

April 21, 2020

## *Reflections*

### **We've Never Done It That Way Before!**

Churches often get a reputation for saying, "We've never done it that way before" a lot. Usually, this phrase is uttered as a challenge to a new idea. Someone offers a new suggestion for celebrating Christmas, a new out-reach project, or a new date for Vacation Bible school. The reaction is "We've never done it that way before!" In such a context, these words are a cover for the word "no." Said too often and in too many situations, this phrase can be an impediment to growth and creativity. A church whose mantra is "we've never done it that way before" can quickly become a stagnant and declining church, because God's spirit is always creating something new and pushing God's people into new opportunities for love and service in Christ's name. Much of my ministry has been about honoring strong traditions of the faith while also encouraging the church to move in the new directions God is calling us. Therefore, I have viewed this phrase as alternately a barrier to what needs to happen at the church or a kind of warning signal. Of course, we all say it in every part of our lives, but we must be careful with it in the church.

Yet recently, "we've never done it that way before" describes everything we are doing. We've never had Bible study on Zoom before. We've never attended worship in our living rooms before. Most of us have never mailed our tithes or used on-line giving before. We've never been really careful and intentional about calling all our members before. We've never showed care and concern by leaving treats on doorsteps and running away. We've never worn masks to the store before.

I'm so grateful for how you have embraced all that we have never done. You've read your email. You've offered to help. You've learned how to zoom. You've called one another. You've given faithfully even though it was harder. In the next weeks and months, we will do more things in ways we've never done before. We will do them imperfectly. We will do them even though we'd rather not. We will do them together. This is a new adventure for everyone. I am glad to be on this journey with you. We do all these new things with courage and hope because we know that God is with us.