

Cultural diversity at St. Joe

When St. Joseph Catholic School was named the No. 1 private school in Mississippi this month, among the reasons cited were academics, athletics and diversity.

St. Joe is no doubt diverse. In fact, our diversity is one of the greatest benefits of attending St. Joe.

With an enrollment of more than 420 students – who include Asians, Hispanics and African Americans – we have an opportunity to interact with each other and learn about widely different cultures. And with that comes the responsibility of respect.

As students, we need to respect each other as a person, respect each other's background, respect each other's upbringing and respect each other's culture.

There is no room for intolerance. Not today. Not in the 21st Century. And certainly not at St. Joseph Catholic School.

OPEN DIALOGUE NEEDED

Yet, in many ways, we as a people have failed. The open dialogue between cultures across

our nation, our state, our city and our schools has been fogged by ignorant discourse.

The Millennial Generation, of which high school students are a part, is our nation's most idealist, thought-provoking and intellectually-driven group. There is no doubt that cultural close-mindedness and racism begins to decrease with each passing generation.

But the Millennial Generation still faces a form of racism that more often than not is rooted in others' inability – and sometimes unwillingness – to respect people who are markedly different from them.

Some mask these insensitive thoughts as a form of humor. While others may find a laugh, it is at the expense of some different races and cultures of which they know little.

CLASSROOM EXAMPLE

Here is a good example: I am in class, another student turns off the lights and someone blurts out, "Where did Noah go?"



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Of course, the punch line here is that I'm dark-skinned. It was obviously good for a laugh – one, of course, that came at my expense.

Now, it was obvious to everyone that I, the darker skinned person, was clearly visible in the room even with the lights turned off. But because others find it humorous and acceptable, they say it anyway.

Another example: I often hear the phrase "Noah, you're white," more than likely because of my social interactions. But to say that puts me in a category where I do not belong and it highlights another weak example of misplaced humor.

On flip side, I have heard minority students remark that "white people can't dance" or "white people can't rap."

Despite these specific

examples, I do want to say that not everyone is guilty of these instances.

SHOW RESTRAINT

Those of you who may be in that very small minority, please cease and desist. You certainly can find something funnier than taking a jab at a person's heritage.

And that leads me to my most important point: to further open the roads of knowledge and discourse, schools should educate their students on varying cultures through a cultural diversity class or through various speakers holding seminars on such subjects.

Simply educating a student body about African Americans during Black History Month is not enough. Let's honor African American leaders and other people's heritage throughout the entire school year.

St. Joe already has taken the lead.

Our school has done much to foster a strong understanding and respect of other, diverse cultures. Just this month, a group of St. Joe seniors took a field trip to a Hindu temple in Rankin County.

Let's continue down that road.

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