

## Celebrating Diversity . . .

There're a lot of yard signs popping up in my neighborhood proclaiming in English, Spanish, and Arabic "I don't care where you're from, I'm just glad you are my neighbor." At a time when division and fear seem to be sweeping the land, these signs bring hope that we can all live together as brothers and sisters. That's also one of the things that our annual Culture Fest is striving to do.

Though much of the food and music may have a Latino flavor, there will also be African and Anglo tunes offering a taste of the wonderfully diverse community that is becoming family at St. Leo's. It is a visible sign of God's love and delight in humanity in all its unique shades and differences which God created and declared "very good."

Years ago my boss at that time had a glass statue on her desk depicting four children—one brown, one red, one white, and one yellow. Underneath was written "all these children God has styled. Which one is God's favorite child?" The answer of course was "All of them."

Today's surfacing racism and fears of those who are different are challenging us to look inside ourselves at places we would rather not go. It's definitely not easy to deal with those parts of ourselves that judge, make excuses for excluding, and put up walls against those who are different from us. Honestly addressing these patterns is out of our comfort zone—uncharted territory with our defenses down. Why would anyone want to go there? Yet it seems that especially at this time God is inviting us to do just that.

We are free to choose. God doesn't force us. God invites. We can join those who like things "the way they always have been."

Then even small changes in routine or environment can get us ruffled. Imagine what we might do when faced with changes in our communities like people who don't look like us, don't speak the same language, or are of a different faith than we are begin moving in and shopping in our communities. Sadly, many of us find reasons to move or shop elsewhere. It is a choice. It may seem understandable, but the result is that we often close off opportunities to grow and expand our appreciation for the great gifts of diversity God is offering.

*"I don't care where you're from,  
I'm just glad you are my neighbor."*

What if instead we made a different choice? What could happen if we tried to stay, welcome and understand people and customs that at first seem so different? At St.

Leo's we've been blessed to have an opportunity to do just that. And as in all attempts at something new, we've done it imperfectly. We've stumbled, made mistakes, and faced our misgivings and fears. And as we've done that we've discovered something wonderful—we are much more alike than we are different! As we have prayed and worked together we've learned to listen to each other (sometimes through interpreters), to value the other's journey, to see the faith that sustained others in circumstance we can barely imagine, and to look into each other's eyes as brothers and sisters. We are steadily becoming no longer Anglo, African American, Latino, or African, but instead, a family of faith, listening to, caring for, supporting each other, working together, and coming to the table of the Eucharist to be fed.

And that is an amazing gift.

You Are Invited to Join Us for St. Leo's

# CULTURE FEST

Saturday, July 15, 2017, 1:00 - 9:30 pm

6:00 pm Mass

Featuring Music, Munchies, Merriment, and Much More!

Music Provided By Musicians from St. Leo and others.

Featuring a variety of Guatemalan, Mexican and Salvadorian cuisines. Be daring and try the Fruta with the special seasoning! It's delicious and refreshing.