



The first 31 high-school students received certification in the Peer Mediators program by Oscar Siwali and Dan Smith Derksen. Photo provided by Dan Smith Derksen.

## Background

God delights in creating different kinds of beauty—sunlight and darkness, mountains and oceans, and all the colors of the rainbow. South Africa is sometimes called “the Rainbow Nation” because people with all skin colors live there.

Scientists tell us the first people in the world lived in Africa and moved from there to all the other continents. The *San* are the first people known to have lived in the area that is today’s South Africa. From the beginning, they were hunters and gatherers who lived off the land in much the same way that North America’s indigenous people did.

Groups of *Bantu* people came from other parts of Africa to live as neighbors to the San. They brought with them cattle and sheep. Some of these groups developed into wealthy and powerful kingdoms.

The San and the Bantu people had dark-colored skin. Their societies were based on sharing whatever they had with others in their communities. Later, about 700 years after Jesus lived in Israel, people from his area of the world (the Middle East) and from Asia began to visit southern Africa by boat. They were attracted to Africa by many treasures: good things to eat—bananas, coconuts and oranges—and precious objects like gold, silver

and ivory. The Middle Eastern and Asian people had light brown skin. They exchanged beads, glazed pottery and cloth with the dark-skinned Africans for the fruit, gold and silver they wanted. Their relationship was mostly based on trade.

Hundreds of years later, people with white skin arrived in South Africa. They sailed from Europe in ships because they wanted the treasures of Africa, too. Sometimes, the people with white skin traded European things for African things, but they often took what they wanted by force, using their big guns to seize what belonged to others and to enslave people with darker skin. They killed many of the people living in South Africa in order to take over their land and wealth.

The people with white skin called the dark-skinned people “Blacks.” They called the lighter-skinned people “Coloreds” and “Indians.” (Many people were taken from India and forced to work on the farms or in the mines in South Africa.) For hundreds of years, the small group of white-skinned people in South Africa made life miserable for the people with darker skin. Racism became a way of life and developed into a system called apartheid that separated people according to the color of their skin.

People with darker skin were not allowed to eat in the same restaurants or use the same restrooms as the people with white skin. People with darker skin had to walk for hours every day because their homes were far away from their work places and schools. Some jobs were so far away that the parents couldn't even go home to their children at night. Sometimes, dark-skinned people died very close to a hospital that was "for Whites only" because they weren't allowed to go inside.

Many people with darker skin resisted this violence and spoke out, saying, "Apartheid is not right. God wants all people to live happy and free lives." Many people were killed for protesting in this way, but because of their sacrifices, apartheid ended as an official policy in 1994.

Today in South Africa, people with all skin colors have more freedom to live and go to the school of their choice. Most church and government leaders, doctors, lawyers and teachers are people with darker skin. But even though apartheid ended 25 years ago, racism is still very present. People with darker skin still don't enjoy

the same privileges as people with white skin, and, as a group, they don't have as much money. Because they weren't admitted into the better schools when they were young, people of color have to work harder to get good-paying jobs. Without enough money, many families can't buy safe homes or send their children to schools with adequate resources.

Churches show God's love when people of all skin colors worship and study the Bible together, and work to overcome racism. People who love God believe that God created each of us to look like God. They also believe that God wants us to live in peace. Jesus told his disciples, "*Uxolo malube nani* [Oo-KHO-lo mah-LOO-bay NAH-nee]. Peace be with you." [See Caleb's story card for context.]

Jesus is helping us break down the walls of anger and fear that divide us. Jesus wants us to work for peace, like Caleb does. Let's do our part to help *all* children go to good schools and to live in safe homes so that South Africa can truly be "the Rainbow Nation" where God's people of all colors live together in peace with justice.