

# Defining Multicultural, Cross-cultural, and Intercultural

The United Church of Canada L'Église Unie du Canada

## *Multicultural:*

In multicultural communities, we live alongside one another. We value tolerance, and celebrate one another's culturally distinctive cuisine, dress, music, dance, and related outward expressions of culture. It usually requires only superficial and polite social interaction.

A multicultural community can also mean that society allows and includes very distinct cultural groups, with equal status

- people from different cultural groups are understood as standing side-by-side, at times in isolation from one another
- often there is a superficial celebration of food, folk, and festivals without deep learning
- power differentials are not addressed; it does not allow for exchange between these cultural groups, and tends to only focus on representation.

### *Cross-cultural:*

In cross-cultural communities, there is some reaching across boundaries.

We try to build bridges of relationship between our cultural communities by sharing, listening, learning, and being open to changing. It usually requires intentionality, and programs of education and community-building.

It also means that

- two or more cultures are considered or related to
- often cultures are compared or contrasted with one another, and one culture is deemed superior or inferior to another
- power differentials are still not addressed; it only allows for limited learning or exchange between cultural groups
- cultural differences may be understood or acknowledged, but are also managed in a way that does not allow for individual or collective transformation

### *Intercultural:*

In intercultural communities, there is comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity, and equality.

Our social structures and everyday interactions are defined by justice, mutuality, respect, equality, understanding, acceptance, freedom, diversity, peace-making, and celebration. Intercultural community hopes to take us deeper than multicultural or cross-cultural models of community.

It also means that

- there are mutually reciprocal relationships among and between cultures
- people from different cultural groups interact with one another, learn and grow together; build relationships and become transformed, shaped, and moulded from each other's experiences
- "intercultural" is not a substitute for "ethnic"!
- the focus is on relationship building (not survival), deep connections, interactions, mutual gifting, respect, and learning from one another
- no one is left unchanged in the intercultural process: some examine their own culture more deeply, some are changed through their interaction with others, many learn more about what it means to be in community together
- racial and cultural power imbalances are addressed; people are enabled to learn from each other and lead toward the transformation of all peoples