

## Growth Ideas 101: Crafting Community Through Shared Experiences

Imagine how your community of faith might weave new connections across generations, cultures, and experiences, gathering people in your building, or in public third spaces, engaging community enthusiasts and partners, around something they can make. People of all ages can learn or teach a skill: needlework, knitting or crocheting, simple sewing or clothing repair, woodwork or carving, photography or digital storytelling, how to use your device tech buddies, food preparation and recipe sharing.

This past week alone, I learned what several communities of faith are crafting to build belonging, with food creating the doorway to connection: Cooking with Grandmas brings university students together with volunteers from many faith traditions to prepare a meal, eat together, and share stories of food and life. A snowy day focused on the warmth inside, not the storm, as 55 people gathered for their first “Tea and Togetherness” event, eager to share and celebrate church invitation bringing people together and opportunities to explore opportunities for future gatherings. A weekly coffee party for local men across denominations and with no church contexts is averaging twenty men at their weekly coffee party, with one person starting to attend the local United Church worship. A brainstorming session for fundraisers to support refugees has been energized to become a multicultural food night with explorations for later food preparation events highlighting diversity of food. A retired chef in one community of faith weekly prepares food to share with youth, parents, and caregivers as part of their newly formed youth initiative, highlighting music and drama. Youth from several communities of faith are loving their large gatherings to meet, share a meal, do activities, explore questions and faith and build community. It is facilitating relationships in the wider community and creating greater sense of safety and belonging, particularly for youth who are part of the 2S and LGBTQIA+ community. This Saturday is P.I.E. Day—a day to be Public, Intentional, and Explicit in our affirmation of the 2S and LGBTQIA+ community.

Every community has gifts waiting to be shared. What could you create where you are? (Fix it café, story swap gathering, photography walks of your neighbourhood, “teach me something” series, makers market, food feasts...)

Please contact me, Sharon Ballantyne, growth animator, at 506 306 0500 or by email at [sballantyne@united-church.ca](mailto:sballantyne@united-church.ca). You are also invited to a virtual 30 minute drop in conversation each Wednesday morning, beginning at 9:45 a.m. Atlantic (10:15 a.m. Newfoundland and Labrador). Contact Sharon for the Zoom link.