



Linda Li's Faith Story

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Linda Li, a Chinese exchange student at Malone University, attended a Common Table Picnic with Donna Benzing this summer. Of her many amazing experiences this summer, Linda chose to write about the Common Table experience at Faith UMC in her first college paper written in English! She wrote, **“If making food is an expression of love, then that place was full of love.”** Everyone brought a unique ethnic dish. Linda made Chinese vegetable pancakes. Here is Linda's paper:

Common Table Picnic

As a student from China, I have always lived with host families. The summer of 2018, I joined a host family in North Canton, OH. I had countless amazing moments during this summer. It was difficult for me to say which one was the best moment during the summer, until I went to the Common Table Picnic with my host mom.

Common table is a culture cooking class in Faith United Methodist Church that celebrates America being a diverse country made great by its immigrants. However, some people fear the people that come from different countries and have different faiths. Common table allows people to overcome these fears by eating food together. The picnic was a reunion for the common table. My host mom is one of the organizers. She suggested that I could make Chinese food for the picnic. Certainly, I was very excited due to the fact that I love cooking. My father is a chef and he taught me how to make many dishes. I decided I want to make Chinese vegetable pancake.

Eventually, the picnic day came. My host mom got up early to make Swedish meatballs and Russian potato salad. That morning I smelled happiness. I made the Chinese pancake after sacrificing a couple of fingers. We got in the car and I was daydreaming about the picnic the whole time we were on the way to church. I was imagining how much food would be there. How many people would come? What countries' food will they bring? What countries people would be there? Would people like my food? I got so many butterflies in my stomach. I was nervous but excited.

My host mom and I got to church early. We set up tables and decorated the dining room. My host mom set the table with white table cloths and lovely flowers that came from her garden. I helped her hang up the pictures taken from previous common table dinners. I carefully went through the pictures like they were a pile of treasure. People were helping each other make food and concentrating on the cook. I saw true smiles on their faces. Without realizing, I had a smile on my face while I looking at those pictures. I made a label for my food, I wrote “Chinese Vegetable

Pancake” down neatly on the card. Meanwhile, I was still nervous about how people would like my food.

As the time of the picnic got closer, more people carried food into the church. A lot people came to the picnic; there were people from Morocco, Syria, Mexico and Guatemala. I greeted them and talked with them as their friendly smiles and handshakes helped to calm my nerves. Our picnic table was full of food, couscous, brats, arroz con pollo, fattoush with pita, Swedish meatballs, Russian potato salad, rice pudding, baklava, Chinese vegetable pancakes and more. Everyone made their food so beautifully as if they had spent ten hours on it. If making food is a expression of love then that place was full of love. Not only did I feel their passion, but also learned about their food cultures and where their countries are in the world. People asked each other how to make their country’s food and complimented each other’s food. Everybody seemed to enjoy the time. Many people complimented my food as well. They asked me how to make it and I was thinking about my dad while I telling them how to make Chinese pancakes. The scenes just came up in my mind, how my dad taught me to cook, how I always loved to watch him cook. I wish he was there so that he could see how people like the food he taught me to make. I miss him and I miss his food.

I feel amazed how different countries people gather in this one place and impressed by the big amount of people came joined us and how food brought people together. We are not so different, we still have things in common.