

Creating A Culture of Inclusion

12 stories about reaching across boundaries

By Jan Pinborough
Church Magazines

God's family circle is as varied and colorful as a field of flowers. It stretches wide to include every one of us. God loves all of His children, and He invites us all to come unto Him because "all are alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33).

Too often, though, we divide ourselves by education and economics, by culture and color. These divisions are a source of great sorrow to God. As He explained when Enoch saw Him weeping, "Unto thy brethren have I . . . given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood" (see Moses 7:33–41).

So how God's joy must soar when we do see each other as brothers and sisters—even more when we try to create something resembling the familial unity He wants for His children.

We reached out to ask some Church members how they are trying to create a culture of unity and love in their own neighborhoods and communities.



Showing Up

Our family believes in showing up. We have shown up to support friends at Passover Seders, Ramadan Iftars, racial justice discussions, interfaith prayer vigils, and Baha'i celebrations of Ayyám-i-Há. We show up to demonstrate that we love and support our friends and appreciate the many rich ways we are different. (And sometimes showing up is how we make new friends!)

Heather and Chase Kimball,
Washington, D.C., USA

Walking Together

Last fall, a few members of our ward and a couple who work with the local Muslim society planned a Mormons and Muslims (M&M) charity walk. On the day of the walk, we had two prayers, one from each religion. We enjoyed a walk on nature trails, and afterward we had snacks (including M&Ms, of course!). We all made a lot of friends and hope to do the walk again next year.



No Reason Not to Love

We have been blessed to have an uncle with Down syndrome. We also have amazing friends who have different abilities and struggles. My children love them and play with them because there is no reason not to. They understand that these wonderful friends are just like them, children of a loving Heavenly Father who just do things a little differently.

Emily Galvez,
Utah, USA



No Second-Class Citizens

Naidia: After I moved here from Jamaica, my bishop and his wife invited me over for dinner. They made a Jamaican night of it! They also invited women in my age-group so I could develop friendships. This experience really warmed my heart and helped me feel included, loved, and needed when, because of my culture or the color of my skin, I might have felt left out and lonely.

Damola: No one should feel like a second-class citizen in the Lord's Church. Our family loves to meditate on the scriptures and the symbolic meaning of temple covenants that tie us into one big eternal family. We have also invited members of our ward to our house for a get-together.

Naidia and Damola Sogunro,
Washington, D.C., USA

Finding Good in All We See

Before the Olympics, we always take the time to learn about the host country by eating a few traditional meals and looking at pictures. My girls love seeing the different costumes and always share what they love about each one—because we try to find good in all we see and see a bit of ourselves in others.

Natalia Earley, Idaho, USA





Serving the Overlooked

A couple of years ago, I felt inspired to serve people we often look past: the homeless. I invited local businesses, schools, and churches to participate in a “Warm Hands & Warm Hearts” charity drive. Last year we collected 1,458 new hats, gloves, scarves, and socks, as well as almost 300 handwritten letters and cards of encouragement. Our local rescue mission added candy and personal hygiene items and placed them at the bedside of those who spent Christmas Eve in the homeless shelter. It’s been wonderful to work with folks of different faiths and backgrounds to serve the less fortunate in our community.

Kevin Wells, Virginia, USA

Singing the Same Song

We have a lot of languages and nationalities in our Primary, with many children who are bilingual or trilingual. One Sunday, I had several groups of kids sing the first verse of “I Am a Child of God” in their native language. I told the kids that no matter where we live or what language we speak, we sing the same songs worldwide. I had such a strong feeling of togetherness that I had tears in my eyes. If we can plant that feeling in our children, they will grow up celebrating their differences and their uniqueness.

Naomi Martes, South Holland (Rotterdam), the Netherlands

One Heart and One Mind

In 1990, my family traveled to the Frankfurt Germany Temple, arranging to stay in the home of a widow who was a member of the Church. On the second day of our visit, our host told us that if she had known we were black, she would have not let us stay in her home. “But your presence in my home has taught me a great lesson,” she continued. “I do not see any difference between us.”

Last year, when our daughter told us of her plan to marry her sweetheart in the Salt Lake Temple, we wondered what to expect among people who were different from us both in culture and race. But we enjoyed an



extraordinary outpouring of love and kindness from all the people we met. At the marriage ceremony in the temple, the words “a people of one heart and one mind” (see Moses 7:18) came into my mind. We truly experienced a culture of love.

Roderick Kofi Anatsui, Greater London, England





Building Bridges

We have built bridges through community involvement. I started as a PTA volunteer and have been PTA president and on a school board steering committee. As president of our local soccer league, Nate works with families of many races, nationalities, religions, languages, and situations—including some same-sex couples. He treats everyone with dignity, focusing on the common desire to help the kids learn and love soccer. The friendships we've formed have been sweet. We've also been able to share our beliefs and build awareness for the Church in our area.

Church members often do well at being respectful of the beliefs of others, but sometimes we could be better at understanding and being inclusive of our own brothers and sisters who choose not to worship with us. Knowing others as people gets you past labels and stereotypes. It opens the door to loving and seeing others as who they really are.

Nathan and Camille Johnson, Ohio, USA

Learning about Other Cultures

We are lucky to live in a very diverse area, and I take advantage of daily life to teach my children about other cultures and how to love your neighbor. We have celebrated Chinese New Year and learned about what is celebrated for the Jewish High Holy Days. This year our neighbors invited us to their Sukkot. We also discuss Ramadan and how our kids can support their Muslim friends who are fasting all day at school.

Rebekah Mo, Delaware, USA ■

All Trying to Be Better People

Every time we move, we treat it as a way to make new and diverse friendships. In Japan, we've visited Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, and we always tell our children that these are sacred places to others, just like our church buildings and temples are to us. We teach them that people in other religions believe other things and that it's great that, like us, they are trying to be better people.

Cassidy Larsen, Kanto Prefecture (Tokyo), Japan

Less about "Me" and More about "We"

I've had the opportunity to get to know a member of our ward who is Navajo. Learning about his background and listening to his testimony has enlarged my understanding. When we learn about the trials of others, it puts our own trials into perspective. It becomes less about "me" and more about "we." After all, we are all in this together.

Dorothy Galloway, Washington, D.C., USA



How can you reach out to help create a culture of love in your community?

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