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# Diversifying Real Estate: Faith & Religion

Guidebook commissioned by CPA & WPA NextGen

May 2024

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This guidebook aims to help individuals and organisations make central London's real estate sector more accessible and inclusive for people who practice a religion or faith belief. It provides best practice examples and signposts to resources.

We hope the guidebook will inspire and inform Westminster Property Association (WPA) and City Property Association (CPA) members, so that together we can help make our profession more representative of London's religious diversity and its buildings, places and spaces more welcoming for people who practice a religion or faith belief.

This is part of a series of themed guides commissioned by WPA and CPA's NextGen networks, produced by London Property Alliance, and supported by Gardiner & Theobald.

## Foreword

I am very pleased to be leading on the final LPA Diversifying Real Estate guidebook, about Faith and Religion. Although – at the time of writing – I've only been in the Built Environment sector for just under a decade, I have seen a huge and encouraging amount of change in the sector's attitudes and approaches to religious and faith inclusion.

Part of this is due to the changing face of religion within England and Wales, which cannot be ignored. The 2021 census showed Christianity as no longer the most dominant religion in these areas, while the percentage of those who follow no religion at all, increased (see census data on page 4). The data also showed increases in those who follow Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, closely related to the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity within our country.

With this, comes greater need for understanding, awareness and inclusion, both within our society and in our workplaces. Whilst I believe that no one wants to get it wrong when approaching faith and religion, mistakes are inevitably made. Presumptions are made about certain religions, networking events are often largely centred around alcohol – when some people choose to not drink due to religious and personal reasons – and some flexible working policies ignore religion as a reason why working hours or holidays may need to change, often at short notice.

However, we can all read and learn more about different religions and faiths, and there is nothing wrong with asking questions, both to broaden your understanding and to help create a working environment that is open, inclusive and respectful.

The incorporation of religion and faith policies within the workplace is key to enabling people to be their true selves at work. It helps to create connections and break down barriers, ultimately, encouraging greater openness and psychological safety, the key measures of an inclusive culture.

Within companies that have started making improvements, we are seeing 'Cultural Day'

swapping, where those who celebrate different festivals, can swap their annual leave with some of the usual public holidays. We are seeing active and supported Faith networks, pioneering change through education and events; and the inclusion of multi-Faith rooms are enabling people to practice their religion or faith belief within the workplace, without feeling the need to conceal a core part of their identity.

Through my experience in community engagement in some of the most diverse boroughs, I have gathered knowledge on some of the best ways to engage culturally and religiously diverse groups, often misunderstood and labelled as 'hard to reach'. There is no such thing as 'hard to reach', rather these are unheard voices, who we have not been engaged with in the best ways. There is an important role for our sector to ensure that cultural and religious diversity is taken into consideration within our engagement and planning approaches, especially within the Public Realm, to allow for different communities to thrive.

There is more to be done and regardless of the size of your company and your resources, I believe that everyone can make a difference. I hope this guide is a useful starting point to make some impactful changes within your organisation and the communities you work in.



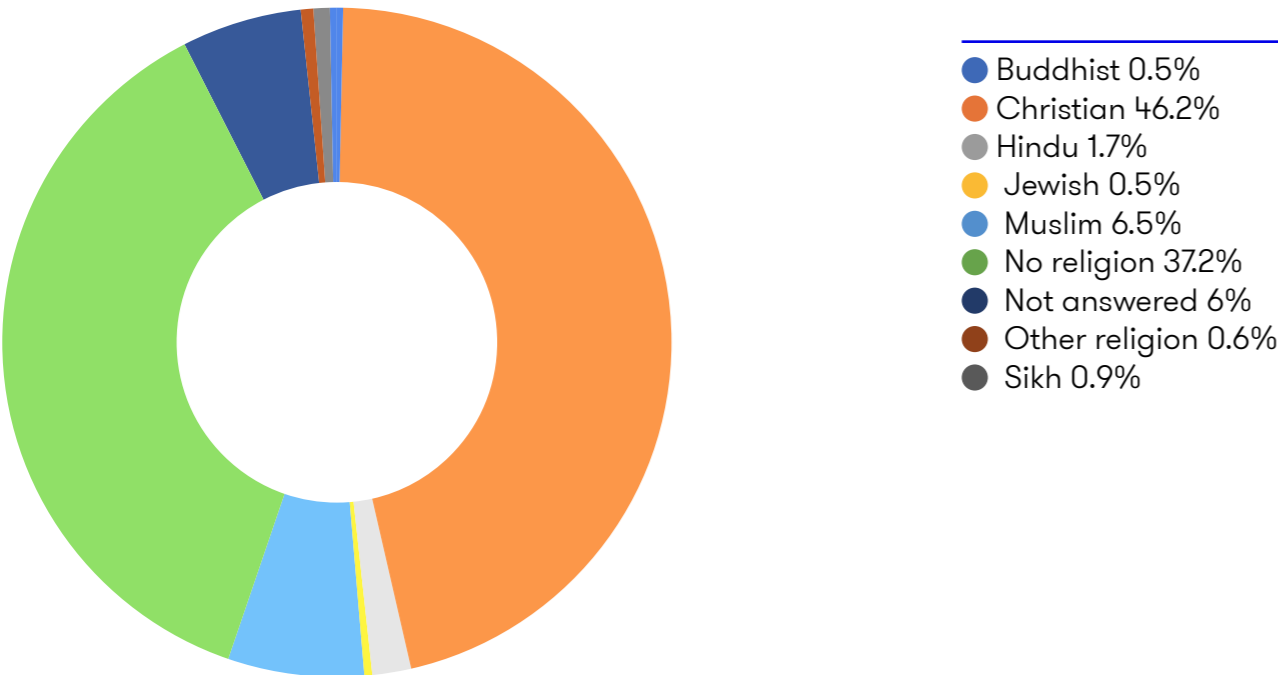
**Priya Aggarwal-Shah,**  
Founder and Director of  
PREACH Inclusion@ (PREACH  
standing for Promoting  
Race, Ethnicity and Cultural  
Heritage) - formerly BAME in  
Property

# Understanding the challenge

**Faith and religion are fundamental and intrinsic parts of daily life for many people and yet they are not often part of the conversations that take place on workplace diversity. Understandably it can be a challenging issue for employers to discuss with their staff, or between colleagues, as religion can be a highly personal and subjective experience for the individual. People may fear that asking or commenting on another person's religion could cause offence, be politicised or demonstrate their own lack of awareness.**

In England and Wales, faith and religion are changing. Key findings from the 2021 census showed that less than half the population in England and Wales describe themselves as Christian and compared to the census in 2011 there has been an increase in the number of people who describe themselves as Muslim and Hindu<sup>1</sup>. This change means that how we look at the functionality of our spaces needs to adapt to best provide for communities and the workforce.

## 2021 census data of Religion in England and Wales



This is particularly the case in London – which is the most religiously diverse region of England<sup>2</sup>, with over a quarter of all residents reporting to be a religion other than Christian. Property companies operating in the UK capital should consider what can be done to ensure people feel included in the workplace and beyond.

London Property Alliance organised an industry roundtable, attended by representatives of different faiths, to discuss practical ideas. Three key areas were raised as barriers to property industry workplaces becoming more diverse for people who practice a religion or faith belief:

1. The ways employers collect personal **data** on the religion of staff for HR purposes is often inconsistent. This can mean that the full needs of staff may not be understood due to how and when the data has been collected.
2. **Lack of awareness** of faith and religion in the workplace can exclude colleagues. For example, a lack of knowledge of religious festivals may impact team resource if the work deadline overlaps with the day of celebration.
3. Faith and religion are **personal** and something that is self-defined. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. When employers and colleagues approach faith and religion they should do so with curiosity, a willingness to learn and most importantly, acceptance.



# Supporting Faith & Religion in the workplace

## Recommendations, resources and case studies

### 1. Improve company awareness

- Companies can help in a number of ways to raise internal awareness of the religions being practiced within a workplace and the needs of those staff e.g. time away from work needed for prayer or reflection, or periods of fasting which might impact work practices. This could include letting people know the dates of religious festivals in newsletters and updating company intranets with relevant information.
- Conversations about time off or more flexible working become easier because colleagues have received this information in advance. Furthermore, when it comes to planning work or social events, key dates can be avoided to ensure colleagues aren't missing out due to religious observations or celebrations.

**Resource:** Associations such as [PREACH Inclusion®](#) and [Inclusive Employers](#) provide diversity and inclusion calendars. These calendars include religious holidays and awareness days and months. It is worth remembering that an EDI calendar is not a fixed document and will need to be reviewed and updated annually to check for festivals that have changed based on the lunar calendar.

#### Gardiner & Theobald Inclusion Calendar

To help raise awareness of notable dates throughout the year, G&T launched monthly Inclusion updates in January 2022, building on the firm's Business with Purpose ESG strategy. The updates are issued to the business on the first working day of the month and include days of recognition throughout the coming month. The calendar includes religious occasions from multiple faiths, as well as international days of importance.

The launch of the inclusion calendar has helped foster greater awareness and understanding throughout the business, especially at times when colleagues may need additional support, such as during Ramadan.

- Ensuring that colleagues who do practice a religion feel supported at all levels of a company should lead to an improvement in well-being and sense of value at work. Signposting to educational resources may help staff who are

not aware of religious practices be more conscious of how they can support colleagues, whilst avoiding putting the educational responsibility on those who are practicing a faith or religion.

**Resource:** Published in 2023, [Holding Faith](#) features insights from CBRE UK's Faith Network. The guide provides an overview of the six major global religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. It also includes a section on 'Five things you should know about Faith' which covers prayer and meditation, observances, festivals and religious holidays, dress and mourning.

### 2. Accommodating different religious holidays

- Some religions and cultures have holidays where the date changes every year depending on the calendar that is being followed, for example the Jewish holidays of Passover and Hannukah and the Islamic holiday of Ramadan are based on the lunar calendar with 354 to 355 days in the year, while holidays such as Navratri and Diwali can follow a lunisolar calendar or lunar calendar.
- It is also worth noting that regions and areas will have their own traditions depending on their religion or faith belief. For example, within the Eastern Christian church, they follow the Orthodox Calendar and celebrate the feast of Epiphany on January 19, while in the Western Christian tradition, Epiphany takes place on January 6. Having a swapping system is one solution in which bank holidays are swapped for religious or cultural days.

### **CBRE Cultural Day Swapping**

At CBRE UK, following recommendations from the Faith Network, employees are now able to self-select two company Christmas holiday days to be taken at different times of the year to celebrate their own faith or cultural holidays<sup>7</sup>.

It should also be noted that it is much easier for some companies to incorporate 'Cultural Day' swapping than others, based on their size, teams and locations. For smaller and mid-size companies this may not be possible due to team constraints, demonstrating that one size doesn't fit all. This is why it is important to have regular conversations with your employees about any important festivals or days that they would like time off for so you can plan project work accordingly. For some festivals, such as Eid which is based on the sighting of the moon, there may be last-minute requests for leave, so explaining this helps colleagues understand why some might be taking time off with less notice.

### **3. Multi-Faith networks**

- A multi-faith network is a group of people who come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. These groups are designed to support faith and religion in the workplace as well as promote an inclusive environment for all.
- They can play an important role in building community internally, bridging the gap between colleagues and building allyship. For these networks to be effective, it is important that members are given time to participate, and they have executive sponsorship<sup>3</sup>.
- The cross-departmental nature of these groups also removes company hierarchy, encourages inter-departmental networking and can boost productivity and understanding within the company.

- If your company does not have an internal faith network internally then individuals can seek associations externally, for example:

#### **Association of Muslim Surveyors (AMS)**

The group was created to promote an inclusive real estate and built environment network, support Muslim professionals in the sector and build awareness of the property sector in Muslim communities around the UK.

#### **Christians in Property**

Established in London in 1953, the charity supports over 300 Christians who work in real estate across the UK. The aim of the group is to increase and strengthen Christian activity through individual and collective witness, including holding prayer meetings and social events. You can get involved through its free [LinkedIn](#) page or annual membership of the organisation, which has a membership fee.

#### **City Hindus**

A not-for-profit organisation created to promote networking, personal development and charity fundraising amongst Hindu professionals in London.

#### **City Sikhs**

City Sikhs has 10,000+ members and a reach of 40,000+ individuals making it the largest network of Sikh professionals in the UK.

#### **Jhive**

A charity that partners with corporations to increase the representation of Jews in construction and the built environment sector. This includes showcasing apprenticeship opportunities to school leavers, graduates and career changers.

#### **Sikh Surveyors**

Created for Sikhs in the Real Estate sector, this group hosts networking events in and around central London.

**Resource:** PREACH Inclusion<sup>®</sup> has published a comprehensive blog on the subject titled '[How to Have Effective Internal Diversity Networks](#)'. It covers four ways these networks can be more effective, as well as recommending best practice to ensure the network is making a difference.

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#### 4. Multi-faith or wellness rooms

- A multi-faith or wellness room is where people of differing religious beliefs, or none at all, are able to spend time in contemplation or prayer. These spaces can be adapted to provide for any religious or spiritual practice.
- Design is important when planning a faith or wellness room. Considerations should include:

- Its location relative to washing facilities, as Muslims and Jews can require cleansing before prayer
- Ensuring that the room is lockable for privacy
- Keeping the space clean and tidy is prioritised
- That the room can be functional for all those who practice a religion or faith belief
- It is of a reasonable size, with blinds that can fully cover any windows and lighting that can be dimmed for different religious or personal preferences.
- If the use of icons is specifically required by a particular religious group, there should be a cupboard for their storage when not in use. Ideally there should be separate cupboards for each religion using the space<sup>8</sup>
- Make sure to signpost orientation of the room, in particular east. Jews generally pray facing east towards Jerusalem, and for Muslims it is important to face the Ka'ba during prayer, an ancient religious site located in the city of Mecca<sup>9</sup>.

- Companies should try to avoid doubling up the multi-faith room as a meeting room too, as this would require a different layout that potentially goes against what is desirable for a multi-faith room. Having the room occupied for a meeting also prevents employees from using the room when they might need to, such as during specific prayer times or during a challenging period.
- Where you are unable to provide a room solely for multi-faith or wellness purposes, this must be explicitly stated and alternative rooms should be offered, if possible.
- Even if your workplace does not currently require a multi-faith room, it should be considered when exploring new office locations, as one may be requested by a future employee.

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#### 5. Accommodating Bereavement

- Compassionate leave should be provided on a case-by-case basis to help meet the needs of the individual, be they religious, cultural or for mental-health reasons. For example, in both the Jewish and Islamic tradition, funerals should typically take place within 24 hours after the death<sup>4</sup>. This is then followed by an extended period of mourning which in Judaism is called the Shiva and can last 7 days and in Islam can last up to 3 days if not longer.

#### 6. How data collection can support workplace adjustments

- Data collection matters as it can help businesses draw valuable insights and make better decisions, in particular to the needs and wellbeing of staff who may require multi-faith and wellness rooms.
- Like any data collection process, collecting religious data needs to be approached sensitively and with full transparency. It should be clear why data is being collected and what it will be used for. Once collected there needs to be a willingness for employers to make provisions for religious needs if people have requested certain things, as otherwise the data collection process will appear disingenuous.
- Similar to the 2021 census, it is important that any religious questions are voluntary.

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#### 7. Responding to political unrest or events

- Showing allyship is important, yet when local, national or global events involving a religious group or groups take place companies may try to align themselves publicly with a particular statement. This risks alienating employees who may be directly or indirectly impacted. In the first instance companies should check in with their employees and find out what support they can give. If the company does choose to say something there are certain things that should be considered first before publicly saying something:

- Is it appropriate to release a statement?
- Have you checked the statement or spoken to those impacted first?
- Is your statement one-sided and suggestive of supporting one community over another? How could this impact certain employees?
- Why are you choosing to make a statement?
- Understand your why before saying anything and ensure you have a plan on how to respond honestly and authentically



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## 8. Networking events and conferences

- Those who practice a religion or faith belief may have varied needs when it comes to food and drink. This can include both dietary requirements and rules around eating and drinking. Ensuring that work events are inclusive should involve considering the location (for example not going to a bar or a pub if staff do not drink for religious reasons), having a range of alcohol-free options as well as catering for a range of dietaries.
- Never assume. Dietary requirements should be requested for each invitation to an event as people may change their religiosity over time and ultimately, decisions should be put to the individual rather than assumed. If an event producer doesn't know how to accommodate the guest, then they should always ask them if they can recommend a potential supplier who they can get in touch with.

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## 9. Dress

- A lack of options for religiously appropriate yet practical and protective workwear can be a barrier to inclusion, especially to some STEM careers such as engineering or construction. Having a DE&I point of contact or faith network that someone can turn to for advice can be helpful to those who follow a religion and choose to wear specific dress codes.

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### Case Studies

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#### Headwear and Personal Protective Equipment

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##### The Hijab

The hijab is a head covering worn by some female Muslims to express their modesty and faith. Aminah Shafiq, a Severn Trent water quality scientist, has designed a personal protective equipment (PPE) hijab which can be worn on construction sites to protect the body, whilst enabling her to cover her head in line with her religious requirements. Ms Shafiq has gone on to win awards at the Water Industry Awards and British Muslim Awards for the design and has been approached by other companies looking to implement the PPE hijab in the workplace<sup>5</sup>.

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##### The Turban

The turban is headwear worn by Sikhs and is an important and historical part of Sikh culture. It is considered a necessary article of faith as it represents equality, honour, self-respect, courage, spirituality and piety. To accommodate Sikhs in the workplace, in 2015 section 6 of the Deregulation Act was passed to exempt turban-wearing Sikhs from any legal requirement to wear head protection at a workplace. Employers are required to take all necessary actions to avoid injury from falling objects by putting in place safe systems of work, control measures and engineering solutions to ensure protection on a construction site<sup>6</sup>.

# Supporting Faith & Religion in the real estate sector

At Board level	At middle management	At NextGen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· There is a duty of care to support the wellbeing of your employees, including their faith and religious needs through inclusive workplace culture and practices.</li> </ul> <p>This means supporting HR departments and faith networks so that religious needs are understood and met in the workplace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Put the right measures in place to collect relevant data and ensure open communication with your colleagues to explain why the reporting is important and what changes your organisation will be introducing to improve.</li> <li>· Allow time for all-levels of the team to take part in professional networks both internally and externally as part of their professional development.</li> <li>· Ensure that there is a DE&amp;I or HR lead internally who people can come to with DE&amp;I queries. This is important so individuals can make best use of the processes and systems in place within the workplace.</li> <li>· Be prepared to have an open dialogue with employees about how they can be supported in the workplace and be committed to actioning adjustments for the team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Become a genuine ally. Understand the needs of your employees by educating yourself so you can offer comprehensive support.</li> <li>· If there is an urgent or pressing deadline for your team, see if it corresponds to any religious holidays, talk to your staff and make appropriate resource plans.</li> <li>· If someone is nervous about going to a professional event or client facing meeting, then talk to them about it. There may be concerns about alcohol, food or something else that could be accommodated.</li> <li>· When planning team away days ensure that they are inclusive for all and not focussed on alcohol, for example ensure they don't take place in a pub or bar.</li> <li>· Set up a diversity calendar with key religious and cultural events to highlight in internal newsletters and company updates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Know who your D,E &amp;I or HR lead is. If something concerns you or you need to raise something, then make sure to do so.</li> <li>· Join an internal or external network to build both your network, receive mentorship and gain confidence with peers.</li> </ul>
<p>If you don't know something don't be afraid to ask the question or do the research yourself. Information has never been so freely accessible.</p>		
<p>Check in with colleagues who practice a religion or faith belief that may have been affected following triggering events.</p>		



# Faith, religion and spaces

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The importance of considering the environment and demographics of an area is key when considering the design of public realm and buildings.

## Engagement:

a) Ahead of engaging with a community on a planning application or proposal, it is best practice to check the demographics of the area to determine age, religion, ethnicity and language statistics. This information can be found on the [Office of National Statistics \(ONS\)](#) website, which contains data from the 2021 census, as well on many local authorities websites. Depending on the data, you can then determine:

i. **Whether engagement needs be done primarily in-person, online or hybrid** as different age groups use the internet in different ways. Some ethnic groups and older people may have little or no access to the internet, so alternative options will need to be explored.

ii. Based on the ethnicity of an area, **do you need to consider culturally and/or religiously sensitive engagement tactics?** For example, in areas with a high Muslim, South Asian or Jewish populations, where previous engagement has been typically low, it may be prudent to initially reach out to community and religious leaders to ascertain the best way to reach out to wider members. They will know their communities better, how they like to be engaged, best locations for events and timings to hold these.

iii. **English proficiency in an area** and whether engagement material will need to be translated into different languages. This can also be gauged from conversations with community leaders.

iv. The **best team members for a project**, as some may have grown up in certain areas and have knowledge of specific religious lived experiences.

To determine whether you need any culturally specific design adaptations in your buildings, it is recommended to hold design workshops with specific communities to better understand their needs.

When you are working with external consultants or agencies on community engagement, planning and design, there should be requirements for DE&I and an expectation that the above principles are to be followed.

# Designing buildings and the public realm

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To be truly equitable the design of our spaces should look at the different religious, cultural and personal preferences of the people who will use the space.

## Toilet provision within buildings and public spaces

- When it comes to providing toilets for public use or in the office, choice matters. Having both single sex and unisex toilets give people the option to choose what is comfortable for them. For example, someone may want to cleanse themselves privately before practicing their religion or faith belief and the option of having unisex toilets, with incorporated washing facilities in the cubicle and completely closed doors allows for a greater degree of privacy.
- On the other hand, single sex toilets may be preferable for some people, who for religious reasons would not be allowed to use mixed spaces, or simply prefer to have their own space for personal reasons.

**Resource:** RIBA has produced an [Inclusive Design Overlay](#) for the 2020 RIBA Plan of Work. The Overlay introduces inclusive design within five key team roles; client, project management team, design team, construction team and asset management team. As part of the Overlay, faith and religious workplace amenities (such as multi-faith rooms) are included as part of the considerations that each role should explore as part of the different RIBA Work Stages for the design in order for buildings to be more inclusive.

## Case studies

### Central Somers Town<sup>10</sup>

Architecture, landscape and research studio practice DSDHA led on the masterplan, public realm and landscape strategy for the redevelopment of Central Somers Town in the London Borough of Camden. After consulting local residents, an area of the new park was designated for dogs. This was to ensure that the wider park appeals to all, including people who may want greater separation from dogs for any reason, including religion. In some religions such as Islam and Judaism, dogs have historic and literary associations of being violent and dirty<sup>11</sup>.

### Greenwich Community Building

As part of the Greenwich Peninsula development by Knight Dragon, DSDHA has designed a multi-faith prayer room and community space<sup>12</sup>. Operated by the Church of England Parish of

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East Greenwich, the space has been designed to be genuinely inclusive to a range of religious groups that operate in the local community.

Designed in consultation with the end-users the project brief started out as re-providing a prayer room and then expanded to provide other community facilities as well, including a chaplain's office and a cleansing room. The space has proven to be popular and is often fully booked. Further information:

<https://www.prayerspace.org.uk/>

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### **Eruvs in London**

An eruv is an area within which observant – often Orthodox - Jews can carry or push objects on the Sabbath (which lasts from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday), without violating a Jewish law that prohibits carrying anything except within the home. The Sabbath is an extremely important part of practicing Judaism and is a traditional period of holiness and rest<sup>13</sup>.

An eruv must be a completely enclosed space. This is defined as a connected parameter that can include linked surrounding features such as railway lines and walls, with any breaks connected by boundary poles that are interconnected with wire or other material. This creates an area that is completely enclosed by boundaries that conform to Jewish law. In London there are several eruvs covering Golders Green, Finchley in Barnet and another covering Brondesbury, Cricklewood, West Hampstead, Queen's Park, Willesden and Kilburn in Brent, all areas with substantial Jewish communities<sup>14</sup>. The eruv allows Orthodox Jews to follow the same rules on the Sabbath that they would in their homes, enabling them to attend the synagogue and take part in other activities<sup>15</sup>.

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### **The changing role of faith and religious institutions in public life**

Increasingly most religious buildings go beyond just providing religious services and also open their doors for food banks, homeless shelters and charitable causes. These activities go beyond specific religious communities, welcoming people from different faiths to participate and connect on shared values – something we are also seeing within organisations.

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### **Case Study**

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#### **Central London Catholic Churches (CLCC)**

Westminster City Council works with many churches across the City to provide shelter and support for homeless people, especially during extreme weather events. Westminster Cathedral is part of the [Central London Catholic Churches \(CLCC\)](#) initiative which supports the homeless of central London. The CLCC operate a twice-weekly lunch service, for between 50 to 60 people each day. In addition to providing food and drink they refer guests to medical facilities and advisory services dealing with legal, employment and accommodation issues.



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