



I AM BECAUSE YOU ARE, AND WE ARE

The African philosophy
Ubuntu demonstrates the
interconnectedness of our
humanity. It can teach us,
writes Charmaine Mhlanga

*‘Umuntu ngumuntu
ngabantu’*
Zulu/Ndebele

*‘Munhu munhu nekuda
kwevanhu’*
Shona

*‘A person is a person through
other persons’*
English

Embedded in our Baptists
Together vision is a series of
five culture values. The first states
that we ‘Seek to be a movement
of Spirit-led communities: As
those who have encountered the
living Christ, to intentionally seek
his will and purpose for our local
churches and **every expression
of our shared life**’ (Galatians
5:22-25).

In the context of this edition of
Baptists Together magazine, it is
important to linger on this latter
phrase.

As someone born in Zimbabwe
who is now ministering to a
congregation in Luton, I believe
Ubuntu can give us a fresh
perspective on our shared life
together.

WHAT IS UBUNTU?

The late Archbishop Desmond
Tutu described **Ubuntu** in its
simplest form as **‘the essence of
being human’**. He continued: “It
says a solitary human being is a
contradiction in terms.

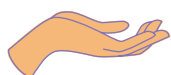
I can't be a human being on my lonesome[...] Ubuntu says, my humanity is bound up in yours; **I am, only because you are**; a person is a person through other persons."

In this way Ubuntu speaks of the ethics of **interdependence**: everything you do impacts and affects me, and everything I do impacts and affects you. Ubuntu, therefore, demonstrates the interconnectedness of our humanity.

Philosophically, Ubuntu (Zulu/Ndebele) /Hunhu (Shona) carries with it a plethora of aspects. These include a spirit of togetherness, of oneness, of solidarity, of community - an intentionality of seeking the good for others. Ubuntu/Hunhu describes our humanity as **'the expression of our shared life'**. We are sharing hopes, dreams and aspirations from one generation to the next; we are sharing the produce of the land and the bounty of the rivers—only acquiring what is needed and not so excessive as to damage or destroy the sources of the blessing; we are sharing in our responsibility to nurture and raise children with good morals and traditional virtues of compassion and kindness.



UBUNTU CARRIES WITH IT A PLETHORA OF ASPECTS INCLUDING A SPIRIT OF TOGETHERNESS, A SPIRIT OF ONENESS, A SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY, A SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY - AN INTENTIONALITY OF SEEKING THE GOOD FOR OTHERS.



The African proverb 'It takes a village to raise a child' speaks into Ubuntu: a community responsible for the safety and wellbeing of a child, engaging in mutual support to meet the physical needs of food and shelter, and the emotional needs of a sense of belonging and being part of the community.

Such is the focus on our relationships and commitment to others, the Ugandan theologian Dennis Kilama, senior pastor of Lugogo Baptist Church in Kampala, has written: 'Ubuntu is a truth that God embedded in African culture that is affirmed in the gospel!'¹

MADE FROM THE EARTH - AND WELCOMING THE STRANGER / MY GRANDMOTHER'S GENEROSITY

A person with Ubuntu/Hunhu recognises that we are all created from the earth (dust of the ground Genesis 2:7). In Shona we speak of 'mwana wevhu'- translated 'son/daughter/child of the soil'. This understanding of Ubuntu/Hunhu is evidenced in the warm welcome of a stranger.

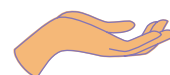
During school holidays, we were packed into a commercial bus, full of different people and families, and sent to the grandparents in the village so we could help with the seasonal agricultural tasks that awaited us. People sat next to one another in the bus would offer each other food and snacks prepared for the journey. What was also always evident was my grandmother's generosity and sincere welcome. If a person was lost and needed

directions, my grandmother would first offer them a drink of cold water drawn from our well and a stool to sit on under the peach tree, which provided shade under the hot Zimbabwe sun. The cup would be extended with both hands, symbolising the dignity held for the person, a sign of welcome and respect.

If we had sat down to eat, the stranger was offered a place at the table, which was everyone sitting and eating together from the same shared plates. My grandmother's welcome of the stranger extended to meal preparation—you always prepared food in anticipation of a hungry soul who might turn up.



UBUNTU SPEAKS OF THE ETHICS OF INTERDEPENDENCE: EVERYTHING YOU DO IMPACTS AND AFFECTS ME AND EVERYTHING I DO IMPACTS AND AFFECTS YOU.



WE NEED EACH OTHER - MOVING FROM I TO WE

Ubuntu/Hunhu therefore speaks to the move from 'I' to 'we' and, as such, has much to say to our times. The world has increasingly become more individualistic, with people focusing more on themselves and their needs than others. Unfortunately, some churches are not immune to this individualistic self-preservation agenda.

¹ africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/redeeming-ubuntu

By this move to 'we', Ubuntu can help us to start restoring what has been lost from our humanity. There is an urgent need for the repairing of our broken relationship with God who calls us into the community of Christ; the repairing of our broken relationship with one another, when we mistreat each other; and the repairing of our broken relationship with creation, when we misuse and abuse what we received from God.

The cost of change will be painful, as we break ground to genuinely embody what we say is our Baptists Together vision. How can we live out Philippians 2:2-4? *'then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.'*

Photo of Charmaine Mhlanga and Tim Judson filming for the Equality and Diversity training pack. Courtesy of The FuelCast

CONVERSATION

How are we impacting or affecting the lives of our families, churches, communities, the world?

Are we more focused on we – or I?

Do we embrace those who don't look like, don't talk like, or share the same culture as us?

STARTERS



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NEW TRAINING RESOURCE FOR BAPTIST MINISTERS

'I am because you are' – a rough translation of the word ubuntu – is also the title of our forthcoming training pack on equality and diversity. Charmaine is one of two presenters of six short videos, each containing an explanation, an interview or filmed conversation, and some questions for reflection.

The videos will be available for ministers to watch and discuss together from June.

The resource recognises that God has created us each in his image, yet in such great diversity. We are inter-connected by sharing our God-given humanity. In the videos, a number of Baptist leaders reflect on this

inter-connectedness and how they have learnt to move towards and not away from others.

'I am because you are' is only an introduction to equality and diversity. Other resources that look in more detail at particular areas of diversity will follow.

Tim Fergusson - Ministerial Development Adviser