

"Why Six?"

By noon of last Friday, six crosses draped in red and purple were erected outside the Lutheran Campus Ministry in DeKalb. I had asked my husband, a dear friend who had driven in from Iowa to be with us, and some students and friends of LCM to build big crosses and plant them on our lawn. They are beautiful and they have come to mean so much for so many. But many ask, "why six?" For me, the answer is not difficult...six crosses, six children of God gone from us. All six were loved by God and all six were victims and all six left behind families who are hurting, confused, empty.

Saturday night a man came into LCM. His hands were ice cold and he was warming himself with some sturdy coffee. He was visibly shaken which was my invitation to ask him to sit with me, talk with me. He was not a student. Up until Thursday, his only connection to NIU was through a sister who had graduated from the school years ago. As of Thursday, he was connected by a sixth cross.

He came to campus to lay flowers at "snow hill," a shrine directly across the street from LCM...a shrine spontaneously birthed on a busy campus corner by hundreds as they left the LCM midnight vigil on Thursday/Friday. A statue of Buddah, frozen flowers, notes, signs, hundreds of candles have created "snow hill" And, there are six crosses on the hill: five crosses facing forward with names of those shot and killed and the sixth cross with no name simply facing backward. He came to lay flowers at "snow hill," but he did not. Instead of finding solace at the hill, he was crushed by the sixth cross. With a sad heart, clad only in a light suit coat on a very cold night, he began walking the empty campus streets. After some time, he found himself across from "snow hill" and standing in front of LCM, in front of six crosses all facing in one direction with no names added but with many words of love and hope written by those who came to find peace at the cross. He laid his flowers in front of the six crosses, read our sign that invites anyone to come to us 24/7 for comfort and care. He accepted our invitation and was quite amazed to find himself talking with me.

But, talk he did. He shared his life story. He told me of his children. He told me of his pain. And, he asked if the sixth cross on "snow hill," the cross turned away from us and the rest of the world, meant that God had turned away from Stephen. "Does that sixth cross mean that God has turned his back on that boy?" My heart ached for him and we cried together as I told him of God's love for all the children...as I told him that all six of those young adults were loved by God and that God's mercy and forgiveness is for all people. He thought about that for a long moment and then said, "I hope so because that could be my son. I worry about him. He's not healthy. He knows that. He won't stay on his medicine and I'm afraid of what he could do. I'm afraid God and the world will turn their backs on him and on me."

We have six crosses outside LCM as a witness to the world that God loves us all...that God forgives us all...that there is hope for all...that the cross of Christ stands in blustery winter winds for everyone. "Why six?" Because God's grace and mercy is for all!

Six crosses.

Six crosses draped in the color of Lent-royal purple.

Six crosses draped in the color of glory-red.

Red. A school color.

Red. A holy color, reminiscent of Christ's blood shed on the cross.

Red. Christ's blood now mingled with the blood of six.

Six crosses.

A guiding place on campus—"the six cross corner."

Crosses that guide to places, prayers, hearts, hope.

Six crosses.

No distinctions, simply acknowledgement.

Six, not five.

Six children. Six families.

Six children of God, all loved by God.

Six crosses.

Six hurting families.

No distinctions, simply painful fact.

Six families crying out for mercy.

Six crosses—

offering hope to world family

facing east toward rising sun

standing firm in winters' storms

directing hearts to God whose back is never turned—whose love is always flowing—

whose mercy is upon us all.

Diane Dardon, Campus Pastor, Northern Illinois University Lutheran Campus Pastor, February 18, 200