

CARING RELATIONSHIPS

By Barry L. Davis

The *Crow Wing Power and Light Company* is headquartered in Baxter, Minnesota, serving small towns and rural areas. Inside the front cover of the employee's handbook is printed, "People Don't Care How Much You Know; People Care How Much You Care." Now, this slogan is an overstatement. Obviously people expect their utility company to have the necessary technical knowledge about electricity, power lines, circuits, and monthly statements. But technical information is not enough. Customers want to be treated as people with wants, needs, and feelings. They want to know that they are more than just meters – they want care.

In case you haven't noticed, a revolution has already begun in North American culture and churches making care far more important. An earlier generation asked the churches for knowledge. Local churches were chosen because of denominational labels and the attractiveness of preaching. Once the selection was made, relationships usually followed.

Increasingly we find that relationships come first. The world that we live in today has been left hungry for love and care. Tens of millions of Americans have grown up in dysfunctional families, have experienced broken relationships, live far from grandparents, or otherwise feel deprived of love, intimacy, and community. In a word, they just want someone to care. Where should they experience love more than from the church?

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying here. In no way am I implying that biblical knowledge and solid Christian faith are unimportant or unnecessary. Obviously, they are essentially important. The church is not the church without truth any more than the power company is a power company without electricity. For Christians there is no choice between truth and love – both are essential. But for too long this mix has been completely out of balance.

A quick survey of the Gospels will show that Jesus modeled care and truth, usually in that order. It was not until the blind saw, the adulterer was forgiven, or the lame walked that they were ready to see the truth of the Messianic message.

In the last few months we have had people attend our church for the first time who were on the verge of divorce, had children that were in detention centers, were contemplating suicide, some addicted to various substances – you name it, they are coming to the church for answers. But more than that, they are coming to church because, for many, this is their last chance to find some people that actually care about them. We can look at them in their pain and argue with them about denominationalism, millennial theories, or the use of musical instruments, or we can wrap our arms around them and show them the love of Jesus Christ.

If we will seize the opportunities that God is placing in our midst, present and future generations will be incorporated into our churches through caring relationships. With those relationships they will become Christians, learn the Bible, and develop as obedient disciples of our Lord. If we do not seize the opportunity, these same people will be lost.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:34-40, NIV).