
RUPERT'S LAND? WE MATTER TO EACH OTHER!

It seems today, in a country like Canada, it is very common for the members of a family to spread clear across the country. The family home may have been in Selkirk; the aging grandparents have moved into Winnipeg to be closer to health services; Mom and Dad have taken early retirement and now live year-round in what was once the cottage at Winnipeg Beach. A couple of the children have married and settled in Calgary and Kingston and the youngest child is attending university in Toronto. Does this sound familiar to you? Between Nancy and me, we have close family on Vancouver Island, in Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg, and in several cities in Ontario, including Newmarket, St Thomas and London.

With families like this, the members see each other only rarely. And when an opportunity presents itself that brings members of the family together, the occasion becomes a family reunion. I seem to have a kind of love-hate relationship with family reunions. On the one hand, I really enjoy spending some time with other members of our family, appreciating the ties that bring us together. But on the other hand, I'm always anxious about the gathering. I spend time ahead trying to dig out last year's Christmas cards and letters to "cram" on the latest happenings in my family members' lives - the names of the recently born children, etc., - hoping that the gaps in my knowledge of the significant events in their lives won't come across as if I didn't care about them. And if we're hosting such an affair, Nancy and I spend considerable energy and time worrying about whether everyone will feel included and cared for, and how we might defuse any conflict or "ruffled feathers" that might result. But things usually go well, and the members of our families often leave these gatherings saying to each other, "We need to keep in touch and communicate more often."

Our Rupert's Land Church family is a little like this. We are formed into 70 some congregations spread across 72,000 sq. km. of southern Manitoba. And while we may travel frequently throughout our diocese, there are very few occasions when we gather together as the family of Rupert's Land. When we do gather, those responsible for the planning and hosting often fret about whether everyone will feel included and appreciated, and whether we can anticipate and defuse potential conflict. And if the gathering has gone well, we will often hear people talking about exchanging email addresses and phone numbers in order to "keep in touch more regularly."

Even though we enter into these family gatherings with some anxiety, every time we meet together it gets easier. As we learn more about each other, natural connections form around common interests, common problems and common perspectives. We don't feel as though we're entirely on our own in facing challenges. We come to realize that others have the same struggles and, more importantly, we begin to learn from them, (and they from us) about the ways to successfully engage those difficulties. There is a kind of synergy that develops when we meet - meaning that the vision, energy, creativity and passion of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts that make it up.

It makes a difference in our spiritual lives as well. The New Testament Epistles are full of references to the members of the Church, together, making up the Body of Christ. In our statements of faith, we say that "We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." It is not enough to merely *say* these words. We need to have regular, tangible *experiences* of this wider Body of Christ. And as with our nuclear families, *communication* is the foundation for building these relationships. We need to know and learn something about each other, in order to support and be supported by one another.

Direction #2 in The Way Forward Diocesan Action Plan reads:

Model and seek better ways of building an interdependent diocesan Christian community in today's world.

And it goes on to describe the work that needs to be done to strengthen communication, provide opportunities to learn together, increase our awareness and acceptance of the diversity in the Church, and build up the kind of relationships that can embrace and work through disagreements and differences. We believe that God's Spirit calls us into this intentional family relationship to help us mature as Christ's examples in the world.

What characterizes strong, healthy families? It is their genuine interest and delight in each other, and their desire to share together in meeting the challenges and opportunities that life presents.