

## Let's Talk About Building Cross-cultural Friendships

Last month, when we talked about cultural appreciation, you might remember that I strongly suggested making new friends as part of the way we can appreciate others' cultures...but I didn't say anything about how to do that. And honestly, making friends as adults is hard enough in general! So today, let's talk about building cross-cultural friendships.

<https://www.incourage.me/2015/10/better-together-week-3-how-to-nurture-a-cross-cultural-friendship.html>

This article by Deidra Riggs describes her wonderful and interracial friendship with Michelle DeRusha. I strongly encourage taking time to read it, but here's a basic how-to guide for building friendships across cultural lines:

1. **Start with commonalities.** Sometimes in intercultural settings, the differences are immediately obvious to us, and we have to look hard if we want to find what we have in common. Maybe someone who attends our Spanish worship service likes knitting or baking or fishing or hiking as much as you do!
2. **But don't stay there!** Focusing exclusively on what we have in common might feel good for a while, but it erases so much of the beautiful diversity of God's people. Think of Pastor Patti's sermon about the wildflowers. How boring would it be if all the flowers were the same? And how frustrating would it be if the flowers were the way they are but you could only talk about the things they all have in common? Differences can be uncomfortable, but they're what makes life beautiful.
3. When differences come up, **take time to learn.** But don't pressure your friend to be your teacher! Some folks love to tell others about their unique culture, but many find it exhausting. There are many apps and books out there to help us learn new languages, and just about any cultural difference you might encounter is covered in loads of articles and videos and podcasts. You don't have to learn everything. Even learning some basic vocabulary in their language can go a long way to show someone you care about getting to know them. If you're struggling to figure out where to go to learn more about a culture, please reach out to me and I'll be glad to help you find the resources.
4. **Keep it in perspective.** The more you learn about someone else's culture, the better you will understand (and be able to identify) your own. Remember you are not learning about another culture just for the sake of connecting with this one new friend or this one culture. This practice will help you connect with people of all kinds of different cultures, generations, and more!

Our "Let's Talk About..." column is one place where we can help one another learn how to be better allies for all our neighbors. If you have a question you'd like answered, or if there are things you wish others in our congregation better understood about your own marginalized identities or those for whom you are already a strong ally, please submit suggestions to <https://forms.gle/E9eRqZJGLgVagbDZ9> or email me directly at [virginiag@smokyhillumc.org](mailto:virginiag@smokyhillumc.org).