

BAPTISM **at Medway Community Church**

Throughout the history of the Christian church, parents have made a commitment to raise their children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord”, in the hope that their child will come to abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live a life of faithful discipleship. This has commonly been expressed in one of two ways: child baptism or child dedication. Since both are practiced at the Community Church of West Medway, the following sets forth our understanding of each and our policies concerning them in order to help parents who desire to commit their child to the Lord.

Q: What Is Baptism?

A: Baptism is one of two sacraments or ordinances practiced in most Protestant churches. At its core, baptism represents identification with Jesus Christ. It does not convey salvation in any way, shape, or form. Rather, the water of baptism points to the cleansing from sin that is found by placing one's trust in Jesus Christ. The act of baptism signifies a connection to and identification with the Body of Christ, the church, and the new life of obedience into which the Christian enters when he/she places faith in Christ. There are two “types” of baptism: the baptism of the children of Christians – child baptism, and the baptism of those who profess faith in Christ – believer's baptism. While baptism is a key practice of the church, only personal, individual faith in Jesus Christ provides entry into the kingdom of God.

Q: What is Child Dedication?

A: It is a ceremony where Christian parents commit to prayerfully, actively, and intentionally raise their child in the ways of Christ, desiring that the child will put his/her faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. When the child personally comes to faith in Christ, then he/she would be baptized based on their profession of faith.

Q: What is Child Baptism?

A: It too is a ceremony where Christian parents commit to prayerfully, actively, and intentionally raise their child in the ways of Christ, desiring that the child will put his/her faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. In addition, it identifies the child with the community of faith, acknowledging that God, in his grace, has placed the child within the fellowship of the people of God.

Q: Are Child Dedication and Child Baptism identical?

A: While they share much in common there are differences between these two practices. Those who hold to child baptism see that this sign and symbol of identification with the covenant community of the church can extend to children. Baptism is understood to be the new covenant extension of the Old Testament rite of circumcision, and a sacrament that is given by the church. On the other hand, there are Christians who believe that baptism is an ordinance and only for those who have publicly declared their faith in Christ. Yet those who believe this way, also believe that is meaningful to publicly commit their children unto the Lord, in a ceremony performed in front of the church.

Throughout the history of the church these two views have stood side by side, embraced by sincere and godly Christian people. In both cases, baptism is regarded as important and an act of obedience to Christ. In addition, both child baptism and child dedication express the conviction that our children are a trust from God, and that we are to live in such a way as to point them to Christ. Both acknowledge that each are to be practiced by Christians only – those who profess faith alone in Jesus Christ, and who live this out in the fellowship of a local church body. Both call

upon not only parents but also the whole church to be involved in the raising of children so that they might embrace Christ in faith.

Q: Why does Medway Community Church practice both Child Baptism and Dedication?

A: MCC was established out of two separate churches – one that practiced child baptism, one that practiced baptism of professing Christians only. In view of our heritage and our conviction that both views can peacefully exist within a local congregation, we invite parents to express their commitments in the way that reflects their own understanding.

Q: What then is involved in the Baptism/Dedication of a child?

1. Both are performed during the public worship of God's people, to express a public commitment on behalf of the parents. The ceremony, however, does not confer membership in the local church upon the child.
2. It is the acknowledgment of Christian parents that our children are a gift, a trust from God; we do not "own" them but they ultimately belong to God.
3. It is the commitment of Christian parents to raise their child in such a way that the child may personally come to faith in Jesus Christ, resulting in faithful obedience to him.
4. It is the commitment of the local church to provide Christian nurture for both the parents and the child, through worship, Christian education, and personal relationships.

Q: May any child be dedicated/baptized?

A: Yes, subject to the following criteria:

1. At least one parent has made a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and is an active member in good standing at Medway Community Church.
2. The parents have read and studied a packet of study materials on child baptism/dedication prior to meeting with the pastor, and can in good conscience affirm all that is found therein.
3. All child baptisms/dedications take place during Sunday morning worship service; only in unusual circumstances will they be held at other times and places, and only with the approval of the elders and Senior Pastor of MCC.
4. Other circumstances or concerns not mentioned above will be taken under consideration by the elders and the Senior Pastor.

(Unanimously approved by Board of Elders, 2/2011)

