

DEDICATION WITH A DIFFERENCE

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The normal 'dedication' service with its elements of thanksgiving, promise-making, and blessing' presumes that the parents are at the very least Christians, and probably members of the church too. But what happens when this is not the case?

There are times when non-Christians want to have their child 'done'. It is hardly appropriate to ask them to promise "to bring up their child within the Christian community and to share their faith with him/her". What then have we to offer them? I normally alter the promise to something less specifically Christian. So in the preamble to the service I state: "We want to ask the parents..... to declare their intention to bring up their child in God's way, recognising that our children will only harm themselves if they don't follow their Maker's instructions.

But that is not the only possible variation. I think of an occasion when I agreed to let a mother and her daughter make the promises at a service of 'dedication'. The mother concerned is a Christian, but her husband is very anti-church. At one stage I thought we would simply have the mother presenting her baby. But then I realised that we could involve the ten-year old daughter, who is a follower of the Lord Jesus and is as keen as mustard to share her faith with her baby brother.

Normally the 'dedication' is part of the main Sunday morning service. However, last month I conducted a 'blessing' (that's what I was asked for) of a baby on the same occasion when I was marrying her parents. The mother is a believer and was attending church services before the birth of her baby – the father has yet to attend a church service. None of their friends belong to the church. In such a context there was clearly no room for the church to make any promises to care for the family. Nor in the somewhat unusual context did it seem appropriate to ask the parents to promise to bring up their child in God's way. However, I saw no reason why we should not thank God for the gift of the child and asking God's blessing on her.

Yet another variation involved the 'dedication' of a child within the context of a noisy Sunday evening 'youth' service, at which by definition most of the church were not present. I confess that I was not very happy with the couple's request – but they were young, and felt very strongly that they wanted to make their promises before their peers. What's more, they felt happiest inviting non-Christian friends to such a service, rather than to what they perceived to be the more traditional service of worship in the morning. So I fell in with their desire. For ultimately we don't fit people to services, but services to people

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