

Agape: Awakening Sacrificial Love in the Everyday About the Theme

Of three types of love talked about in the Bible, Agape is the most God-like, because Agape love is selfless and unconditional. When Jesus washes the disciples' feet, they protest because Jesus, their leader, must take a position of extreme humility, which to their worldly way of thinking just doesn't seem right. And yet, when Jesus explains himself he takes it a step further by telling his disciples to do the same thing. "I have set you an example," he tells them, "that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). For Jesus, Agape love, lived out in humble service, is expected of everyone.

Christians engaged in global service are likewise called to exercise Agape love, not only in distant lands, but in our daily lives. Such love is to become an integral part of who we are. As Paul says, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:9-12). So how do we do that?

Many of us have become passionate about global ills like sex trafficking, refugees, child soldiers, ecological threats, to generalized hunger and poverty, and more. These are the arenas, far away from our own homes and lives, to which we often think we are called to practice Agape love. And yet it is our conviction that our commitment to love people around the world impacts the way we live our lives at home too.

Sacrificial love seen only as periodic dramatic acts of service for "helpless children abroad" may provide those fulfilling adrenaline-rushes, but it can also lead to god-complexes. Focusing on needs in other countries can also lead us to forget the needs and shortcomings of our own communities. Because the truth is that our own communities and nations are also desperately in need of holistic transformation. In this conference we want to explore how Agape love enters into and infuses development work done in other lands, but also how such love impacts our lives here at home. Whether we are ultimately called to work internationally or here at home, the need to grow in the practice of agape remains universal.

God made us to love and to be loved, so let us learn in humility what this means for us as we think about our role in a world where poverty, hunger, disease, conflict, gender discrimination, racism, and ecological decline define the lives of way too many people both abroad and at home. In this interchange of agape that we are called to cultivate, may we come together at this conference in worship and joy. At FIDC 2016, we hope to promote the transformation of the heart through Christ's love so that God may leave an imprint that lasts, on our own lives, and on the communities where God calls us to live.