

Being a Welcoming Family of Faith

In our society when we hear people speak about "family values," what they have in mind rarely has much to do with the family values of Jesus or the New Testament. The family values suggested by Jesus require a transformed idea of family. "While Jesus was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-49).

For Jesus family is spiritual, not primarily physical. The view of Jesus is also seen in the words of the apostle Paul when he said, "Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Galatians 6:10). As followers of Jesus we are to love and care for all people but we also have a special responsibility toward other who are part of the community of faith. With them we are part of the "household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). As such, we seek to comfort, encourage, up build and support each other so we can more faithfully love God and serve people in need.

I often speak of the Royal Palm Christian Church community as a family. Being a family doesn't mean we are perfect in our relationships. We certainly don't find anything like perfection in our natural families. Each member is not equally close to every other member. There are degrees of intimacy and harmony, from member to member. And so it is in church. But it is important that we reach out to one another in caring ways, not just during times of crisis but all the time.

It is our aim in RPCC to be a genuinely embracing church, welcoming all, not just selectively welcoming certain kinds of "imperfect people." Often we do this well. This week I was told by someone who visited our church how warmly received he felt. But occasionally we don't do this equally well. A few days ago someone else told me that it seemed that during our coffee fellowship time many people just talk to those they already know well and don't make much effort to speak to others who might very much need a kind and welcoming word.

We don't want anyone to be ignored or feel isolated. It is important that we be attentive to all and to make a special effort to go beyond our circle of comfort. One passage of scripture urges, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). At our best we do that well at RPCC. But we can improve. Let's all commit ourselves to making sure every person who ever comes to our church experiences us as a genuine family of faith that works to include all.