

*“Let’s Talk About…” is a column in our monthly newsletter where we will learn one thing at a time about how we can love others the way they want to be loved. We will learn something each month that helps us understand and respect people who are different from us a little more deeply.*

## Let’s Talk About Holidays

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year!” the radio asserts. December is a great season of celebrations, and not only in Christian tradition. A multitude of holidays happen in or around December, in various religious and cultural traditions. This article from Time Magazine describes twelve of the most-celebrated among these holidays: [11 Holidays the World Celebrates in December | Time](#). So, let’s talk about the holidays.

I grew up in the Bible belt, where Starbucks cups were considered a threat to keeping Christ in Christmas. That may seem silly to some of you, but I assure you, others are nodding their heads in recollection, or even thinking of stranger elements of the perceived “war on Christmas.” Getting defensive has never opened anybody’s heart, and this concept of a culture war does nothing to bring the experience of God’s beloved community to life in our world. So, how can we be loving, Christlike neighbors to people of all sorts of faiths and cultures this time of year?

1. “Happy Holidays” is a way of being respectful when we do not know someone else’s faith or culture. While the vast majority of people who celebrate other holidays will be perfectly gracious when we wish them “Merry Christmas,” our language choices this time of year can either acknowledge or erase the reality of somebody else’s world. Better still, if you have the time, try asking somebody what (if any) holiday they celebrate, and be curious. Find out what that holiday means for them. You may discover that learning about others’ holidays can deepen your appreciation for the ones you celebrate!
2. Choose a holiday from the Time article’s list and look deeper into it. What makes it special? What can you appreciate about the value of that holiday? Learning more about others’ beliefs can help us to deepen our welcome of the many diverse people we encounter in our church and our wider community.
3. How much do you know about Christmas? Have you learned about this holiday’s roots in both Christianity and paganism, and how so many different local traditions have impacted how we celebrate it today? I am a self-professed Christianity nerd with an interest in the oddities of our holiday histories, and I still learn new things every year about how Christmas became what it is. Sometimes the best way to be gracious to others is to learn more about our own traditions and seek to really understand what we celebrate and why we celebrate the way we do.

Don’t feel like you have to go do all three of these things. Each one can be quite a challenge if you lean into it! And even if none of these things fit for you this year, my invitation is to simply be kind and humble, trusting that others have good reasons for what they practice.

*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).*