

Remaining in the Context of Love

With the right study, in the right spirit, baptism almost always takes care of itself

By Ron Kastens

CrossWay Christian Church is an exciting, growing, seven-year-old congregation averaging about 400 in attendance in Nashua, New Hampshire. Nashua is about one hour north and west of Boston. A consistent resident on *Money Magazine's* top 10 list of "best places to live in America," Nashua is a great city to call home.

In Nashua, as in all of New England, Roman Catholicism has been the dominant religious force since Europeans first settled here. Its roots go deep into the history of the region, predating the founding of our nation. For many native New Englanders, Catholicism is as much a part of the fabric of their identities as being American.

But we do not merely minister in an area where Catholicism is dominant. This also is a region that has a great respect for history and tradition. Those two aspects signify a stability and longevity that should be honored. Catholicism holds history and tradition in high regard. Place that in the most historic region of our country, and it breeds a hyperdedication to "what we've always believed." For those who have grown up in this part of the country, history and tradition are not to be ignored or quickly dismissed.

In addition to those realities, New Hampshire, more than any other state, champions the independent spirit. New England played

a significant role in our country's struggle for freedom. The people who live here are proud that the spirit of those revolutionaries is alive and well today. The New Hampshire motto, "Live Free or Die," can be seen on every license plate. We are, after all, the only state where seat belts are not mandatory for adults. People in New Hampshire may agree that wearing a seat belt is a good idea,

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but they don't want anyone telling them they have to wear one! That attitude permeates much of life in New Hampshire.

Our Approach

It is into that independent-minded, historic, predominantly Roman Catholic, New England world that CrossWay Christian Church was planted in 1995. Meeting in leased warehouse facilities, baptizing people in a portable hot tub, CrossWay has had a lot of lessons to learn in navigating the predominantly Roman Catholic waters of New England. How have we tried to do this? Very carefully—in thoughtful, respectful, and loving

ways. Let me explain a little about how we approach the important subject of baptism at CrossWay Christian Church.

That we practice baptism is not a surprise to most people in the Northeast. As a matter of fact, we get several calls a month from people wanting to know if we will baptize their babies. These phone calls, plus conversations with those who attend our church, give us the opportunity to be thoughtful, respectful, and loving as we discuss when, how, and why we baptize.

One of the first things we do is share the New Testament account of the early church, when a person was baptized only after he had heard about Jesus, understood his need for a savior, and put his trust in Jesus alone.

That almost always raises questions. "Does that mean my parents did something wrong by having me baptized as a baby?" When that question is asked, my response is not to debate the past. I tell them their parents should be commended for doing what they thought was right to raise a godly child. But I also tell them that since they now understand biblical baptism is preceded by faith and trust, something a baby is not capable of, it would seem they should now be baptized, based on their own decision, and not the decision of their parents.

The most commonly asked question is no surprise. "What about those who haven't been immersed? Are they in Heaven or Hell?"

I do not believe it is my place to

See "LOVE" on page 10

Love: Remaining in Context

Continued from page 9

answer that question, and I never do. God is pretty good about knowing who should be in Heaven and who should not. I trust that, immersed or not, God will get everyone where they need to be for eternity.

Some might be uncomfortable with my approach and consider it too ambiguous. In my history in the Stone-Campbell Movement, I sense there has been a great desire to nail everything down and know who is “in” and who is “out.” But I believe

that is beyond what God has asked us to do.

At CrossWay we teach baptism, but we do not emphasize it beyond its rightful place. We practice immersion, but we do not worship it. When someone has questions or objections, and they often do here in New England, we don’t debate or grandstand, we love. And in the context of love, we teach. But love always comes in the beginning, the middle, and the end, whether they submit to baptism or not. What I have found is that if people love Jesus and are

open to the Bible, and if we love them, then baptism takes care of itself, even here in New England.

Are we right in our approach and handling of baptism? I think we are handling it well, but I’ll be the first to admit that we may be wrong. I am just glad our ministry is not dependent upon us getting everything right.

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