

NEWS FROM LYNNE PABST

Our Certified Christian Educator and POINT Partner

Living Traditions for a Living God

Tradition in the church has gotten a raw deal. People hear the word “tradition” and associate it with things which cannot be changed or the old way of doing things. Traditional church often is considered lifeless, stodgy, from years gone by and unattractive to younger families. Some pastors have said “We don’t want to do anything the same two years in a row. We want to be careful that traditions do not get cemented into this church.” A new pastor hates hearing the congregation say, “We have always done it this way.” While there are some dangers, there are many benefits to tradition and ritual. It is tradition that marks time providing order to lives. It is tradition that provides comfort offering stability during uncertain times. Traditions can empower, relieve stress, offer solace and save time.

There are daily traditions which are lovingly called routines. In many of the articles guiding parents in dealing with work at home and children at home during the pandemic suggest that establishing a routine is important. Any early childhood educator knows the importance of maintaining routines to develop self-esteem in children and guide behavior. Waking, eating breakfast, brushing teeth, and getting dressed prepares for the day to come. Washing hands before you eat or reading a book before going to bed cues the child to the behavior and event to follow. When prepared for what is to come, the activity engagement is improved.

There are family traditions like celebrating birthdays in a certain way, gathering at grandma’s for Thanksgiving, vacationing at a certain spot or sitting down for supper together. Such traditions provide family members with a sense of belonging, an identity and a family story. All are defined as necessary for good mental health.

While everyone would agree to the benefits of the above traditions, for some reason church traditions are feared. What are church traditions, but those daily routines and family routines of God’s family which are needed for spiritual health. These events remind that all belong to God and that God gives order to life. Two messages needed more than ever during this pandemic. Many of these traditions originate from the order of the church year. Others of these take the form of spiritual practices – prayer, worship, Bible study, fellowship. The danger comes when the tradition method is valued above what the tradition honors. Congregations need to examine the purpose of a particular tradition. For Example: What is the main objective in holding the Christmas pageant? To tell the story? To have an intergenerational activity? To allow the children to have a voice in telling the story? To highlight the church’s drama group? If the main purpose is to have an intergenerational Christmas event, then it could be something other than a pageant and still maintain the tradition. If it is to tell the story, then it could be told in a different form than pageant and still maintain tradition. It is then asked, “Is the tradition “The Pageant” or is it the gathering of the church to tell the Christmas Story?” What is the purpose of VBS? Community Outreach? Summer Childcare? Christian Education?

Intergenerational time? Replacement for Sunday School in the summer? If VBS was to replace Sunday School in the summer then having summer Sunday school maintains the tradition. A new question is asked, "Is the tradition the VBS or is the tradition the offering of some summer activity for children?" Asking such questions helps determine what the true tradition worth keeping alive is.

In this time of COVID 19, everyone from families to businesses to educational institutions to churches have been forced to take time to define the core purpose of a tradition and redesign maintaining that core purpose. While face-to-face graduations are impossible this May, Luzerne County Community College defined its core part of the tradition worth holding on to as the acknowledging of each student's accomplishments. Therefore, it is creating an online graduation during which each student will be named while other elements of graduation will not be included.

This pandemic is giving congregations the opportunity to examine their traditional practices and what those practices honor. During this time, congregations need not mourn that there can not be Traveling Day Camp or VBS or Summer Concerts or face-to-face worship. Instead they are challenged to look deeply and spiritually into the purpose of those traditions and design another method of achieving that core tradition.

Daily spiritual routines and congregational traditions hold us together as communities of faith and the family of God. When congregations redesign traditions based on purpose, they establish living traditions for a living God.

Blessings – Hold on to what matters – Let go of what doesn't -- Be Creative!

Resources:

Howell, J and K. Reinherd, *Rituals and Traditions: Fostering a Sense of Community in Preschool*. Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2015.

Family Routines and Rituals May Improve Family Relationships and Health:

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2002/12/rituals>

Websites of interest:

Struggling with Zooming Worship – this facebook page is a must see:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/zoomchurch/>

A Pandemic Prayerbook shared on APCE facebook:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tDdYIFTjXvrFVrykNZhxgTDFWwuCpqS0/view?fbclid=IwAR3gpZARHHDIFrijtphxMfUJSVHzpDRs7pwRCvrstw8W3AmH-d5KIQKZa0yM>

Ideas for Pentecost: <http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/2016/05/pentecost-pass-parcel-all-age-talk.html>

New Offer from the PCUSA Store, *Practicing* by Kathy Escobar:

<https://mailchi.mp/pcusastore/2rap4ldyit-1140683?e=3219f3057b>

A worthwhile article from Presbyterian Mission:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/old-school-new->

[school/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Daily+Coronavirus+briefing+and+News+from+the+Presbyterian+Church+\(U+S+A\)&utm_campaign=Covid-19-daily+news+-+April+21,+2020&fbclid=IwAR1j5RGleRDgHb4xR4pykncTaz2Q8Jv8W-M3qh54Wto61rVO5qTT3IR_v6Y](https://www.pewresearch.org/school/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Daily+Coronavirus+briefing+and+News+from+the+Presbyterian+Church+(U+S+A)&utm_campaign=Covid-19-daily+news+-+April+21,+2020&fbclid=IwAR1j5RGleRDgHb4xR4pykncTaz2Q8Jv8W-M3qh54Wto61rVO5qTT3IR_v6Y)