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Dr. Paul B. Phair, Pastor

TO: Parents who are dedicating their child

FROM: Paul B. Phair

SUBJECT: Child Dedication

Psalm 22:10 (CEV)

From the day I was born, I have been in your care, and from the time of my birth, you have been my God.

The following is a sample of the child dedication service. This is provided to you in advance so that on the day of dedication, you will be enabled to dedicate your child with a full understanding of its significance. It is a public vow that you are making to God before His people. As you do so, I know it will bring God's smile of approval and that He will help you to fulfill your vows and that He will bless your child.

If you have any questions or if I can provide you with personal guidance, please give me a call or email.

CHILD DEDICATION

In just a couple of moments, I will be calling upon several parents to come forward in order to dedicate themselves and their child to Christ. I want to remind us that child dedication **boldly declares three foundational truths about the human condition.**

1. That these young persons are precious to God, their lives are sacred because they are created in God's image to have the capacity of personally relating to Him.
2. In spite of the innocent beauty of these children, we recognize that they are sinners. When they come of age, they need to be redeemed for they, like all of us, are utterly helpless to merit salvation.
3. Dedication declares that Jesus is the rescuer. Jesus invited the little children to come because He knew, better than anyone else did, that they needed Him, too. Acts 4:12 (NLT) *There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.*"

Introduction of parents & child(ren):

Let us hear the Word of the Lord as it comes to us in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NLT)
⁶ And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷ 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.

This is the commandment of God, that we should diligently rear our children in our most holy faith. In obedience to this command, these parents bring their children today to present them to the Lord.

The precedent for the ceremony of baby dedication may be found in Scripture, as in the presentation of Samuel by Hannah and of Jesus by Joseph and Mary. Paul reminded Timothy that "from a child" he had known the sacred Scriptures. Jesus considered "the little ones" infinitely precious, and he said *"Permit the children to come to Me, do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*

The purpose of baby dedication is really to be found in the purpose of the parents. Rightly understood, the ceremony is one of parental dedication as well as child dedication. The parents are publicly pledging themselves to obey the command of Paul, (Ephesians 6:4 NLT) *"... do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord."* This ceremony is meaningless unless parents dedicate themselves, as well as their child, to God.

- ♥ *Do not provoke your children to anger* - includes building up a child's positive self image
- ♥ *Bring them up* – this word also includes *nourish* and *nurture*
- ♥ *Discipline* – this word also includes *instruction & spiritual guidance-training*
- ♥ *Instruction* – this word also includes *warnings & encouragements*

COVENANT OF PARENTS

If it be your intention to present your child to the Lord, and to pledge yourselves to "bring your child up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," please answer we do to the following promises:

1. Do you here this day recognize your child as the gift of God, and give heartfelt thanks for God's blessing?
2. Do you here this day dedicate your child to the Lord who gave him or her?
3. Do you here this day pledge as parents that you will bring up your child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?
4. Do you here this day promise to give your child every possible benefit of home, of education, & of the church?
5. Do you here this day ask God's blessings upon your child's life, to guide, guard, and direct your child through all his or her years?

COVENANT OF CONGREGATION

"Will you, members of this congregation, be faithful to your calling as members of the body of Christ, so that these children and all other children in your midst may grow up in the knowledge and love of Him?"

THE ACT OF DEDICATION

Parents will each individually say a word of dedication such as, "Lord Jesus, (wife) & I present our child (name) to you, believing in your loving care, and with the prayer that (name) would respond to the work of your Spirit to bring him/her to trust in you as Savior." – other dedication samples appear below.

Pastor's brief prayer.

APPLICATION TO ADULTS

There is an important spiritual lesson that we adults are to learn from children, and that is simply to trust our souls to Jesus as a child would:

Luke 18:15-17, "Then people began to bring babies to him so that he could put his hands on them. But when the disciples noticed it, they frowned on them. But Jesus called them to him and said,

You must let little children come to me, and you must never prevent their coming. The kingdom of God belongs to little children like these. I tell you, the man who will not accept the kingdom of God like a little child will never get into it at all."

That is the conclusion of the ceremony. Here are the actual mechanics of the service and the anticipated procedure:

1. Toward the beginning of the service and elder, another Pastor or I will call all the parents and their children to be dedicated, to come forward, and stand in a line facing the congregation.
2. I (or another Pastor or elder) will briefly introduce each parent and child.
3. I will then bring a "charge" to you (as a group) and review the meaning of child dedication.
4. I will ask you as a group to respond with a **"we do"** to the questions I will ask you concerning the dedication promises (as stated above).
5. It is at this point that your child will personally and individually be dedicated by you to the Lord. One family at a time (down the row) will say the words of actual dedication. Likely, the father (if applicable) will be the spokesperson for the couple. Often there is only one parent (mother or father) dedicating their child.
6. The following are three suggested phrases you may choose from to use to express your actual dedication. You may memorize them, write them out on a note card and read, or briefly adapt the words:
 - a. *"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Wife's name) and I present (or dedicate) our child (name, with middle and or last if you wish) to God and to His loving kindness."*
 - b. *.....(same beginning as above)..... "present our child to God and to His protection and to His saving and sanctifying grace"*
 - c. *"Lord Jesus, (wife) and I present our child (name) to you, believing in your loving care, and with the prayer that (name) would respond to the work of your Spirit to bring him/her to trust in you as Savior."*
7. Finally, I will close in prayer for the children, you as parents, and for us as a congregation. You may then be seated back with the congregation.

Prior to the dedication service, please fill out the attached “Child Dedication Information” sheet and return it to the Church Office. This provides us with information for a Dedication Certificate that we will mail to you.

Since child dedication to Christ fundamentally involves parent dedication to Christ, only those parents who have personally trusted in Christ as their Forgiver and who earnestly strive to follow Him as their Leader will be “eligible” to participate in this ceremony. If this is true for only one spouse, that spouse may dedicate their child alone and the other spouse is welcome and encouraged to observe the dedication in the service.

Should your child die at a young age before he or she reaches an age of spiritual accountability, I believe he or she will be in heaven. Below I am providing a brief summary of the Biblical rationale for such a conviction.

I strongly encourage you as a parent to have a Will prepared which specifies who would become the guardians of your children should you both die. These prospective guardians need to be the kind of people who would provide the same kind of loving, nurturing Christian guidance that you have pledged yourselves to at this dedication. The only way to assure that your desired guardian is appointed by the court is to have a Will. I recommend that you have a first choice and an alternate. Ask these prospective guardians in advance of preparing your Will for their consent to be listed. The Evangelical Free Church of America Foundation department has some information and suggestions that could be of help to you in preparing your Will. See efca.giftlegacy.com or call them at You may call them at 1-800-745-2202.

If you have any questions, or if I have overlooked something please do not hesitate to give me a call. I rejoice with you in God's special gift (and loan) to you!

CHILD DEDICATION INFORMATION
To Be Used For The Dedication Certificate & Worship Program

Child's full name (or how you would like it to appear)

Date of birth

City of birth

Parent's names as you would like it to appear on the certificate:

We do not expect you to select **godparents** (see below). However, if you do, please list their name or names in the manner you would like them to appear in the Worship Program:

Your post mail address:

Please return this form to the Church Office so that we can fill out the certificate.

May we have godparents or sponsors?

Often, godparents or sponsors take a special responsibility to support the parents and for the spiritual welfare of the child. The role of godparents is not a part of Oakwood's tradition because we view that beyond the parents, the entire church community is charged with this role. This is expressed in the wording of our ceremony. However, if you wish to include an individual or couple who is willing to take on the role of a godparent or sponsor, you are welcome to invite them to do so. They may stand behind you at the time of the dedication as an indication for their supportive role. If they are comfortable in doing so, they may place their hands upon your shoulder(s) as you express your vows and as you offer your words of dedication.

Christian Responsibilities of a Godparent:

1. Regularly pray for your godchild and the child's parent(s)
2. Set an example of Christian living
3. Encourage, support, and advise the parent or parents in their parenting, and spiritual nurture of their child or children; if the parent is married, offer the same to the couple in their marriage relationship.
4. Give every encouragement to the godchild to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ

Do Infants Go To Heaven Or Hell?

(Gordon Lewis, adapted by Phair)

The Scripture clearly teaches that all humankind is born with original sin because of Adam's fall (Rm. 5:12,15-19; I Cor. 15:21,22). Thus, all are under the condemnation of God and have an inherent inclination to sin. This being true, do infants who die go to hell? There have been a variety of answers to this important question. Some are the following:

- 1A Arminianism - Romans 5:15-19 says that in Adam, all became corrupt and guilty but also in Christ, all Adamic guilt is removed. No infants are under condemnation therefore, and those who die go to be with Christ.
- 2A Sacramentarian - God has deposited all saving grace in the sacraments of the church. Regeneration is brought about through baptism. No adult or infant is saved without it.
- 3A Some Reformed - Death in infancy is a sign of election. Some affirm this only for children of the "covenant," children of believing parents in the church who have been baptized. The children of Christian parents are sometimes held to have a potential faith ("seed") already in their subconscious, which would have expressed itself had they lived.
- 4A Strong's View (and others, including Phair) - Although born with original sin, infants have no actual sin (conscious, responsible sin) and so a relative innocence. As such, they are objects of special divine compassion. There is not a different ground of their salvation, but a different way of applying Christ's atonement to them.

1B Scriptural inferences:

- 1C A different principle of judgment for unaccountable children is at work when the parents who sinned died in the wilderness, but the children who did not know good from evil could enter the promised land (Deut. 1:39; cf. Num. 14:29-31).
- 2C Christ died for all, including infants (2 Cor. 5:15).
- 3C Christ exemplified God's special compassion for children (Mt. 18:2-5, 10, 14; 19:14).
- 4C While children who die cannot return to us, we can to them (2 Sam. 12:23).

2B The Distinction between condemnation and punishment

- 1C In Adam the sentence of condemnation is passed upon the whole human race, but it is executed (effectual) only upon those who responsibly sin, i.e., reject revealed truth. (Infants, mentally incompetent people are not punished eternally simply for Adam's sin).
- 2C There is an important distinction between being justifiably found guilty of a crime worthy of death and the actual execution of the sentence of death, the experiencing of the penalty. Guilt is one thing; penalty is another.
- 3C The penalty of eternal punishment is assigned scripturally only to those who, like Satan, have knowingly and deliberately turned away from God's revealed will in nature and Scripture. Punishment is regularly said to be according to the individual's works. One who could not know the difference between good and evil can hardly be punished on this basis. "Each person was judged according to what he had done." (Rev. 20:13). The lake of fire is not for infants who died, but for Satan, demons, "the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars" (Rev. 21:8).
- 4C Grounds of responsibility
 - 1D Knowledge of God in nature (Rom. 1:18-32) and the human heart (Rom. 2:14-15).
 - 2D Knowledge of Moses' law (Rom. 2:13; 2:17-3:20).
 - 3D The Gospel of Christ.
- 5C Degrees of punishment according to extent of light
 - 1D Mt. 11:20-24
 - 2D Lk. 12:47-51
 - 3D Lk. 20:17-18
- 3B Conclusion: Only those who responsibly sin and reject God's revealed truth are eternally punished; infants are not capable of doing this. While infants are under condemnation because of Adam's sin, they are not punished; rather they are objects of special divine compassion.