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## *What We Share! A brief stop, and lasting memory*

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Rev. Canon Salmoon Bashir**

Last week, our family took a few days away for vacation in South Carolina. Although, with a fourteen-month-old, calling it a vacation might be a bit of a stretch. As any parent knows, traveling with a toddler mostly means parenting in a different location. We spent a few days at Lake Murray and then headed to Hartsville for a friend's wedding. It was a great trip, but the part I remember the most happened at a gas station along the way.

As we were driving, Damian started crying. And not the kind of crying that can be fixed with a snack, a toy, or random objects from the glove box. We tried everything. Nothing worked! So, we pulled off the road and stopped at a gas station, not because we needed gas, but because we all needed a break.

When we walked into the convenience store, Mari picked up a few things while I wandered the aisles with Damian, trying to distract him and calm him down. That's when I heard something that immediately caught my attention. Two people were speaking Punjabi. Hearing Punjabi in a rural South Carolina gas station was the last thing I expected that day.

Punjab was once one region before it was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947. Today we speak of Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab, but language, culture, food, memories, and family stories still connect people on both sides of the border.

When I heard them speaking my mother tongue, I joined the conversation by greeting them in Punjabi. The woman over the aisle looked at me with surprise, and almost immediately her eyes filled with tears. A simple greeting in Punjabi opened the door to a conversation neither of us expected.

The owner of the gas station was from Indian Punjab. As we talked, we discovered that his father had lived only about thirty miles from where my family lives today in Lahore, Pakistan. After partition, his family moved to the Indian side of Punjab.

Soon we were talking about places we knew, stories we had heard growing up, and of course our favorite food. For about ten minutes, that little convenience store felt less like a gas station and more like someone's living room. We talked about family, history, and the places that shaped us.

Meanwhile, the woman working there had completely adopted Damian. She kept bringing him treats, talking, and entertaining him. Before long, she was inviting our family to come to their home for dinner.

When the owner learned that Mari had already bought a few things, he seemed genuinely upset and said he should not have let us pay. He kept encouraging us to take drinks and anything else we wanted. After several rounds of friendly disagreement, I finally convinced him we were fine. We exchanged hugs, said our goodbyes, and promised that if we were ever back in that part of South Carolina, we would come and share a meal with them.

When I got back to the car, I had tears in my eyes because of the kindness we had just experienced.

For a few minutes, things that often divide people, borders, politics, religion, and difficult history between our two countries, faded into the background. Two families who had never met before connected through language, memories, and hospitality.

When you meet someone face to face, not on social media, not from the news and not through a screen, those divisions don't seem quite as important. You are no longer talking about groups of people or ideas. You are

talking to a real person. You see the tears in their eyes. You feel the emotion in their voice. You hear about the memories that still live in their heart.

Standing in that gas station, we were not thinking about which side of the border our families ended up on after partition. We were talking about home. We were remembering places, sharing stories, and finding connections we never expected to find.

And what about Damian? While I was having an emotional conversation about Punjab, history, and home, Damian was busy collecting snacks and enjoying all the attention. After causing the emergency stop, he was completely fine.

As we move into summer, many of us will travel, welcome visitors, and spend time with family and friends. May we remain open to unexpected encounters along the way. Sometimes a simple conversation or a small act of kindness can stay with us longer than we imagined.

After all, you never know what can happen when a crying toddler makes you stop at a gas station.