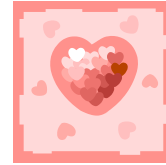


From the Diversity & Inclusion Committee...



Celebrate Diversity This Valentine's Day

by DAVID MCLAUREN*

EVERY FEB. 14, we celebrate the day of love, Valentine's Day, by exchanging gifts or greetings. These valentines often contain a message of love or affection for the receiver. Valentine's Day is a time for remembering one's vows of love to one another, and it is a day for those who are desperate to win the affection of another, often enticing them with fattening gifts like chocolate.

With Valentine's Day come visions of Cupid, a mischievous, winged child whose arrows pierce the hearts of his victims, causing them to fall deeply in love. In ancient Greece, he was known as Eros, the son of the goddess of love, Aphrodite. To the Romans, he was Cupid, the son of their goddess of love, Venus.

How do we celebrate love on Valentine's Day in a diverse multicultural society? Canada and the United States are the most culturally diverse countries on Earth. As thousands of people from virtually every nation and ethnic group arrive on our shores, our cities have truly become a multicultural mosaic. Do you know that over 100 languages are spoken in our cities?

Such diversity can enrich the lives of those who welcome it, but not everyone is quick to embrace cultures different from their own. Many are initially ignorant of new traditions, appearances and religions and communities can quickly become tainted with stereotypes, racism, bullying and intolerance.

IN CELEBRATION of our rich diversity, add new meaning to this year's Valentine's Day in our North American cities by doing more than exchanging chocolates and roses.

Intolerance of other cultures can stem from a bad experience in the past. Use this Valentine's Day to reflect on whether you need to forgive anyone this season. Open your heart so you may accept new experiences and relationships.

Love with generosity: Why stop at close friends and family when sharing Cupid's arrows? Take a look outside your close-knit circle for someone in need of a little extra care. Know a lonely neighbor or an isolated senior? Add special meaning to this year's Valentine's Day by showering them with an unexpected dose of cheer.

Love with charity: Do you know that North Americans are viewed as the most generous people in the world? Generosity does not have to mean writing a check to a needy person or a charity. It can also mean giving of ourselves and our time to make a positive difference. Take Valentine's Day a step further by volunteering at a food bank or serving at a soup kitchen.

Love with sympathy: Each night, we see images of people suffering on the nightly news. Take their suffering to heart and let your sympathy inspire you to action. Show your love for humanity by actively working to alleviate someone else's suffering, whether it's from poverty, disease or injustice.

LOVE with foresight: This Valentine's Day, take a moment to remember that while we may speak different languages and enjoy different food, we are all connected by our dependence on the Earth. Loving your neighbors means caring enough to protect the land we share. Make your home greener by only using products whose production and disposal do not harm natural resources.

Happy Valentines Day!

*McLauren, David. "Celebrate Diversity This Valentine's Day." The Gilmer Mirror 14 Feb. 2010. 19 Jan 2011 (<http://www.gilmermirror.com/view/full_story/6285381/article-Celebrate-Diversity-This-Valentine-s-Day?instance=home_news_bullets>.). Reprinted with author's permission.
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