

Welcoming a Child into the Family of God

Cover Letter:

The leaders of the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada are developing resources that will help our churches build a unified identity amidst our rich diversity. The first stage of this process is identifying the rites of passage from birth to grave that we would like to recognize with our congregations. We are preparing a package of liturgies and practices that churches can incorporate into their worship experiences.

In this package, we offer a service for welcoming infants into the life of the congregation. Where often parents initiate the desire to dedicate their child to God, the dedication service may occur several months after the birth of the child or completion of adoption. It is based on the faith of the parents and their desire to raise their child in a Christian home.

A welcoming service is intended to be initiated by the church and ideally would occur the first Sunday that the child attends worship, or as soon after birth/adoption as possible. It is not based on the faith of the parents, but rather on the openness of the church to embrace this gift of God and to celebrate the beauty of new life. It symbolizes the grace of God that receives all children in his name. Parents who may not be ready to commit to the life of the congregation may be ministered to and drawn closer by a service that celebrates the life of their child.

For parents who would like to enter into the commitment as an affirmation of their own faith we have included a dedication section that combines the welcoming and dedication into one celebration. To recover an ancient practice rich in symbolism, we have included an option for anointing the infant with oil. This section can be used with the welcoming service or the dedication/welcoming service. Parents who come from a faith tradition that practices infant baptism may be comfortable with this anointing in place of water baptism as is in keeping with our Baptist tradition of believer's baptism.

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(Invite the family forward during the children's story when the children are all gathered at the front. Have a rose in the pulpit signifying the new birth/adoption.)

Pastor: Children are gifts given by God to be held with delight and joy. In the gospels, we read that Jesus took a little child just as we are doing today with (name of child) into his arms, and said, "whoever welcomes one little child such as this one in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Following the example of Jesus, we wish to welcome (name of child) in Jesus' name; knowing that we welcome not (name of child) alone, but also Jesus, and far more than that – we also welcome God who sent him.

As a rose opens in its own time to its own unique beauty, so it is our desire that this child grow and blossom into all that God has created him/her to be. We acknowledge today that Jesus has already welcomed this little one with his abundant grace.

Litany: *Please join in the following litany affirming life as we celebrate the arrival of _____.*

Pastor: "For God has formed (child's name) in his/her mother's womb, so we will praise God for (he/she) is fearfully and wonderfully made: Marvelous are His works.

Congregation: How precious also are Your thoughts to (child's name), O God! How great is the sum of them!

Pastor: God said, "Before I formed (child's name) in the womb, I knew her/him.

Congregation: "Before (child's name) was born God sanctified (her/him).

Pastor: (Address the child) What a privilege to have you here and to hold you in our arms.

Parents: We are so glad that God has given this little boy/girl to us whom we have named (name of child). We rejoice that you are here and that God has entrusted your life to us.

All: With Christ's help, we will give you space and time to become all that God desires you to be and by the power of the Spirit, provide all that you need to feel safe, nourished, loved and esteemed.

Prayer

"Heavenly Father, how good you are!

How wonderful are your works!

We praise you for all your gifts

And especially for your gift to us of this dear child.

We take him/her to our hearts and welcome him/her into our church family as a token of your love;

And gratefully we give him/her back to you,

To love and serve you all his/her days,

In the name of Jesus our Lord."

Dedication (This section is optional according to the desires of the parents)

Pastor: Your love for God and for one another will model before (child's name) a love for God that he/she will also desire for his/herself. Do you {parent(s) name(s)}, vow, by God's help and in partnership with your family, friends and church, to provide (child's name) a Christian home of love and peace, and to raise him/her in truth to love, follow and obey the ways of Christ?

Parents: With God's help, we do.

Godparents' Vow

Do you, (names), hereby declare your desire to help (parent's names) fulfill the vow they have just made by becoming (child's name) Godparents and encouraging them in their efforts to raise (child's name) to love God and follow Christ. **(We do.)**

Family's Vow

Do you as parents and family members acknowledge and commit yourselves to the special role you have in (child's name) life and to treasure him/her and call forth his/her gifts and abilities. **(We do.)**

Friends' and Church's Vow

Following the leading of the Holy Spirit, will you come along side (parents' names) in ways that encourage (child's name) to encounter God's love in this community of faith? **(We will.)**

Anointing (optional):

The use of oil is rich with meaning from the Hebrew culture. The abundance of olive oil was a symbol of God's blessing, for oil was used in cooking, to light lamps, valued for its healing properties as well as for beautification and often a guest was honored with the anointing of oil. This day, we want to anoint (child's name) with all of this wonderful symbolism in mind. May the blessings of the Father, the light of the Son and the healing joy of the Holy Spirit be upon this child all of his/her days.

The Blessing

Under the old covenant, in the Old Testament, the priests pronounced a blessing on the people. However, since we are now in Jesus, we are "being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood." [1 Peter 2:5] Therefore, since we are called upon to be priests to one another, let us join together to pronounce the blessing on this child today, as words of welcome, affirmation, love, and thanksgiving for this child's life, and his/her continued journey with us.

Congregation stands, (lifts their hands toward the child) and says:

"The Lord bless you and keep you, _____;

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." [Numbers 6:23-26].

Hymn (While the congregation is singing, the pastor may take the child through the congregation. The children who have gathered for the children's story may walk with the child and pastor as well as they introduce the infant.)