

Planning a Dedication/Thanksgiving Ceremony

When a family has made the decision to have a Dedication/Thanksgiving ceremony there are several things to take into consideration, below is some guiding information that will be beneficial towards the planning of the ceremony. If you have any further questions or need some support, please contact your Children's Secretary.

WHAT?

What do I need to do?

The decision to have a Dedication/Thanksgiving ceremony is not made lightly. It is important that this decision is treated with the respect it is due; it is a privilege to walk with and support the family during this time and beyond. Time will need to be set apart with the family to discuss the things that need to happen prior to the ceremony taking place, it is recommended that you meet with the family on at least one occasion to discuss what the ceremony is and what the family would like to include. There is also opportunity for the family to compose a prayer for their child, this may need guided support for the family to do so.

What resources will I need?

There are a variety of certificates that can be used for this purpose, which are able to be purchased through [The National Children's Team](#). These include 2 varieties of Dedication certificates and one of the Thanksgiving certificates. They are available in Single & Dual Parent formats.



There is a great resource that can be used to support the family as they prepare for the ceremony of their child. [Parenting for Faith](#) is a website that holds lots of resources that are helpful to support parents. There are [3 videos](#) that we recommend that speak to supporting the family to growing faith in the home.

What needs to be included in the Ceremony?

Specific promises and commitments are made by the family before God—refer to [The Salvation Army Ceremonies Book](#), chapter 3, for the formal part of the ceremony, this covers both Dedication (section 2) & Thanksgiving (section 3) Ceremonies.

As mentioned, it is recommended that you discuss with the family what they would like to include in the ceremony in making it a meaningful time for them. This may include music or a display and will help in supporting the significance for this moment for the family and for the church. It is also recommended to involve those in key roles in children's ministries of the corps to assist in highlighting the ongoing support of the faith community in the family's life and this decision.

What is a Thanksgiving Ceremony?

While a Dedication ceremony is generally requested by Salvationists or other Christian families, the alternative is a Thanksgiving Ceremony which is generally used by families in your community who may 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.

WHY?

Why is this important?

This is a 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 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 several 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 ceremony, 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. older siblings etc. Although parts of the discussion will be aimed more at the parents/caregivers, 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/caregivers?

This is a very special time not only for the family involved but also for the faith 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, so any help and support from others can help make it feel like you are not doing it alone.

Support for the parents/caregivers as they undertake this role is not the only support required—we also need to support the child as they begin 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 the parents write their prayer?

Each family will be encouraged to write a prayer for their child.

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 family may need support in writing their prayer, so spend some time with the parents/caregivers going through their thoughts and reflections to the 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 to influence 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.

Dear ...

Today we dedicate your life back to God, and also say this prayer as we think about who you are and where you're headed. ... we pray that you laugh often. Never take yourself or life too seriously and remember that a smile is contagious. We pray that you will have a heart for others, one that is overflowing with love. At times it will get broken, but through those experiences you will also learn and grow.

... we pray that you dream big. Never stop hoping or dreaming for what could be. You're never too young to start and you'll never be too old to stop. Take the time to notice the people around you. Please remember that you are never alone, that in your hardest times there are people who love you and will support you. You are valued and loved!

... we pray that you will take the time to see the world through God's eyes, the eyes of the one who created it all and loves you. Never be afraid to question your faith, because it's only by doing this that you will gain a deeper relationship with God. We promise, God is big enough to take on all your doubts and fears, and will love you through whatever you throw his way.

... take time to sit and listen to others. Equally important, don't be afraid to open yourself up and let people into your own life; it'll expand your world. We pray you will be yourself, ... whatever that looks like. Find and surround yourself with people who will help you become the best version of yourself, and never be afraid to just be who you are. Life won't always be easy, and things will happen that you won't understand, but look for God in those situations because we promise he will still be there.

... just love. Love God, love others, and love who you are. Have the courage to simply be yourself, to help others, and to be God's hands and feet to help make the world a better place.

Love and prayers for always,

Mum and Dad

VISIT WITH PARENTS/CARE GIVERS

This will include talking with the parents about what happens in the ceremony as well as some things they may like to include.

It is important for you to help the parents to understand that they are the one primarily responsible for the discipling of their child but as a faith community, you are supporting them in doing so. 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 Dedication 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.
- Go prepared with information regarding programs that your Corps/Faith Community may offer for their family including different age groups, genders and transition stages.

Spend some time with the family in prayer before finishing your time together.

