

## A Devotional: Unified in Spirit—But What If the Other Guy Is Different?

*By Laura Austin, president of AB Women's Ministries of Connecticut*

Ephesians 4:3-6 (NIV) speaks of a unity in faith and "one body", but can this unity include unbelievers or members of a faith that is in conflict with our own? My interpretation of this is God must be present in *all* people, including Muslim extremists and the hordes of "nones" (people who, when asked if they follow a religion, respond, "None"). Since the word of the Lord is true and I believe it, that means all the people on earth are my sisters and brothers even if I don't see any evidence of God in them. Ephesians 4:12 states that God will equip God's people for works of service until we all reach unity. Wow! What works of service can I do that will have an impact, especially reaching far to people I will never meet? I think God gave a variety of gifts (Ephesians 4:11) for just this purpose. God wanted artists and teachers and doctors to work on differing aspects of suffering. God presents opportunities in our neighborhoods, regions, nation, and world that tug at our heartstrings. It doesn't necessarily mean finding a cure for HIV/AIDS (although that would be super nice) but rather using the gifts you already have, like sharing a cup of coffee or raking a sick neighbor's leaves. I have felt compassion for a beggar in India that I could only help for a day by offering a single meal, but I know that sending money to a faith-based nonprofit would help people in Bangalore improve many family's futures for their lifetime and beyond. Like ripples on a pond, the love waves spread when given to a responsible organization. This is one way to show how thankful we are for God's great love for us. If you can help someone directly, do so (Ephesians 4:32). When that is not possible due to distance or circumstances, you can contribute prayer or acts of service or finances to trustworthy agencies like American Baptist Women's Ministries' Women and Girls Mission Fund, American Baptist Home Mission Societies, and International Ministries, who will share God's message of love along with the care being provided.