



Dear friends in Christ,

This month we celebrate Immanuel's 20-year partnership with our brothers and sisters in Kidugala, Tanzania. Our friends at Kidugala are a spiritual gift given to Immanuel by God's Holy Spirit. There are all kinds of blessings that we receive from our friendship.

First, our friendship with Kidugala reminds us that the Church is much bigger than just our own little congregation. We are part of a movement of the Holy Spirit that crosses boundaries of nationality, language, culture, politics, economics, and race. Our world is so divided, but the Church of Jesus is a force that brings people together. The Church is the largest movement for good in our world today. Our partnership helps us to keep the big picture in view.

Second, our friendship with Kidugala reminds us of what is essential and what is peripheral. We tend to think that the way we do things is the only way to do things and the way Christians have always done things. But our partnership with Kidugala shows us that followers of Jesus are a diverse group who live and worship and serve in various ways. We can see both our strengths and our weaknesses when we are in relationship with people from other cultures.

Third, our friendship with Kidugala gives us an opportunity to discover the deep unity of the Church. What binds us together as Christians is not our proximity or our shared experience or even our culture. What binds us together as Christians is Jesus and his Holy Spirit. We are not some club for like-minded individuals. We are a family united by blood -- by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. From the very beginning of the Church, the Holy Spirit has been working to unite the Church across all the divisions of our world. Our partnership with Kidugala is part of that work of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, our friendship with Kidugala gives us an opportunity to use our giving to make profound changes in the world. Of course, we are called to serve our neighbors in our own community. And we do. But we also have the opportunity to profoundly change the lives of hundreds of people in Tanzania. We have given an education to orphans. We have saved lives with clean water, with equipment for a health clinic, with improvements in agricultural practices. When we give a little in Africa, it can go a long way through the careful work of our Kidugala partners.

Finally, our friendship with Kidugala helps us to keep an outward focus in our mission. It is easy for congregations to become inward focused, to do what we do as a way of serving own interests. We share the faith to gain members. We do good deeds to improve our reputation. But serving those on the other side of the world helps us to keep a genuine outward focus, a genuine servant heart. This is part of what makes a congregation truly healthy.

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen