

## **How we can celebrate South Asian Heritage Month in the Diocese of Guildford**

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As **South Asian Heritage Month** approaches (18 July – 17 August), we have a unique opportunity in the Diocese of Guildford to honour and connect with our South Asian brothers and sisters, both within our churches and in our wider communities. This celebration isn't just about culture, it's about deepening relationship, extending hospitality, and witnessing to the inclusive love of Christ.

There are many South Asians across our region, from Indian and Pakistani heritage families in Woking to Nepalese communities in Aldershot, and many others with deep roots across Surrey and north-east Hampshire.

### **What is South Asian Heritage Month?**

South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM) celebrates the cultures, communities, and histories of people with roots in eight key nations: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and the Maldives.

Some of our neighbours may be British-born South Asians, while others came to the UK as students, workers, or through historical events like the Ugandan Asian expulsion in the 1970s. Many speak languages such as Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, Bengali, and Farsi—each rich with expression, hospitality, and tradition.

### **Why Does It Matter to the Church?**

This month offers us a chance to reflect on God's creativity in culture, identity, and community. Growing up in South Asian households, it's not uncommon to experience open homes, shared food, and deep hospitality - values that resonate strongly with the biblical themes of welcome and fellowship.

In a Church that desires to reflect God's kingdom on earth, celebrating South Asian identity is part of living out Revelation 7:9:

*"A great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."*

### **Ways to Celebrate in Your Parish or Community**

Whether your church has many South Asian members or just a few, this is a great moment to grow in friendship and awareness. Here are some ways to mark the month:

#### **Host a shared meal**

Invite neighbours from the South Asian community for a bring-and-share lunch or dinner. Encourage traditional dishes like biryani, samosas, or vegetarian curries, and create a welcoming space for storytelling and laughter. (Be mindful of dietary or religious restrictions.)

### **South Asian Worship Sunday**

Include prayers or readings in South Asian languages such as Hindi, Urdu, or Gujarati. Consider inviting a South Asian Christian speaker to share during the service or leading intercultural worship together.

### **Sermon series or testimony sharing**

Focus on biblical themes like hospitality, identity, and belonging, drawing parallels with South Asian experiences. You could also invite members of your congregation to share their own cultural journey.

### **Film night and discussion**

Screen a family-friendly film or documentary highlighting South Asian culture or migration stories, followed by a reflective discussion.

### **Celebrate through music, art, and dance**

Encourage South Asian members to share traditional music or dance, either during worship or as part of a cultural afternoon.

### **Prayer and reflection service**

Host an evening of prayer for the South Asian community in the UK and globally. Invite a speaker from a South Asian mission or diaspora ministry.

### **A Final Thought**

Let's be a diocese where every cultural background is not just welcomed but celebrated and where people are not only included but fully represented.

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the beauty and diversity of your creation. Help us to be a Church that welcomes with open arms, listens with humility, and celebrates with joy. May we reflect your Kingdom in all we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.*