

## Putting Christ First at Church

Dear Friends:

August 16, 2007

This one would seem to go without saying, wouldn't it? Of course Christ would come first at church! He is what church is all about. But it's important to remember that even if something is (or should be!) obvious, it's still valuable to *say* it. Why? Because our minds are surprisingly capable of ignoring - or forgetting - the obvious.

Here's how it works in church. First is our faith in Christ. Second, we draw lifestyle conclusions from our faith. (We realize, for example, that we are called by Christ to feed the hungry.) Third, we plan strategies for carrying out such callings: we provide a food pantry, we make and encourage contributions to World Hunger Relief; we may even support political candidates who make hunger relief a priority.

We could give other examples. We could say our faith in Christ (1st) leads to valuing fellowship with other Christians (2nd) with the result that we plan an annual picnic (3rd). Or we could apply this analysis to fundraising, Bible study, caring for the sick, protecting the unborn, promoting peace, praising God through music, or any number of things.

Here's the big temptation: What if the strategies and programs, *which are supposed to come third*, start to take first place? That's easy to happen, because often people have very strong feelings about their own favorite causes and programs. But that's when division begins, and when our true, first purpose begins to suffer. This can happen in a denomination (ELCA), or in a congregation. One key to avoiding this is to continually remind ourselves to put Christ first.

Our name reminds us well! We are "First Lutheran Church - Putting Christ First."

Sincerely in Christ, Pastor Carl L.M. Rasmussen