



December  
2013

# Pastor's Page



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## Family (Christmas) Traditions *General Guidelines for Keeping or Changing Family Traditions*

As we enter the Christmas season it often means gathering with family. And, like it is with Christianity, each individual congregation, or each Christian denomination—every family has unique traditions, even if there may be overlap with the traditions of other families. My hope in this article is to give you the gift of properly understanding when to change or when to observe non-sinful<sup>1</sup> family traditions, from a Biblical perspective, with the hope that you can dwell in peace and unity with your family this Christmas season and all year long.

*Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (ESV)*

I guess we should define tradition quickly before we continue this discussion: What is tradition? A tradition is simply the handing down of customs, practices, and beliefs from generation to generation.<sup>2</sup> Again, many families have Christmas traditions. Some families have the tradition of exchanging gifts--some on Christmas Eve and some on Christmas Day. Others don't exchange presents, but simply gather with family for a turkey dinner, each person bringing the dish they bring every year—a tradition. When you marry or join in with another family, often times you are unfamiliar with their unique traditions. If the tradition you grew up with was to bring mistletoe, but your spouse's family is against public displays of affection—you could find yourself in an awkward situation. But, as a pastor, my goal is not to teach good etiquette, but what the Bible says about keeping or changing traditions.

As we Lutherans know, some traditions must be rejected. In the Church, if any particular man-made tradition is put on the same level as Scripture, like it is in the Roman Catholic Church, then it is good to reject that tradition no matter how many prior generations did it. Or, if a tradition is taught in a way that it must be observed to earn heaven, i.e. circumcision in the book of Galatians, then it must be rejected. But, what about traditions that are not sinful—that is, they are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture? In these areas we have Christian freedom, particularly in our consciences, but not in regards to our neighbor. This means we shouldn't make wholesale and quick changes, as this may offend the weak in faith and show a lack of love for our neighbor, especially the older generations. Additionally, any change in tradition should have a good reason for the whole and not just come from personal preference.

Sadly, as we know, many Christians take this “Christian freedom” in regard to traditions too far and arrogantly throw the baby out with the bath water, by showing a lack of love for their neighbor, especially older generations, by rejecting non-sinful traditions. This is actually sinful, even though the tradition itself is neutral. Now, this observation could certainly be expounded into a book, especially in regards to traditions and practices in the Church—candles, music, vestments (I don't mean Converse shoes and stocking hats), etc.-- but I want to narrow it down to Christmas traditions in the family. However, these guidelines still can be applied in multiple areas of life beyond family and church such as work, clubs, and really any time you gather with others.

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<sup>1</sup> Any sinful tradition must be rejected—like drinking too much eggnog to the point of drunkenness. And, some traditions ought be encouraged, like going to the Christmas Worship Services.

<sup>2</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/tradition?s=b&path=/>

So, what are some good Biblical guidelines for changing or keeping non-sinful family traditions? I think rather than give you guidelines I will answer my own question with some questions to ask ourselves if we are the ones seeking to change a tradition, especially within our extended families:

Respect for our elders: Am I the patriarch, if you will, of this family or am I part of the younger generations? Scripture is clear in the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment that we are not to despise or anger our parents, but to honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. When any generation inside the family decides to reject a non-sinful tradition that has been handed down and start a new tradition, great care should be taken out of respect and honor for the older generations. Am I angering, or loving, respecting, and honoring my parents (and in-laws) by insisting that they change their non-sinful tradition and observe my non-sinful tradition? If family unity and harmony can be maintained with a change in tradition—then proceed as a family. If not, then defer to your elders (usually parents or grandparents).

Dwelling in Peace: Scripture, so long as it isn't sinful, wants us to strive to live in peace and harmony with one another. Is my push for a change in a non-sinful tradition causing harm and disunity in the family? Might I be showing a disregard for a tradition and offend someone, either on purpose or by mistake? (Rm. 12:18) It is so sad when families have strife over non-sinful traditions. "If Susie Q brings stuffing, when I have always brought the stuffing, then we will be going to the Chinese restaurant for Christmas dinner!"

My Motives: Are my motives for rejecting my parents' (or older generations) tradition(s) completely pure or are they also tainted with sin? Stubbornness? Self-righteousness? Selfishness? Arrogance? Payback for the something in the past?

Love for Neighbor: Out of love for my neighbor, could I suffer and submit to my parents' (or in-laws') traditions when we are together?

In summary, as it is in the church and in others areas of gathering with sinners, the rejection or change of non-sinful traditions in the family can indeed become sinful if it disturbs the family peace and dishonors the older generations. And, ultimately, for us all, when we are talking motives and guidelines, this shows us our sin, doesn't it? If you have disunity in the family (or work or anywhere else) over such or any matters, by God's grace, I pray you all be reconciled and dwell in peace.

May our Lord give us all patience and wisdom in these matters of Christian freedom in the family (and elsewhere)! May He also show us our sins where we have failed in these and all matters, so that He can show us all the more the reason for the season—Jesus, our Savior, Who took on our flesh to live a sinless life in our place, always honoring His parents and loving His neighbor, and to die the death we all deserve on the cross for our dishonoring our parents and putting our desires first. What a gift!--a "tradition" worth passing on to the next generation. I pray that I see you and your family in the place where this faith is passed on and our Lord gathers with us to give us the gift of His cross in Word and Sacraments. It is by receiving His peace and reconciliation that we have the desire to reconcile and live at peace with others.

I pray a Merry Christmas Season to you and your family, coworkers, and neighbors,

Pastor

## **Ecclesia Semper Reformanda Est Even 496 Years Later!**

*The ACELC invites you to its Fourth Annual Free Conference, "Christ For Us in the Office of the Holy Ministry," at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa, Feb. 25-27, 2014.*

On the anniversary of the Reformation, with liberal pundits on one channel talking up the rising of sea levels due to climate change and more conservative ones on another talking up the rising financial, personal and political costs of so-called affordable health care, you get the sense that maybe not a lot has changed in the 496 years since that Oct. 31st in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. The world was divided then and it is divided now. FaceBook friends can't even seemingly agree on whether the answer to a riddle is "eyes" or "the door." Ah, but some things we needn't go to war over. Other things? Well, the Reformation did usher in a time of great divide, during which many were willing to bear witness to the Truth, even to the point of shedding their blood. It was nothing new. Christian martyrs had borne testimony to the Gospel with lives freely given for it for generations before the time of Reformation. Even now, Christians around the world are martyred for the Truth.

Some disagreements tire us. Some trouble us. Some are just plain silly. But the Truth of God's super-abundant Love fleshed out and brought to its fullness in the person and work of Christ Jesus . . . well, that's not something we can let go of or let be taken from us, or permit to be recast by the misshapen doctrines of men. So, when it seemed clear to a German monk and doctor of the Church, named Martin Luther, that the clarity of the Gospel had become obscured and even transformed into what was no longer Gospel at all, it was time for action. He did not go to war, but took up as arms the Word of God, posting his theses and asking for discussion, study and debate.

Since then, we have learned that what was true before the Reformation is still true nearly 500 years later. *Ecclesia semper reformanda est*. The Church is always to be reformed, as every Christian is always in need of reform. We are in need of constant dying and rising, with the Old Adam being drowned with all sins and evil desires and the New Man arising to live before God in Christ Jesus. The daily life of the baptized Christian is the life of the Church as She lives from the diligent preaching of Law and Gospel, and the faithful administration of the Holy Sacraments. Why is this important? Because the contrast between Old Man and New, between our sin and the righteousness we have in Christ Jesus, is more radically opposed, more strikingly in contrast, than any of the divisions we can

see on TV, in political or economic debates or even in friendly disagreements over Giraffe Riddles on Facebook. To put it simply, this is war.

We do not war against flesh and blood but against the rulers, authorities and powers of the spiritual darkness of this and every age. They make their inroads. They take their toll. We have their allies residing in each one of us. Too often we lay down our arms and join the other side.

We do not even know we've done so. That makes what Luther did, and what so many others before him did, Huss, Augustine, Athanasius and every voice that raised the cry of warning and urged us to repentance and faith, including the voices we hear even now from the pulpit and classroom, from faithful parents, children and friends, who point us to God's Word and our Lutheran Confessions – it makes each one of these invaluable GIFTS!

Some of God's Gifts include pastors, who hold the Office of the Ministry for the sake of the faith God's Spirit would work in those who hear the Gospel. We confessed that so clearly at Augsburg, 13 years after Luther got the debate going in Wittenberg. In Article IV of the Augsburg Confession, we state the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls:

*"It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5."*

So that such justification by faith might not be left to the pulling and tearing of divergent winds of ever-changing doctrines, individual opinions, interpretations or feelings, we confessed WHERE such faith might be had, and by what Means. We confessed in the very next article, Article V of the Augsburg Confession:

*"To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel."*

*To obtain such faith.* That is why God instituted the office of the ministry. It is why He gave gifts like

pastors and teachers, who are called and ordained for the express purpose of publicly preaching and teaching God's Word in its truth and purity and administering the Sacraments according to their institution by Christ. When we talk about the Office of the Ministry in the Church today, we find it – according to our own confession – not a matter on which we may agree to disagree, like a Facebook riddle, nor a political or economic difference about which nothing will ultimately stand or fall, nor anything so innocuous as whether the Cardinals win the World Series or the Red Sox. This is a matter of the Gospel, which “teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.”

Because this is THAT important, the ACELC invites you to its Fourth Annual Free Conference, “*Christ For Us in the Office of the Holy Ministry*,” at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa, **Feb. 25-27, 2014**. We all know there are disagreements. We all know there are divisions. We just can't change channels or dismiss the importance of what we confess. We cannot ignore the reality that the Church and our Synod even now are in need or wrestling through and coming to agreement on this issue, 496 years after the Reformation.

**Please join us Feb. 25-27 in Cedar Falls, Iowa for our next Free Conference.** Visit our [website](#) for updates. There will be a conference registration link provided as the conference draws near. We look forward to an array of excellent presenters, including Pres. Brian Saunders (Iowa East District), Dr. Richard Nuffer (CTS, Ft. Wayne), Rev. Ronald Ziegler (CTS, Ft. Wayne), Rev. Brent Kuhlman (Trinity, Murdock, NE), and Dr. Naomichi Masaki (CTS, Ft. Wayne). We look forward to pastors and laity gathering, as we continue in the confidence that as Ecclesia Semper Reformanda Est, so is our God Faithful to kill and raise up again – both Synods and individual Christians – according to His Word and Promise.

Rev. Rick Sawyer  
Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Brandon, Mississippi

P.S. If you would like to assist the ACELC in this effort you may encourage your congregation to [join as a full Member of the ACELC](#). As an individual you may [join as an Associate Member](#). You may also support our work by [making a donation online](#). Or, if none of those options work for you, we would like to ask that you remember our efforts in your prayers – that all we do would be pleasing to God and beneficial for the building of up His kingdom of grace

# LETTER FROM OUR ADOPTED STUDENT

Dear Zion Lutheran Church,

God's Peace be with you! I wanted to write and thank you for the check you sent! I can't thank you enough for your prayers and support! They are blessings from God! I pray you are all doing well as we are already in November! I only have 2 weeks left of this first quarter. It has particularly been great to be a field worker at Lutheran Life Villages. It has been a great learning experience. Jessica and I are hoping to go to Chicago and spend Thanksgiving with my sister and brother-in-law. Thank you again for your support, it has helped me greatly! In Christ,

Jens Jenson  
6723 S. Anthony Blvd. Apt. 5207  
Fort Wayne, In 46816

## FROM THE LEADER TELEGRAM

Let me offer my opinion from my own experience as a surgeon of more than 50 years as to when life begins.

I have seen dozens of spontaneously expelled "products of conception" (miscarriages), most of them at six to eight weeks of pregnancy. What does it look like at that age? A big blob of not-yet-living tissue? Or like a tadpole? A monkey? No. It looks like a human being, with a head, body, arms, legs, toes, fingers, genitals, all internal organs - heart, lungs, intestines, etc.

The major difference between a spontaneously aborted baby and a baby surgically "extracted" is that the latter is alive when removed from the womb, whereas the miscarried baby is usually dead.

## Birney Dibble, M.D. Eau Claire, WI

b l b

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL  
THE MEMBERS WHO  
HAVE DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!!**

Joey Sahr	12/1
James Vance	12/1
Lyn Brace	12/4
James Boettcher	12/5
Dean Hakes	12/7
Brianne Stark	12/7
Simeon Stark	12/9
Justin Taylor	12/12
Verlyn Ehlers	12/13
Lila Pahl	12/16
Dakota Bowe	12/26
Ryan Hunt	12/28
Kathy Michels	12/30

♥ **HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:** ♥

Louis & Mary Gettler	12/24/1982
Dale & Arlene Potts	12/24/1975

† **WE ASK YOU TO REMEMBER IN  
OUR PRAYERS THE HOMEBOUND  
MEMBERS:**

Mavis Berry	Juanita Taylor
Loretta Erickson	Helen Hempelman

**NEW CHOIR MEMBERS NEEDED!**

If you are interested in joining the choir or if you play an instrument please speak with Lyn Brace.

**YOUTH NIGHT**

Youth Night is Wednesday, Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> at 5:45 p.m. Rachel Welke will serve a light supper. All youth are invited to assist in baking cookies to be shared with the shut-ins.

**WOMEN'S SOCIETY NEWS:**

Zion's Women Society met on Thursday, Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>. Fourteen members, one guest and Pastor attended. Following the table prayer, our hostess Arlene Hakes served a choice of four delicious pies for dessert. Thank you Arlene. Pastor led us in devotions "He Alone is Holy - All Saints 2013" from "Higher Things". The Lord's holy ones are His saints. We are not holy in and of ourselves - it is through baptism and the death of His Son that we become saints. Saints receive His holiness by faith in Christ and Christ alone. At the Lord's table we are fed His Body and Blood and eat with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Our business meeting included completion of plans for the upcoming "Advent by Candlelight" on Sunday, December 1<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 p.m. to start off the Advent season. The Society will again assemble cookie tins for Zion's shut-ins on Thursday, December 12<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 a.m. followed by a Christmas potluck luncheon at 12:30 p.m. Members are asked to bring a dish to pass and also an item for the local Food Pantry. In place of a gift exchange, there will be an offering for the radio broadcast. Decorating the church and Christmas tree will follow the luncheon. Guests are most welcome! Any men that would like to help with the decorating are invited to the luncheon also. The more help the faster we will get done.

**A MESSAGE FROM THE FELLOWSHIP BOARD:**

2013 is quickly drawing to a close. December brings us Advent when we prepare for the birth of our Lord and Savior. This year the worship service with the Children's Christmas program will be Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, beginning at 9:00 a.m. The annual potluck brunch will follow. Members are requested to bring an appropriate brunch item to share. Some suggestions are baked items, fruit or egg bakes. Beverages will be provided by the board. We hope you will be able to partake in this fellowship opportunity after attending this special Christmas service.

**ZION YOUTH:**

\*Sunday School will be 10:15 - 11:45 a.m. Dec. 1, 8, & 15. Children's worship service is Sun. Dec. 22 with brunch following.

\*SAVE the DATE for MARCH 7 & 8, 2014 when Circuit 3 will be offering another retreat at Wild Mountain for Snow tubing and skiing and especially time with other active Lutheran Youths their ages, listening at the feet of Jesus' Word.

**THE LUTHERAN WITNESS**

The Lutheran Witness can be ordered now for 2014. The cost is \$21.65 for a year. Please let the office know by December 18<sup>th</sup> if you would like to order a subscription.

decorated with lights and many scrolls. The lights symbolize that Jesus is the light of the world .... And the scrolls contain the words of Jesus taken from the four Gospels. The scrolls have been prepared and placed on the tree for you to take each time you enter (or leave) the church to open and to read. Please feel free to take more than one and share with family and friends.

**ADVENT/CHRISTMAS SCRIPTURE TREE**

A tree will be placed in the Narthex during the Advent and Christmas Seasons