

Building Bridges With Our Communitites

MWC Tea & Chat

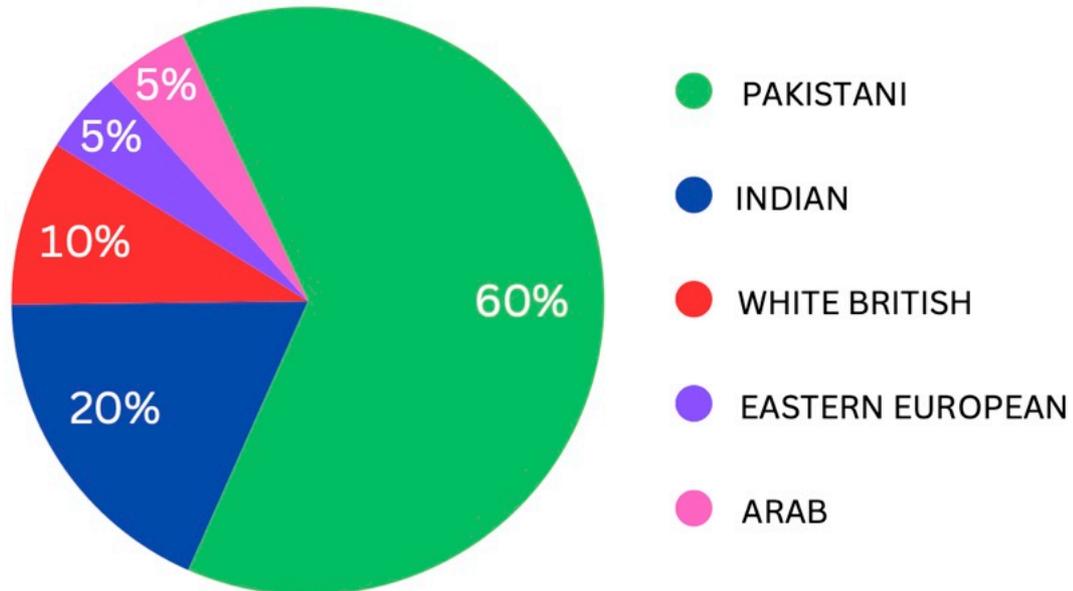
Overview

The “Building Bridges with Our Communities” event brought together women from diverse backgrounds to engage in meaningful interfaith dialogue. The gathering was marked by warmth, openness, and a shared commitment to fostering understanding across religious and cultural lines.

The aim of the event was to help women of different faiths see the commonality they shared and to encourage them to explore that connectivity with each other.



Ethnicity of Participants



Total attendees were 50 women

Opening Remarks

Fatma, who chaired the event, welcomed attendees and set the tone by reflecting on the Qur'anic call to kindness and respect towards the "People of the Book." She reminded participants of the shared Abrahamic heritage of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and cited historical examples of peaceful coexistence in Andalusia, Jerusalem, and South Asia.

"We are all created from a single soul. It is not our race or religion that elevates us, but our righteousness." – Fatma, quoting Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13)

Fatma acknowledged that while coexistence has often been the historical norm, recent times have seen conflict and division, increasing the need for dialogue, understanding, and healing. She encouraged participants to listen deeply and speak openly in a space of non-judgment and compassion.



Speaker Reflections

Sister Catherine – A Spirituality of Peace - *“Peace begins in the heart. Dialogue is important, but it is relationships that truly build bridges.”*

Sister Catherine, of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace, shared insights from her lifelong service in education and interfaith community work. Expressing deep gratitude for the Muslim Women’s Council, she spoke about the shared human journey, marked by challenges, trust, and vision.

Rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, her spirituality of peace emphasizes mutual understanding, cultural richness, and stewardship of the Earth. She spoke passionately about the community garden in Fagley, celebrating it as a model for togetherness and environmental care.

Sister Catherine stressed that building bridges is not merely about dialogue, it’s about relationship-building through compassion and inclusion. She mentioned her personal connection with Bana Gora, CEO of the Muslim Women’s Council, who was honoured with a Peace Award from her congregation, the first Muslim to receive such recognition.

Drawing on teachings from Pope Francis, Sister Catherine emphasized that peace begins within the mind and heart. Her closing message was one of hope, respect, and the importance of grassroots initiatives that create ripples of change in society.



Dr Jane Williams – Stories of Solidarity - *“When our roof was leaking, it was our Muslim neighbours who stepped in. That act of kindness saved our synagogue.”*

Dr Jane Williams, from a Jewish background, brought a deeply personal perspective rooted in her family’s experiences of the Holocaust and her work as a therapist and board member of the Bradford Reform Synagogue.

Jane shared a moving story of how the Muslim community in Bradford helped save their synagogue, which dates back to the 1880s. When the building faced closure due to a leaking roof, the Muslim community, led by figures such as Zulfi from the Sweet Centre, helped raise the necessary funds. She credited this act of solidarity with the synagogue’s continued existence.

Reflecting on her upbringing in a multicultural school, Jane acknowledged experiences of antisemitism and drew parallels with challenges faced by the Muslim community. She described how her mother, a Holocaust survivor and peace campaigner, inspired her to seek friendship across differences, highlighted by her school friendship with a Muslim girl.

Quoting Hebrew prayers and the saying, “The whole world is a narrow bridge, but the key is not to be afraid,” she spoke of courage in engaging with difference. Jane proposed future initiatives such as shared meals, mutual invitations, and practical interfaith collaboration. She described moments of spiritual unity, like Muslims praying in the synagogue during Ramadan coinciding with Passover, as deeply symbolic of what interfaith friendship can achieve.

Jane concluded with a call to move beyond celebrating difference toward shared action, underscoring the shared ancestry and values between the Qur’an and Torah. She urged ongoing everyday acts of connection, like baking bread with Muslim neighbours or inviting families over, as ways to normalize interfaith relationships.



Q & A Session Highlights

The Q&A session allowed attendees to engage directly with the speakers. Several thoughtful questions were raised, reflecting a genuine desire for deeper understanding and practical collaboration.

Q: How do we respond to people in our communities who are suspicious of interfaith work?

Sister Catherine: “We respond with patience and presence. Sometimes, just showing up consistently is the most powerful answer.”

Q: What can we do when our children face discrimination at school?

Dr Jane Williams: “Start by listening to them. Then speak to the school. And if possible, bring communities together—invite classmates over, share meals, build bridges early.”

Q: How can we involve more young people in events like this?

Fatma: “We need to meet them where they are—on social media, in schools, through creative projects. And we must let them lead.”

Q: What do you do when interfaith dialogue feels like it’s only surface-level?

Dr Jane Williams: “That’s when you bake bread together. Or garden. Or help someone in need. Real connection happens in shared action.”



Feedback From Attendees

- *"I came here curious. I'm leaving connected."*
- *"It was moving to hear how faith can bring people together, not push them apart."*
- *"I've never felt so welcome in a space like this. It was healing."*
- *"Hearing about the synagogue story made me realise how powerful small acts can be."*
- *"I didn't expect to cry today, but I did. In a good way."*
- *"I never knew how much we had in common. Today has changed the way I see things."*
- *"It was powerful to hear stories of real friendship and support between our communities."*
- *"I felt seen and heard. This space was safe and welcoming."*

Conclusion

The "Building Bridges with Our Communities" event was a heartfelt and profound gathering that brought together voices from different faith traditions in a shared spirit of understanding, mutual respect, and love. The stories shared by Fatma, Sister Catherine, and Dr Jane Williams offered not only inspiration but also a roadmap for grassroots interfaith cooperation.

Whether through historic bonds, spiritual teachings, acts of solidarity, or small everyday gestures, the event highlighted the importance of intentional dialogue, empathy, and collaborative action in healing and strengthening our shared communities.

"We are not strangers, we are neighbours. And neighbours look after one another." - Closing remark from Fatma

The women recommended doing more such as:

- Quarterly Interfaith Gatherings
- Shared Community Projects
- Youth Engagement Initiatives
- Storytelling Circles
- Faith Exchange Visits
- Neighbourhood-Based Activities

**Report created by the Tea & Chat
participants supported by the MWC Team**