

UNITY

UNITY IN CHRIST – NO DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

— MATTHEW 5:7

During the season of Lent, Christians join Jesus in the journey to the cross, reflecting on his sacrifice, but even more on the reason for the sacrifice. We wonder why God Almighty became vulnerable to sin, pain, and death, even death on a cross?

In II Corinthians 5:19, the Apostle Paul provides the definitive answer: *...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*

In God's infinite mercy, God came into a broken and bleeding world to break down the barriers that separate humanity from God and one another. Then, in an amazing act of trust, God said to pass on the message of reconciliation. We walk to the cross with Jesus as his ministers of reconciliation. To follow in his footsteps means that the barriers that separate us must come down.

In 1990 the term "six degrees of separation" became part of the popular vocabulary when John Guare wrote a hit play with the same name. Three years later the play was adapted into a movie starring Will Smith, and in 2006, the "six degrees" concept became the central point of an ABC television series.

The concept, once confined to academia, is based on the theory that if a person is one step away from each person he or she knows, and two steps away from each person known by these acquaintances, then everyone on earth is no more than six steps away from one another. To borrow another phrase from pop culture, "It's a small world after all."

Few of us have had the privilege of visiting Africa University or visiting anywhere in Africa. That doesn't mean that we are separated from AU and its mission.

Not only do we have a close relationship through mutual friends, some of whom are contributors to this devotional guide, but as United Methodists, we also have a direct link through AU itself. We in the NTC have a unique opportunity to work together to build a health center and provide scholarships for young men and women who will be God's agents of mercy and reconciliation as they go back to countries devastated by disease and premature death.

JESUS, WHO CAME TO ERASE ALL DEGREES OF SEPARATION BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANITY, CALLS US TO FOLLOW HIM.

Through our Lenten sacrifices for AU, we will obey the command to be reconcilers, showing mercy and empowering others to pass it on to God's children in Africa.