



## Pastor's Notes

Dear Friends,

Last week, I spoke of the famous theological phrase “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” - the way we worship is the way we believe. I also asked you to try imagining that the wall behind the altar was a window into the place where all the saints are found, as well as the throne of God, and here's why: the design of traditional worship spaces and the items found there have meaning that often gets lost over the years.

Let's start with the communion rail. Historically, it serves as the line that separates the nave (main seating area) of the church from the sanctuary, which contains the altar and other sacred items. Today, many communion rails have been taken down to suggest that God is always accessible to us. Others respond that the communion rail isn't about keeping people out, but instead about preparing them to enter into the life of the resurrection, and coming face-to-face with the holy for a brief moment.

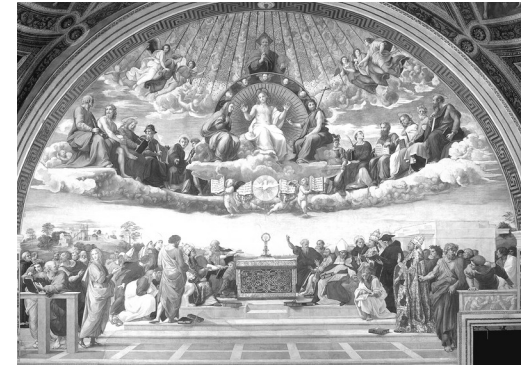
Moving to the topic of the altar: For most of church history, it was placed against the wall, called *ad orientem*. The altar in the old Immanuel church was situated this way. In this setting, worship is an action where the congregation and the celebrant look together toward God. It also emphasizes the eschatological view—awaiting the return of Christ.

Later, Vatican II would usher in the practice of *versus populum*, or free-standing altars where clergy stand in front of the altar while speaking for the congregation, and behind when carrying out the duties of administering Holy Communion. It allows for direct eye contact and engagement between the presider and the assembly. Some say this better facilitates the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Both placements of the altar are still used today.

In either case, the altar and the space behind it is envisioned as the place where heaven and earth come together, with the church militant (that's us) on one side, and the church triumphant (heaven) on the other side. All of the faithful worship together, offering their finest sacrifice.

When we worship, we are joining our voices with those of the generations that have come before us. Heaven and Earth are united in praise, if just for a brief moment. The world may be on fire around us with selfishness, hatred and all other manner of evil occurring. But in those sweet moments, we join our voices with those from every time and place as we praise the God who saved us from death and condemnation.



Raphael's Disputation of the Holy Sacrament

Immanuel Lutheran Church is a place where God's people come to repent of their sins, and receive absolution. It's a place where we bring people to the baptismal font, sharing with them the gift of the Holy Spirit and the promise of eternal life. It's where we receive the body and blood of our Savior, and the freedom to love others as we want to be loved. It's a place where we praise God for all he has done for us.

Does thinking about the communion rail, the altar, and the space beyond help to shape what worship means to you? Regardless of what style of music you prefer, what clothes you wear or where you stand in the physical space, I pray that you always feel a sense of reverence here. Times change, but the altar of God remains holy, and heaven still shines through in our prayers and worship of our Triune god.

Wishing you the Lord's peace,

✠ Pastor Brian Moeller