparents for the child or you might like to discuss with the family if there are any significant adults they would like to support them on the day who will continue to support the child and the family beyond the ceremony.

Who is making promises?

Because this is a significant step in the life of their child, it is not only the family who are making promises on the day—the rest of the congregation, family and friends also make a promise to support and encourage the family as well as support the child in their faith development journey.

HOW?

How do we support the parents?

This is a very special time not only for the family involved but also for the church community. What a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and give thanks for another precious life. As the family take this significant step, it is important to help and support them with a loving and caring faith community. Many will be aware of how overwhelming it can be to be a new parent and be charged with the care and nurture of a young life,



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so any help and support from others can help make it feel like you are not doing it alone.

Support for the parents as they undertake this role is not the only support required—we also need to support the child as he/she begins to grow and develop, and especially as they start to explore what faith might look like for them. Having a bunch of significant adults in their life—who are going to help support their parents in the role of spiritual development—is a crucial thing that can help the child develop a faith that sticks.

How do we use the Dedication certificates?

You will find two certificates in your Dedication pack. One that has a space for the prayer that has been written by the family for the child, and one that has a space for a photo of either the child on their own or with the rest of the family.

You will find alongside these notes on the website a template document for you to use for the prayer. You can change the font as well as its size depending on how many words are included in the prayer. This can then be printed out and placed at the back of the corresponding prayer certificate. It would be great to have a copy of the prayer on the screen if it is read during the ceremony.

TOP TIP: Use an extra fine permanent marker or regular ballpoint pen. The finish is slightly glossy and you do not want to risk a smudge on this special certificate.

These certificates would look great framed and might be something that the corps would like to do for the family and have ready for the certificates to be put in straight after the ceremony.

How do the parents write their prayer?

Each family will be encouraged to write a prayer including their hopes and dreams for their child. It is important for you to help the parents explore what this might look like and suggest some language as they begin to articulate the dreams they have in mind for their child. We have included some questions, statements and examples in the appendices to help you and the parents as they think about this picture.

We really want this to be the words from the family, so help them by asking questions and suggesting a word to fit, but don't write the whole prayer for them—this is about their desires for their child.

VISIT WITH PARENTS/CARE GIVERS

This will include talking with the parents/care givers about what a dedication is as well as some things they may like to include in the Service.

It is important for you to help the parents to understand that they are the one primarily responsible for the discipling of their child. Introduce the key spiritual truths that would be beneficial for their child to know and understand before they head off to school:

- We are made by God.
- We are loved by God.
- We can be friends with God always.

Below are some discussion points to include when you are visiting with the family:

- ✓ Dedication is not salvation. In some churches the Christening service is understood as the time when the child receives salvation and can, thereafter, be considered a Christian. However, in a Salvation Army Dedi-



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cation the focus is on the commitment the parents make to God to raise the child in a Christian manner; it is the hope and prayer of the parents that one day the child will make their own personal commitment to God. It is also an opportunity for the parents to thank God for the gift of the child.

- ✓ Have some discussion with the family about other elements that they might like to include in the ceremony, e.g. songs, images, props, other family members, photographs etc.
- ✓ It would be important to ask the family if they have considered inviting someone to support their child, either as a godparent or as a key adult who will encourage the child in their spiritual journey.
- ✓ Earlier in these notes we referred to the Parent Cue website where you will find six helpful clips about key parenting strategies. You might like to look at some of the clips with the parents or encourage them to look at some as these as they may be helpful for the parents in their preparation for writing their prayer and the Dedication ceremony.
- ✓ Go prepared with information regarding programs that your Corps/Faith Community may offer for their family including different age groups, genders and transition stages.

Writing a prayer for their child as they celebrate this milestone event...

- ✓ Perhaps you could say to the family, 'As part of an international movement, The Salvation Army, you stand with people all around the world when you make these promises. However, you have the opportunity to customise this special milestone by writing a prayer that talks about the goals, hopes, prayers and dreams you have in mind for your child.'
- ✓ Spend some time with the parents/caregivers going through their thoughts and reflections to questions similar to these:
 - What sort of person do you hope your child will become?
 - What are the hopes and dreams you have for your child?
 - Who are the people/sorts of people you would want supporting/influencing your child's life?
 - What would be your desires and dream for your child, going beyond being healthy and happy?
 - I wonder what sorts of experiences you would want your child to know.
 - I wonder what sorts of relationships they would be a part of.
- ✓ It would be helpful for them to start by writing down some dot points of the key things they would like to include.
- ✓ Below you will see an example of a prayer. This is an opportunity for the family to put into words the hopes and dreams they have for their child as they grow and develop. Note that this is not about just taking the sample and changing the names—encourage the family to use their own words and language so that it sounds like it is coming from them.
- ✓ The template you will find on the website for typing the prayer into will fit a range of prayers. It might be a short prayer using a large font or a longer prayer using a normal-sized font. You should be looking at approximately 200–400 words of normal-sized font as a gauge for putting this prayer together.
- ✓ Spend some time with the family in prayer before finishing your time together.



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Example of a Prayer

Dear God,

We pray that ... never loses her/his love for people. That she/he always shares her/his wide and beautiful smile to bring peace and joy to others. We pray that she/he will believe the best of all people and be quick to forgive. We pray for her/his good health, her/his kind soul, courage to stand up for what is right and patience to wait for God's plan in her/his life.

We pray for those people who surround her/him; that she/he would:

- know a sense of achievement from good teachers
- experience the fun and care of firm friendships
- learn from the successes and challenges of teams
- grow in the knowledge of God's love through the church
- and develop in the security of her loving family.

We pray that ... will always know how much we love her/him. That she/he will keep her/his sense of adventure to travel and experience other cultures. That she/he will be generous and know the joy of giving to others. That she/he will have a hunger for learning and a passion for life. Above all, we pray that your Holy Spirit would teach her/him, your wisdom would guide her/him and your love would move her/him. We pray that everyday ... will do something that will help her/him grow in her/his relationship with you.

Amen.



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