

Consecration of Children and Parents

INTRODUCTION

The Church of the Brethren believes that children born into the congregation belong to Jesus and to the church in a special way. Children are an integral part of the people of God and share in the life and experiences of a congregation. Because the choice to be baptized follows a personal decision involving responsibility that a child is not prepared to assume, congregations welcome children into the church in a service of consecration of children and parents.

Alexander Mack, leader of the first Brethren in the early 1700s, recommended that “children are to be presented to the Lord Jesus in prayer.” In 1931 the Annual Conference considered the need for “some kind of consecration service to be used in consecrating young children to the Lord.” The reply of that Conference recommended that congregations hold services of consecration that would have three emphases: a consecration or blessing of the child; a consecration of the parents, including a charge for them to be Christian parents; and a consecration of the congregation as the spiritual family within which the child is nurtured and supported.

The service of consecration of children and parents is appropriately held as part of a congregational worship service, and always includes the three emphases. Planning for such a service takes into account a number of variables so that the service is worshipful, yet intimate and personal.

When only one child is consecrated in a worship service, the importance of each child and each family to the faith community is emphasized. When one service is held for several children and their families, every attempt should be made to personalize significant moments in the service. Each family name and each child’s name should be clearly stated. During the prayer of blessing, all children and parents should be prayed for by name. If there is a single prayer of consecration, deacons or church parents can hold or lay hands on each child during the prayer. A rose or other gift from the congregation may be presented to all children and their families.

Each family situation needs to be considered carefully so that the service is appropriate for that family and becomes a meaningful time of worship and consecration. Families will bring children by birth and by adoption, children ranging in age from infancy to the time of baptism. There may be one parent or two; there may be older brothers and sisters, possibly from a blended family; grandparents or extended family members may be part of the service; deacons, church sponsors, church parents, godparents, or other children from the congregation may be included.

Special care in planning is needed when only one parent is participating in the service or when parents are not members of the congregation or not resident of the community. In such cases the pastor needs to work carefully with the family in planning a service that speaks with integrity to both the family situation and the church.

Significant participation by family members helps to make the consecration service more meaningful. Some parents or family members may choose to write their own vows in

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consultation with the pastor. Parents may want to advise the pastor about holding or carrying their child at points in the service. Then, prior to the worship service, the pastor should meet with the child or children and family members to review the service and share with them in prayer.

Significant participation by the congregation is also important. Some members may be asked to write the congregation's commitment or pledge to the family. All members present at the service should participate actively in some way, by standing, speaking vows, or holding hands with others in the congregation during the laying on of hands for the child.

The service of consecration of children and parents brings together words, music, scripture, vows, prayers, and symbolic action, as a people of faith respond to God in joy and commitment.

A SERVICE OF CONSECRATION OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS¹

MINISTER

God has truly blessed us in creation! Today we join in celebrating the blessing of a new life among us.

The (name) family has been granted a special gift from God, the gift of a child. As with many of God's gifts, a new life brings both responsibility and joy. This family comes today, sharing their joy and recognizing their need for support from this family of faith.

Let us hear these words from Mark's Gospel:

People were bringing little children to [Jesus] in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark 10:13-16

MINISTER

These actions and words of Jesus tell us something about God's desire for the reception of children into the family of faith. In the Church of the Brethren, our understanding of the gospel and our tradition have led us to wait for baptism until children are able to make a decision for themselves to follow Christ. We see that Jesus instructed his followers to receive children as a gift of God; he also said that children are an example of the way in which we should come before God in faith.

Today, in obedience to our understanding of the gospel, we welcome this child as God's gift to this family of faith. We receive *(her/him)* with our blessing and we pledge our support to the (name) family as they seek to provide a loving Christian home for their child.

Will the (name) family please come forward.

MINISTER

(to congregation)

This is (child's full name). (She/He) was born on (date) and is now (age).

MINISTER

(to parent/s)

(name/s), you have shared in God's creative power, bringing forth this beautiful new life. Will you pledge to support and love (child) by providing the opportunity for (her/him) to grow up in the family of faith, with the hope that (she/he) will some day confess Christ as (her/his) own Teacher, Lover, and Savior?

PARENT/S

(I/We) will.

MINISTER

Will you, to the best of your ability and with God's help, provide a loving family environment in which (child) can grow in love, loyalty, and obedience to God?

PARENT/S

(I/We) will.

MINISTER

Will you encourage (child) to grow in faith, so that (she/he) might later be received into the fellowship of the church by baptism, fully partaking in the work and worship of the church?

PARENT/S

(I/We) will.

MINISTER

(to congregation)

(parent/s), along with the other members of (his/her/their) family, have expressed their trust in God and in you, the body of Christ gathered here, by presenting this child for consecration. Will you pledge your support and loving presence in times of ease and difficulty, in times of joy and sorrow, in times of growth and frustration? Will you pledge to be faithful witnesses for Christ in upholding this family and especially this little one, (child) ?

CONGREGATION

We will.

MINISTER

(holding the child, if possible, and placing a hand on the child's head)

(child), we consecrate your life to God on this day. We pledge to be faithful as your church family and as witnesses to Christ in your life. May God's blessing always be upon you, through Jesus, the lover of the children, and our example. Amen.

MINISTER

(to congregation)

In praise to God for this new life and for (child) presence with us, and remembering our own need for childlikeness before God, let us sing together a hymn of praise.

During the hymn, “Shepherd of Tender Youth” (no. 480) or “Child of Blessing, Child of Promise” (no. 620), the minister, parent/s, or church sponsors may carry the child through the congregation, presenting her or him to the church family. Deacons or the child’s parent/s or family members may add a symbol for the child to a banner on which appear symbols for each child in the congregation. After the hymn, the child is returned to the parent/s.

UNISON PRAYER

God, you have blessed us with the wonders of creation, and today we celebrate your gift of creation in the form of a new life. May we, being mindful of your presence at all times, remember Jesus’ words when he said, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” Make your presence known in the life of (child) and in the life of *(her/his)* family. Bless (child) and the rest of your children gathered here. We pray in the name of Christ, whose love for all your children brings us here. Amen.

A CELEBRATION OF CONSECRATION OF AN INFANT²

MINISTER

Today we come with hearts full of joy and wonder as we celebrate God’s gift of (child) to this world. We marvel at the grace-filled act by which God gives such a precious gift. We celebrate the promise of God’s future that (child) represents. We declare ourselves open to the new responsibilities and relationships that (child)’s presence brings.

This is a service of both consecration and commitment. Today we consecrate (child) before God. Before we ever saw *(her/him)*, God was at work creating and shaping this life. Before we ever called (child) by name, God said, “This is my child.” Thus, we joyfully affirm that (child) is a child of God.

This is a service of commitment for all of us: parents, family, friends, and faith community. We commit ourselves to sharing with God in the nurturing and upbringing of (child). It is not a commitment that any of us should take lightly, but neither is it a burden we must carry alone. For as God is present with us in this time of celebration, so God promises to be present with us in each day of the future as we seek to live out the commitments we make here today.

The scripture to be read is Luke 1:1-7,22-40. An alternative to reading is to tell it as a story. Because this is a service that celebrates children as gifts of God, the story should be told in such a way that children can understand it. The minister then invites the family to come forward and reads the Celebration of Consecration or leads the congregation in reading it.

Celebration of Consecration

This morning

**we celebrate the gift of new life among us
coming in the person of (child),
life we have waited for expectantly!
life we have watched growing month by month!
life we have welcomed in pain and joy!
life we see and hear and touch and smell!**

**We celebrate the gift of new life among us
coming to us as a gift from God.**

We give thanks

**for a baby born with fragile, yet fully
human features reflecting our image
and God's.**

We give thanks

**for the extension of family and
community across the miles and across
generations.**

We give thanks

**for the potential and opportunity this
birth heralds, as well as for the challenge
and commitment it calls forth.**

We give thanks

**for the joy of this moment and the
promise of God's continuing presence
among us.**

The parent/s give/s the child to the minister. Then the minister and the parent/s lay/s hands on the child's head.

MINISTER

**(child), you are consecrated to God, and God's Spirit will always be with you.
As you grow may you come to recognize the presence and blessing of God in your life.
May you be nurtured in your faith by the people surrounding you and may you find a
home within the faith community.**

MINISTER

(to the congregation)

**Let us join together before God in publicly making our promises regarding (child)'s
spiritual nurture in a litany of commitment.**

Litany of Commitment

PARENT/S

**(I/We) promise to offer (child) a loving home where (she/he) may learn the importance of
faithfulness to God through worship and service. (I/We) will teach (her/him) the way of Jesus
through word and example. (I/We) will further encourage (her/him) toward a personal
commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.**

ALL OTHERS

May God help you in keeping these promises.

SIBLING/S

(I/We) will love (child) and tell (her/him) about Jesus.

ALL OTHERS

May God help you in keeping these promises.

EXTENDED FAMILY OR CHURCH PARENTS

We also promise to be examples of God's love to (child) and to offer additional places where (she/he) can turn with difficult questions.

CHURCH PARENTS

We further promise to be supportive of you, (parent/s), in your task of parenting; and to you, (sibling/s), in your roles as (brother/s and sister/s), through our prayers and other acts of love.

ALL OTHERS

May God help you in keeping these promises.

CONGREGATION

We promise to share in (child)'s Christian nurture by providing (her/him) a warm and welcoming faith community in which (she/he) can grow in God's love. We will supplement the Christian education and spiritual guidance (she/he) receives at home as we fulfill our special calling as the body of Christ of which (she/he) is a part. We will be in prayer for (child) and for you, (family members), as we continue to support you as a family.

THE FAMILY

May God help you in keeping these promises.

MINISTER

May God be present in (child)'s life and in our lives as we provide (her/him) nurture. Amen.

The minister returns the child to the parent/s.

Hymn

"Wonder of Wonders," no. 622

CONSECRATION OF AN OLDER ADOPTED CHILD⁴

MINISTER

(calls family forward)

We take this special time to introduce (child) as a new member of the (name) family and recognize (her/his) presence in our faith family. To adopt means to choose and bring into an intentional relationship—to take into one's own family by legal process and raise as one's own child. The legal adoption has taken place—and now we, as the body of Christ, celebrate the adoption of (child) into our congregational family as well.

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Scripture

Ephesians 1:3-5

MINISTER

(to child)

(child), just as your (parent/s) (has/have) chosen you to be part of (her/his/their) family, so God has chosen you to be a part of the family that believes in and loves Jesus. This service today reminds us that we are a family, that we are to love each other and help each other learn more about God and Jesus. Each person in this family is very special in God's eyes and we celebrate your becoming a part of us.

MINISTER

(to parent/s)

God has entrusted (child) into your care. Do you now present (her/him) before God and this congregation in solemn consecration?

PARENT/S

(I/We) do.

MINISTER

Will you show love (to each other and) to (child) that (she/he) will know the meaning of trust and grace and acceptance through you?

PARENT/S

(I/We) will.

MINISTER

With God's guidance, will you provide a home for (child) that reflects Christian values, and will you encourage (child) to participate in worship and the teachings of the church so that (she/he) may come to know and accept Christ as Savior and Lord?

PARENT/S

(I/We) will.

MINISTER

I charge you to be faithful to these vows as you care for this child. May the blessing of our most gracious Lord rest upon you.

MINISTER

(to congregation)

Will you as the family of faith accept (child) into this fellowship and provide spiritual nurture to (her/him) and (her/his) family, supporting them with your love and prayers? Will you encourage (child) and all children in our midst to grow in the knowledge of Christ's love? If so, if you are able, will you please stand.

MINISTER

(lays hands on child and says to the child)

(child), you are now consecrated to the Lord and are adopted into this family of faith as

one of our children. May you know God's blessings through your home, family, and church; and may you be nurtured and cared for in God's love.

Let us pray.

O God, who gives life in Jesus Christ, bless (child) as Jesus blessed the children. Grant your grace to *(this parent/these parents)* that *(she/he/they)* may by word and deed remind this child of *(her/his)* consecration to you. Bless this congregation that it may, with insight and energy, assume its responsibility toward this family and all families within its care. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The minister may walk the child through the congregation, introducing her or him to some of the new church family.

A SERVICE OF CONSECRATION THAT INCLUDES OTHER CHILDREN⁵

MINISTER

Today we share a joy as we consecrate (child). What a miracle *(she/he)* is! There is no greater cause for thanksgiving than this precious gift of new life. There is also no greater reason for prayer and commitment, as *(her/his)* birth family and *(her/his)* church family take on the responsibilities entrusted to us for *(her/his)* care and nurture. This day we consecrate (child) to God and commit ourselves to live so *(she/he)* might learn to know and love God.

MINISTER

(to parent/s)

(parent/s), there have been many times for you to affirm your belief in and commitment to Jesus Christ. (child) brings new challenges and joys to your life and your faith journey. Do you consecrate *(yourself/yourselves)* as *(her/his parent/s)*, to instruct *(her/him)* in the Christian way of life, to provide a home atmosphere of devotion and prayer and to so live that *(she/he)* will be strengthened by your love and faith?

PARENT/S

(I/We) do.

MINISTER

Will you endeavor to keep (child) within the ministry and guidance of the church until *(she/he)*, by the power of God, shall accept for *(her/him)*self the call of Jesus Christ?

PARENT/S

(I/We) will.

MINISTER

(to older brother/s and/or sister/s)

(sibling/s name/s), you are (child)'s big *(brother/s and/or sister/s)*. You are learning what it means to share your mom and dad, your toys, your home with (child). *(She/He)* needs your love and help. And *(she/he)* will give you love and will learn from you. You can help *(her/him)* learn about Jesus and God's love too. Will you love your little *(sister/brother)* and help *(her/him)* to grow?

SIBLING/S

Yes, we will.

MINISTER

(to congregation)

Followers of Jesus Christ, this day reminds us of the privilege and responsibility we have to nurture and support this family. We are to pray for, help, support, and encourage this special family as they love and nurture their children and endeavor to build a faith-filled home. Will you pledge your continuing support as they seek to fulfill their commitments as a family and will you love and accept (child) and share the responsibility for *(her/his)* development and spiritual nurture?

CONGREGATION

We will.

MINISTER

I would like for all the children in the congregation to come and stand with us here. Boys and girls, (child) will look to you to show love to *(her/him)* and teach *(her/him)* many things. Will you try to do this?

CHILDREN

Yes, we will.

MINISTER

(to child)

(child), this day you are dedicated to God, that all efforts of home, family, and church may nurture you and encourage you toward your decision for Jesus Christ.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Introductory Statement

From the beginning of time the miracle of new life has been cause for celebration before God. We come now to give thanks to God for this child, (child), who is different from all who have lived before and all who are yet to be created. We rejoice that in the young, the human race begins again. New life is the gift of God's grace.⁶

Introductory Statement and Prayer

MINISTER

Life is a precious and gracious gift from God. It is a gift with endless possibilities and mysteries that can be discovered anew each day. Life is a gift which allows us to experience the nurturing and creating presence of God. The *(birth/adoption)* of a child enables us to celebrate again the hope and newness that God's gift of life offers. (parent/s) *(comes/come)* to us as *(a recipient/recipients)* of God's precious and gracious gift of life in the *(birth/adoption)* of a *(daughter/son)*, (child). Let us celebrate with *(her/him/them)* the newness of life that God has sent.

Read Philippians 4:4-7.

UNISON

O God, we have cause to rejoice at the *(birth/adoption)* of this child. With thanksgiving we receive *(child)* into our midst. We pray, O God, for your peace in the life of this child and *(her/his)* family. O God, accompany that peace with truth, honor, justice, purity, beauty, grace, and purpose. In thanksgiving and in celebration we praise you. In Christ's name. Amen.⁷

Act of Consecration

The name *(child's full name)* has been given to this child. Today, *(child)*, *(I/we)*, your *(parent/s)*, your family, your church family, consecrate you to God. You will not remember today, but the story will be told to you. This day happened because you are loved and accepted. May your life unfold and grow in God's love, in the love of your family, and in the love of the faith community.⁸

Act of Consecration

***(child)*, you have brought great joy into the *(heart/s)* of your *(mother/father/parents)* and into the hearts of your grandparents. I now consecrate you to God and pray God's blessing upon your life. May you grow strong, yet remain sensitive. May you gain wisdom, yet never lose the sense of wonder in life. May your heart know great joy. May your hands embody love, service, and praise. May your feet carry you down paths that nurture and call forth the gifts God has given you. And in time, may you come to love God the way that God, even now, surrounds you with love. Amen.⁹**

Charge to the Congregation

Your faces reveal your delight when little children are here for consecration. It is a moment of beauty, tenderness, and joy. Remember that receiving a child is both gift and responsibility. Again and again, this child will be here. Always, *(she/he)* and *(her/his parent/s)* have the right to expect the support of our friendship, faith, teaching, worship, and discipleship. If you are willing to offer such support, please affirm your intention by standing, if you are able.¹⁰

Prayer of Blessing for a Child and Family

O God, we thank you for this moment. You know how much (parent/s) wished for a baby and how *(she/he/they)* rejoiced when *(her/his/their)* prayers were answered. Be with (parent/s) as *(she/he/they build/s)* a home environment in which (child) blossoms and learns what it means to be loved. May this home be filled with happiness and laughter.

We thank you for (church sponsor/church parent) who has accepted the responsibility to serve as *(sponsor/church parent)* for this child. Bless all of us gathered here, as we pledge to stand by this family and help raise (child) in the embrace of a Christian community.

Hear us now as we quietly pray for (child),

(pause)

for *(her/his)* family,

(pause)

and for this church family.

(pause)

In Jesus' name. Amen.¹¹

A Blessing When More Than One Child and Family Are Being Consecrated

Almighty God, we thank you for the miracle of conception, for the miracle of birth, for the miracle of life itself, and for the miracle of children! Help each of these parents to realize the seriousness of bringing children into the world. Create in each of them the sense of responsibility for rearing these little ones in the ways of truth and right. Grant them patience and wisdom and joy as they faithfully perform their parental duties. May they—by word, deed, and example—never allow these little ones to forget their consecration to you, O God.

Loving God, as these children experience physical growth, may they grow mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as well. Reveal to each of them in their young and tender years an awesome sense of who you are and the salvation that you give. As these children reach the age of accountability, call each of them by your Holy Spirit to yield their hearts and lives in obedience to Jesus Christ.

O God, we pray that this congregation may assume the task of nurturing and encouraging these parents and their little ones. Help us in this task, and give us the insight and energy to do it well and without reservation. With thanksgiving we pray, through Christ. Amen.¹²

A Blessing for the Parent/s

As you approach the days and years ahead, may you be showered with God's rich blessings; abundantly sprinkled with patience, acceptance, and understanding; and drenched with an occasional downpour of laughter!

May you feel much joy and thanksgiving for this gift of life from the Creator, a precious child to love and care for, nurture, and hold tenderly in your arms.

May God bless you always. Amen.¹³

A Prayer for the Parent/s

God, we are gathered with feelings of tenderness, love, and gratitude, remembering both your gift of the baby Jesus and this baby. Guide and uphold (parent/s) in keeping the promises which *(she/he/they)* *(has/have)* made today. May *(she/he/they)* be Christlike, loving, wise, and strong, as *(she/he/they nurture/s)* (child)'s growth. Grant your strong spirit to (child), to *(her/his)* family, and to all of us. And guide us all to be faithful to the baby who grew up to be the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.¹⁴

ENDNOTES

1. Norlyn Davis-Driver
2. Sharon Cobb Hutchison, Mark Murray, Kevin Daggett, adapted
4. Violet Anet Satvedi, Jean E. Keith
5. Alice Martin-Adkins
6. Sam Flora
7. R. Kurt Borgmann, Keith Alan Funk, Glenn A. McCrickard
8. Flora
9. Glenn Mitchell
10. Flora
11. Ingrid Rogers
12. Paul W. Brubaker
13. Juanita Huber Deardorff
14. Flora