

# SHARED ROOTS IN FAITH

Interview by David Miller

## A Nun in the East End

**Sister Christine is a member of the Society Faithful Companions of Jesus and came in the 1970 to the East End. She dedicates herself to create a multi-cultural community in which people of different faiths and cultures share their lives together. Therefore she is the manager of “Neighbours in Poplar”, a charity providing support to older, frail or isolated people of all cultures and faiths.**



## Irish Origins

“I was born in Ireland, I am catholic. My father was religious, but not my mum. At home we didn't have many religious practices, just going to church on Sunday. My sister's mum was a nun and my mum was petrified I might go into the same thing.”

## Becoming a Nun

“When I was about 16 or 17, I decided to become a nun. I just knew I was called to do that, that was what I was meant to do. Whether I liked it or not that was beside the point but, that was where I was meant to be. At the age of 16 I told my Mom I wanted to be a sister and she nearly died.”

## Immigrants in the East End in the 1970s

### Why Sister Christine migrated to the East End

“As a nun you are sent to places by the Society and I was sent to a community in the East End. It was in January 1970. I hated it! The cold, the very strictly run school I worked in, people taking the mickey out of me because of my Irish accent. But I got over it as you do and I ended up then wanting to stay.”

### Immigrants from Bangladesh

“It was very difficult for the Bangladeshis coming here, extremely difficult. They would come and view a flat and someone would know that they were interested in the flat and were coming to view it tomorrow by which time graffiti would have been on the front door saying, ‘Paki get out’ because they were always called Pakis even though they were not from Pakistan they were from Bangladesh which was a different country and that would be by way of deterring them from taking that flat.”



Women and children celebrate the breaking of the fast during Ramadan 2011 at Neighbours in Poplar.

### Racism

“And at this time there were a number of Caribbean families coming over. There was a lot of racial prejudice and as an Irish person I've experienced racism. And now the Irish were themselves being racist to Caribbean and people who were different. That seemed very difficult to understand how you could inflict on another, what you had suffered from yourself, it just didn't make much sense.”



Two Bengali Women face racial daub.

### ‘The good old days’?

“So in the 70s you had the older people complaining about ‘the good old days’ and ‘there're no neighbours anymore’. That's when we founded “Neighbours In Poplar” to fill the gap and to ensure that neighbourliness wasn't lost. And nowadays I see loads of community. People say to me there's no such thing as community, I don't believe them. It's like anything else – if you want to find it, you'll find it.”

Poplar