

Faith, Identity and Belonging – A Rochester Perspective

A resource for the Diocese of Rochester exploring our shared calling to love, listen, and build peace across every community.

Introduction

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

In recent months, several groups have invoked faith or national symbols to define who belongs, or who does not, in public life.

While faith can inspire unity and courage, when combined with exclusionary messages it can also wound and divide.

As a diocesan-family, we stand committed to a vision of the Church as a community where truth and compassion meet, and where our belonging in Christ transcends borders, politics, and culture.

This resource has been developed by the Diocesan Racial Justice Officer in collaboration with the bishops and supported by conversations with members of clergy across the diocese; and seeks to provide churches with some initial guidance and encouragement as they seek to respond to issues of racial justice, identity and belonging in their communities.

Our shared commitment

The diocesan Called Together vision dedicates us to embracing and celebrating the rich diversity within our churches and communities. We commit:

- To model generous listening and respectful conversation, especially when views differ strongly, creating room for everyone to be heard.
- To speak truth with humility, ensuring our witness reflects the love, justice, and compassion taught by Christ in all circumstances.
- To nurture safe, welcoming spaces in our churches and community gatherings where each person feels valued, affirmed, and fully included, regardless of race, background, faith, identity, or perspective.

We recognise that conversations about identity, national pride, race, faith, and belonging can be sensitive and complex. Our calling is not to shame, exclude, or silence anyone but to bring clarity, light, and understanding rooted firmly in the Gospel's message of unconditional love and reconciliation for all people.

Understanding Our Diocesan Context

The Diocese of Rochester reaches across Medway, north and west Kent, and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley

These places are marked by long histories of movement - of sailors, traders, agricultural workers, and families seeking refuge. Today, that same diversity strengthens our common life.

Media images and campaigning language can heighten fear around immigration and national belonging.

In truth, migration to Kent has long been part of our story, from the Huguenots to the Windrush generation and beyond. From the Gurdwaras of Gravesend to the mosques of Chatham and the churches along the coast, our neighbours embody many cultures and languages; an expression of the world God loves.

There was a total of 1,005 asylum seekers being supported in Kent ¹at the end of December 2024 which makes up a tiny fraction of the nearly 2 million people who live in Kent, and many migrants, students, and international families contribute richly to our civic and church life.

Churches in this diocese host welcome hubs, warm spaces, and partnerships with other organisations including local authorities, helping people to feel valued and safe.

We give thanks for the diversity of this diocese, a reflection of the global body of Christ.

Ways we can support each other

- Encourage open conversations in PCCs and parish groups around belonging, faith, and identity.
- Offer pastoral advice and support for situations of tension linked to community or political movements.
- Help parishes connect with local networks tackling discrimination and promoting peace.
- Provide theological and historical input where questions about faith and nationalism arise.

Tailored guidance and training are currently being developed for Clergy, Lay Ministers, Churchwardens, and community leaders. In the meantime, please contact the Diocesan Racial Justice Officer if you need further support with any of the above (contact details can be found at the end of this document)

What you can do locally

- Begin with prayer, reflection, and conversation; ask where grace is needed most in your community.
- Invite speakers or facilitators to lead sessions on cultural awareness, reconciliation, or migration.
- Create visible expressions of unity, such as shared meal or peace walks.
- Collaborate with schools or partners to model inclusion and positive identity formation.

¹ Kent Live, 27 May 2025, [Interactive map shows number of asylum seekers receiving support in Kent](#) based on [Home Office data](#)

Grounding ourselves in Scripture

Our commitment to racial justice and inclusion is deeply rooted in the Scriptures and goes to the heart of our Christian faith.

- "So, God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them."
Genesis 1:27
- "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)
- "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2)
- "Let all that you do be done in love." (1 Corinthians 16:14)
- "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

A prayer for our common life

God of mercy and truth, draw the peoples of this diocese into deeper understanding of one another.

Where language divides, teach us patience; where anger rises, grow in us gentleness; where fear takes hold, fill us with love. May our churches become homes of belonging for all who seek your face.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

To accompany reflection:

The global recording *"The Blessing"* unites over 10,000 voices from 154 nations, each singing the ancient priestly words of Numbers 6:24–26 in more than 250 languages. It reminds us that God's promise of peace and blessing transcends every border, echoing the shared humanity at the heart of our faith.

Watch here: [The Blessing — World Edition](#)

Further information

The Sanctuary Foundation has responded to requests from schools by creating a free video resource (less than 5 minutes duration) to support children who may feel anxious or unsettled by the recent appearance of the St George's flags and graffiti across England.

Here's a link: [How to talk to children about the St George's flag.](#)

Helpful links

- Summary of latest immigration statistics (UK Government) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025/summary-of-latest-statistics>
- [No recourse to public funds - House of Commons Library](#)
- Action Counters Terrorism: <https://actearly.uk/advice/tips-for-talking/>
- Refugee Action: facts and figures - <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees/#:~:text=According%20to%20UNHCR%20statistics%2C%20only,a%20refugee%20or%20asylum%20seeker.>

How to get in contact

If you have any questions, need support, or would like to discuss further anything outlined in this document further, please feel free to reach out directly to:

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Racial Justice Officer

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You are warmly invited to contact Zara for advice, resources, or to share feedback.

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