

Welcome Not So Welcome

One of the nine core values of CGCC states:

We value being God's Family - the Church the body of Christ where genuine Christ-like love is expressed through acceptance, unity, forgiveness, serving and encouraging one another - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Ephesians 4:20-32; Colossians 3:12-17.

Rod, Ken and Philip were at a training weekend for preachers. On the Sunday participants were dispersed to a range of local churches. Rod, Ken and Philip went to a church. No one was in the foyer to welcome them, so they proceeded inside and sat down. No sooner were they seated than a man got up, came to them and said, "Sorry chaps, it's obvious you are not one of us so can I recommend you move on!" They were dumbfounded. They left.

Differences between Christians and Christian communities can result in genuine Christians being rejected for wrong reasons. In Rome, Italy, there was tension within the congregation because of differences of opinion about diet, drink and special days [Romans 14:1-15:13]. We are reminded that: "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit . . . therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" [Romans 14:17, 19].

Michael had a cancerous growth behind his ear. He came to Rome and underwent several operations. We took Michael back to his family in southern Italy. On Sunday morning we went with him to the local Christian Brethren Church. The building was packed. As we were ushered down to the front every man rose, embraced me and kissed me on both cheeks. As most had not shaved for a week my face was raw by the time I made it to the front pew. I knew I was welcome.

Who is welcome at CGCC? Today we have a 'welcome lunch' for families and individuals who are new to CGCC. Though we come from a wide diversity of backgrounds, we believe and are committed to obeying what the Bible says in this area. "Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.' For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" [Romans 15:2-7].

Today those attending the 'welcome lunch' will be given a copy of CGCC's statement of faith, a copy of our nine core values, an outline of what is expected of members of CGCC, an explanation about CareLink, etc. But this is meaningless unless we warmly welcome people as friends, sharing a meal, doing an activity together, praying for each other. We are to model Christ's WELCOME. Do we?