



# GUIDE TO INTERFAITH

Tips and tools to help residents in  
Barking and Dagenham to connect and  
engage with neighbours from different  
backgrounds

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# INTRODUCTION

## What is this guide?

This guide is for residents who want to better get to know their neighbours or connect with someone who is from a different faith or belief. It is suitable for someone who is new to interfaith or someone who has been involved in interfaith events before but wants to do a bit more, maybe even host their own event or activity.

Through this guide we offer some starting points for you to organise small events or gatherings that will help bring people together for interfaith dialogue. You may want to use the ideas set out in the guide to organise something for your street, school, place of work, community centre or place of worship.

Local and national organisations are also signposted, highlighting more opportunities for you to get involved with.

## Who are the Faith & Belief Forum?

The Faith & Belief Forum is one of the UK's leading interfaith organisation – we work towards a connected and supportive society where people of different faiths, beliefs and cultures have strong, productive and lasting relation.

Since 2018, we have been working in Barking and Dagenham delivering a range of programmes and events that give residents the opportunity to explore their faith, belief and values by meeting and working with neighbours from different backgrounds.

# FIRST STEPS FOR INTERFAITH

## Who lives in Barking and Dagenham?

The borough of Barking and Dagenham is very diverse in terms of faith and belief, with 75% of residents identifying with a religion or faith [1].

There is also a rich and vibrant faith sector, with 128 faith-based organisations in the borough including a former royal monastery (Barking Abbey), a beacon mosque (Al-Madina Mosque), a gurdwara that serves the East London Sikh community (Barking Gurudwara), and a temple that serves the Nichiren Shu community for the whole of Northern Europe (Nichiren Shu Temple) and a local faith forum (Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum) [2]

## What is interfaith and is it relevant to me?

The word 'interfaith' means different things to different people. At the Faith & Belief Forum we see interfaith as people of different faith, belief and cultural backgrounds getting to know each other and deepening their understanding of their differences and similarities.

Interfaith is relevant to everyone and is something we can all participate in. No matter what background or level of knowledge you have about different faiths and beliefs, there is always more to learn about those who live around you. When we are better connected as a local community, we are better placed to support each other, to work together towards areas of shared concern, and to advocate for those in our local area who are in need. Meeting new people can also challenge our own biases and prejudices (which we all have!), and enable us to reflect on our beliefs, traditions and life experiences.

[1] <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/population-and-demographic-data>

[2] <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Faith-groups-and-meeting-places-evidence-base-study.pdf>

## How can I start?

Meeting new people from different faiths, beliefs and backgrounds can be daunting for some people. We might be nervous about how other people will perceive and treat us, as well as whether we will have enough in common for conversation to flow well. We also might be hesitant about offending or upsetting someone by what we say or do. If you are nervous about these things we suggest focusing on getting to know people as individuals first and foremost: a general rule whilst getting to know someone is to ask rather than assume. No one is expecting you to be an expert on all traditions.

For beginners, we suggest:

- Start on your own street – introduce yourself to your neighbours, find out more about their lives and families, what they like to do in their spare time, and how they came to live there
- Power your social media – follow local places of worship, community centres and community leaders from different backgrounds to discover more about what is happening in your area
- Join in public celebrations and educational events - from local community groups from backgrounds different to your own
- Get involved with and support campaigns - from local community groups from backgrounds different to your own
- Get your family involved – sometimes learning alongside young people can make adults feel more comfortable. Remind yourself and your family throughout that:
  - It is okay to feel challenged and uncomfortable when meeting new people – this is a very common experience