

THE THREE C's OF 2015 - CHRIST - COMMUNITY - COMPASSION

At the center of our life together as the congregation of First Evangelical Lutheran Church is CHRIST. It is Jesus Christ our Lord who forms and shapes us as His Body, the Church, and gives us life.

We know that worship is essential and so our Saturday evening Holy Communion and our Sunday Morning Holy Communion are at the heart of our COMMUNITY of faith. Out of our sharing in The Word and the Holy Meal, we grow together in CHRIST.

Together and individually we live as people of COMPASSION who are called to live following the example of Jesus whose love is the same love we receive from The Holy Spirit in Baptism.

We take time at our Annual Meeting to listen to one another as well as read reports of our life together. I urge us to consider what we receive today, with the idea that everything can be captured within THE THREE C's OF 2015 - CHRIST - COMMUNITY - COMPASSION.

For instance, one of my joys of being your Pastor is to preside at our times of worship. CHRIST invites us to celebrate His presence in with and through us, which continues to refresh in us our unity with The Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Indeed our worship is rich and full with many people taking part in various ways each time we are together. We are blessed with uniquely gifted servants of CHRIST who are a part of each opportunity to worship.

COMMUNITY refers to who we are as the Body of Christ. We are a welcoming gathering of people who are, as I have heard over and over from guests and new friends, that First Evangelical Lutheran Church is friendly. A great blessing is enacted when we reach out to one another, not only in worship, and also in the ways we pray for one another.

Each of our groups at First Evangelical Lutheran Church help to expand the gift of our COMMUNITY. One of my three major goals for 2016 is to consider ways and means for establishing an ongoing Small Group Ministry Program. Of course Small Group Ministry is all about building and sustaining our sense of COMMUNITY.

There is a way in which COMMUNITY is nurtured and somewhat hidden from most of us, and that is our school. Tender Love for Children is filled with love for one another and is modeled through the excellent staff. Our school is in my estimation, an anchor in our COMMUNITY for good. Since I have continuing relationships with staff and our

children, I know that TLC is a resource in Downtown Altoona that has touched the lives of many, many families.

Another of my concerns for First Evangelical Lutheran Church is to implement a Confirmation Program. Here again, the gift of COMMUNITY can be nurtured through a group of young people who will regularly study, learn and share their lives together, which is so very important.

Continuing further with this goal has to do with considering ways to help new people here at First Evangelical Lutheran Church, be integrated into our life together. O yes, this is an intentional way of nurturing COMMUNITY.

COMPASSION completes the triad of considerations I set out for this report. Doing what Jesus would do is a straightforward way of stating the obvious spiritual basis of COMPASSION. We do reach out to help people in need, because the Spirit of Jesus in us, continues to open our eyes and hearts to needy people and situations. I am pleased that part of our second offering on Sundays is designated for mission. We all have COMPASSION with regard to the Honduras Mission Program which touches us deeply. There are many other ways we reach out, and that is all for the good, because the more we each feel COMPASSION, the deeper it will take root in our hearts and grow.

Now you know how I hope we can view our past year. Through the three ways of evaluating who we are as the people of God, we are known as First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Downtown Altoona, PA. Of course, these words only partially express who we are since we speak loud and clear, without words, through loving deeds.

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We can use these three expression in 2016 to shed light on our mission and ministry while we journey together as Pastor and People of God.

Thank you for responding to the call of The Holy Spirit in your life.

Pastor Folmar