

Opportunity

August • November 2024

friends
INTERNATIONAL

Witnessing to the Nations

Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

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Leading Thoughts

Ernest Hemmingway was quoted as saying “Courage is grace under pressure” while Henry Kissinger commented that “a diamond is a chunk of coal that did well under pressure”. In the first chapter of James we read, ‘Don’t run from tests and hardships. If you embrace them, your faith will blossom under pressure and teach you true patience as you endure’.



On occasions it may seem we have plenty of time to reflect and plan before we choose how to proceed. At other times we are under pressure to take quick and decisive action and time is against us. That was the case for the recent

Big Weekend Away, an event organised by Friends International and our partners after a last-minute cancellation, when we needed to develop a Plan B at short notice. It was incredible to see what happens when carefully laid plans have to be shelved and we have to rely upon God’s blessing and provision. The Bible is full of stories – from Joseph to Jonah and Daniel to Moses – where plans did not go as envisaged but taking God’s way resulted in great blessings. This was certainly the case for the *Big Weekend Away*, where international students from 23 different countries met together and left with their faith deepened and new friendships established.

In this edition of Opportunity you can read about the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield, where there has been a large increase in the number of international students. We are also seeing new opportunities for our staff to serve as chaplains, helping universities provide pastoral care for international students, and helping explain the gospel message to international students who want a better understanding.

So be encouraged by what you read in these pages and please consider how you could get more involved. We value all the work you do to support international students but we must always be open to Plan B, because we know God’s plans are best and we want to invite Him to direct our actions.

Thank you and let’s be in touch!

Alan

Alan Tower

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‘Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails’.
Proverbs 19:21

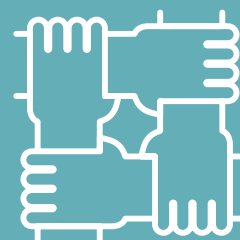
”

Right Connections



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I hope that together with other workers we can encourage, motivate, and welcome other churches that are yet to find their place in this ministry.



My name is Harriet Ngugi, I was born and raised in Kenya. I am married to Sam and we have two children. I came to believe in Jesus as a teenager while in high school. Soon after university, I joined a one-year internship program with a student ministry organisation in Kenya. I received training on disciple-making and cross-cultural ministry and continued to work with this ministry for four years. Later with Sam, my husband, I founded *Mission Campaign Network*, a ministry involved in mission mobilisation, discipleship, and cross-cultural training among university students, professionals, and church leaders in East Africa region.

We came to the UK in 2019, for further mission studies and to work with Pioneers UK getting involved with mission mobilisation and training of Afro-diaspora churches in the UK. I studied contextual theology at All Nations Christian College. Joining Friends International and working in my current role in Cambridge was an answer to prayer as well as a calling to trust God once more in a new context.

So far, moving to Cambridge has been the most challenging part of taking up the role of Centre Team leader here. Like any such transition, my family and I have had to deal with adapting to a new home, schools, church, and relationships. There’s a huge number of international students in Cambridge, compared to the workers. We only reach a small percentage of students in the city and this can feel overwhelming, as though we can only scratch the surface of what could be accomplished.

While some churches in Cambridge are committed to the international student ministry, many are yet to establish a concrete way of reaching international students. I hope that together with other workers we can encourage, motivate, and welcome other churches that are yet to find their place in this ministry. We hope we can recruit and train sufficient volunteers so that our dreams to reach every international student in Cambridge with the Good News of Jesus can be fulfilled.

**Being chaplains
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university's rules and regulations (something we should be doing anyway given we are operating on private university land!). We also get to connect with others from other faiths, hear of

their beliefs directly from them, and find common ground in terms of caring for students.

Difficult times for internationals often mean they are more vulnerable, and universities are aware of safeguarding students against potentially harmful or exploitative external organisations or cults. Being chaplains has given us an ability to support international students and staff as part of the university's support services. For us, this currently includes supporting staff through university restructuring and coming alongside students, families, and staff in bereavements. This has been a practical outworking of what it means to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and mourn with those who are mourning.

It is different from what 'traditional' Friends International ministry might have looked like in the past, but it provides opportunities we wouldn't have had otherwise to reach internationals, both staff and students, on campus. As universities are looking to increase the numbers of international students, we hope to become an integral part of international student support, helping them to find a community on campus and in town, connecting them with local people and ultimately experiencing God's unconditional love for them.



Guildford Chaplaincy

The University of Surrey is home to a Religious Life and Belief team of 32 people that represents the eight major faiths, as well as the humanist tradition. Within this team, the local Friends International team have found a home which has brought new opportunities to serve the staff and students at the university.

Being Christian Chaplains for international students means that we are clearly Christians. It's in our title! As chaplains, we are expected to be the 'religious people'. More than ever before we can invite students – where appropriate – to Bible studies, prayer meetings and other activities on campus!

It also means other members of staff are trusting us. Through our relationship with the International Student Support team, we are part of the welcome week for new students, being asked to deliver seminars to help navigate UK culture. From hospital visits and helping vulnerable (international)

students move accommodation, to connecting lonely international students with others in our community – we can help, and the university knows about it and appreciates us. One example was when the university asked for our help to support a student from China who was in hospital and feeling isolated over the Christmas break. We organised a couple of volunteers to visit and they were able to follow up with the student after they left hospital.

To get to this point has taken several years of faithful prayer along with building relationships and trust with key people in the university. We are here to serve the staff and students, which also means to abide by the



Bournemouth Outreach



As Friends International local centres up and down the country gear up to run summer outreaches, Antoine Thenin, Centre Team Leader in Bournemouth, recounts the impact outreaches have had on many lives, including his own.

I remember going to Bournemouth International Outreach [BIO] as a language school student back in July 2010. The Hub Café was filled with students from all over the world and a large volunteer team was running events, dramas and Bible studies. I was amazed by it! The events were informal yet informative, the dramas were hilarious and the Bible studies a real gem. I was hooked and kept on going!

A warm welcome

Fast forward to summer 2024 and it will be the 5th BIO I am leading as FI Centre Team Leader. The joy of being welcomed and loved led me to join FI and lead summer outreaches. In 2023, around 50-60 international

students attended our events each evening. Interestingly, the majority were from the Middle East. What did we offer that even Muslim students were ready to step into a church and join Bible studies? Well, it is not too dissimilar to 14 years ago: they were welcomed, cared for and loved. It allowed for wonderful faith conversations and some of them were eager to put an Arabic Bible in their bags (when they assumed no one was watching...). Students come back again and again; the sense of belonging, the safe alternative activities to the clubs nearby, a place to practise English, engage in faith conversation... all of that means that our summer outreaches work! We are meeting their physical and spiritual needs.

[continued on p11]

Prayer Diary

August • November 2024

friends
INTERNATIONAL



Seventeen weeks of prayer points



Thank you for your continued prayers
and support for international students.

Returnee Students

Week 1
5th Aug

Lydia Bown, Southampton

Pray that international students who have engaged with us this year would continue to join us to explore who Jesus is. Pray for wisdom for us as we follow students up, in knowing how to help them move towards faith, especially as many will leave the UK in September.

Week 2
12th Aug

Madeleine Bonicel, Nottingham

Give thanks that many students will have heard about Jesus this past year, but pray that they would continue their journey of exploring faith back home, either online with their UK friends or with local believers. We are training our volunteers and CU students...pray that we would be effective over the next few weeks in building friendships with new international students.

Outreach and Growth

Week 3
19th Aug

Mike and Rachel Hill, Birmingham; Ruth Duffin, Leicester

Pray for Friends International on campus to make contact with many new students who will go on to join Friends International's activities. Please pray for us as we seek to rebuild links with Birmingham's city centre universities. Please pray for strengthening and refreshing of the staff in Leicester, as we look to grow the team here to better reach out to the many South Asian students in the city.

Week 4
26th Aug

Raquel Medina, Norwich

Please pray that the Norwich International Outreach in August would be an opportunity to reach out to new students arriving in the city, to strengthen the team and to equip new volunteers for cross-cultural ministry. Pray for all the logistics and different events.

Week 5
2nd Sept

Bethany Marsh, Aberdeen

Give thanks for the growth taking place in Aberdeen – new members joining the branch, more international students joining our iCafé teams, and a local church wanting to partner with us. God is at work! Please keep us in prayer as we partner with local churches to minister to postgrad international students who are in the UK over the summer.



New Academic Year

Week 6
9th Sept

Fiona Barnard, St Andrews

Pre-sessional week begins on 9 September. We value prayer for invitations to various university departments and induction sessions, for clear communication on our part and curiosity from international students, for warm connection and significant conversations. Pray too that churches will be accessible as well as welcoming, and that we will have the right number of local hosts.

Week 7
16th Sept

Raquel Medina, Norwich; Kirsten Wynn, London

16-20 September is Welcome Week in Norwich. Pray for all the events running in partnership with the university, Christian Union and local churches during this week. Pray that we can meet many internationals and that we'll be able to develop friendships with them. Welcome events also start this week at Greenwich University. Please pray for opportunities to invite international students to our events and have meaningful conversations.

Week 8
23rd Sept

Tim Stanyon, Loughborough

Pray for us as we run training for volunteers and local Christians this month. We're also looking forward to a new cohort of students arriving. Pray for fruitful connections with students and for students to get involved with our events regularly. Pray especially for our welcome meal and first International Café.

Week 9
30th Sept

Rebecca Davies, Glasgow

Please pray for our 'September Welcome' programme, where more than 12 churches host welcome events to meet some of the newly arrived 27,500 international students. Please pray for many friendships to start, and good planning from our side!

Week 10
7th Oct

Alex McCann, Colchester; Lilli Jones, Guildford

Please pray for relationships built with students in Colchester over the summer break and the new international students we will meet during freshers' week. Pray we will be able to promote the work of Friends International and lay good foundations for the coming year. Please pray for Guildford as we develop our staff team. We have new volunteers with very specific gifts getting more involved, but it will take some time to restructure.

Week 11
14th Oct

Ivana Bajic, Stirling

Pray for new international students coming to Stirling, that the Lord will lead their steps toward us and help them to settle well. Pray for students that are graduating and leaving Stirling, that wherever they go, they can connect with other Christians. Finally, please pray that the good cooperation between Stirling University and language school, INTO, will continue and for wisdom and protection of free speech at our events.



New Beginnings

Week 12
21st Oct

Antoine Thenin, Bournemouth

Pray for Antoine, the Centre Team Leader in Bournemouth, as he steps down to begin a new role pastoring a church in the town. Pray for the Bournemouth team at the start of the new academic year and particularly for Luke Hammond, who is only part time, for wisdom on how to manage the local ministry, on top of his national role as Reach Co-ordinator.

Week 13
28th Oct

Helen Morrissey, Exeter

We are launching Local Link in Exeter and beginning our Life Leadership course. Pray that we will be able to form deep and meaningful relationships with the international students. We are also planning a weekend away. Peter and Lynette Teagle will be teaching. Pray they are able to connect with the students wherever they are on their spiritual journey.

Week 14
4th Nov

Susan Caddy, Portsmouth

Give thanks for the appointment of Matthew, the new Centre Team Leader for Portsmouth. Pray for the rebuilding of the ministry in Portsmouth during this next academic year, for more links with churches, individual supporters and the University Christian Union as we seek to engage with the international students we meet.

Week 15
11th Nov

Warren MacLeod, Edinburgh

Please pray for our monthly day trips, as they provide a great opportunity to get connected to new students. Pray that good conversations would happen between our volunteers and the students, and that this would continue to be a good vehicle for students to start coming along to Bible studies, churches, and exploring faith.

Week 16
18th Nov

Phoebe Ridout, Winchester

Give thanks for the great relationship with Winchester School of Arts and our links on that campus. Please pray for the strengthening of our relationships with the University of Winchester chaplaincy and the Christian Union in the new academic year. Please also pray for more Local Link volunteers as this growth in Winchester continues.

Week 17
25th Nov

Sabine Stockton, Manchester/Salford

Joint CUs and Friends International Manchester weekend away – Pray that a good number of international students will attend and that they will be drawn to Christ through His word and the Christian community.



Bournemouth Outreach [continued from Page 6]

Summer Outreach

International students are not the only ones benefiting from it; we as a team benefit hugely. With morning devotions and trainings, the team is equipped to share the Gospel cross culturally so the message of the Cross is shared in a way that students will most naturally understand. Some volunteers had never shared the Gospel with an international student before, led a Bible study or stood in front of a crowd to lead an event. The team is pushed to trust God in every way; 2 Corinthians 4:6 says: *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.* Our role, therefore, is to preach Jesus Christ, and God does the rest.

God at work

Our summer outreaches encourage volunteers to understand, in a real way, the partnership in mission between us and God. Working together with the same goal in mind: sharing the knowledge of His glory displayed in the face of Jesus.

While the Summer Outreach brings me great joy, I also have the joy to hear of what volunteers do afterwards. I heard of volunteers who returned to their Christian Union and got involved in international student ministry there, or recent graduates who found a job in a different city and got involved in the international Café run by FI; other volunteers got married after meeting at BIO (I am guilty of this one myself!).

I am still in touch with a Muslim student I met over 10 years ago. Recently, his mother passed away, which allowed me to share about God's love, comfort and peace. He was very

receptive to my messages and encouragement. Never underestimate telling students that you are praying for them; more often than not, they will be grateful.

As I conclude, I want to stress that being part of a summer outreach means that you are 'a link in the chain' in sharing God's glory displayed in the face of Jesus. I would love to tell you that all the students who have heard the Gospel put their trust in Jesus. Sadly, I cannot; but I have met students who had never heard of Jesus or the Bible and now they know. I have met students who thought that Jesus was not important, and while they are not Christian today, they understand that He does matter. Equally, I have met students who previously couldn't care less about the Christian faith and are now dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

So we pray that those who have just heard of Jesus will continue to hear about Him; we pray that those who have started to understand that Jesus matters will put their trust in Him alone; we pray that our new brothers and sisters in Christ will continue their walk with the Lord, being more deeply rooted, and telling their families and friends back home who Jesus truly is.

Summer outreaches are truly worth joining, or at least praying for!



Antoine Thenin,
Centre Team Leader
Bournemouth

How can we be an effective witness in a multicultural setting?

Debbie D Philip reflects on occasions where international students have led her to a deeper understanding and enabled her to take a more enlightened approach to welcoming internationals.

In Acts 17 the Apostle Paul says that God decided when and where people would live 'so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him'. Maybe that new person on our street was brought by God so that we could help them find Him.

Eating together is great for getting to know people, their cultures and food. I had a Turkish neighbour who brought food to my door; it was delicious! Some cultures invite guests into their home, others eat out together, others like people to visit them. A Nigerian brother told me his shock that no British church people had visited him and his family when they arrived, a natural thing to do in Nigeria.

I'm sure God wants us to grasp every opportunity as we adapt to this new multicultural norm. Through engaging with our international brothers and sisters we can gain a richer understanding of the Bible. I will never forget reading Luke 15 with a Kenyan Christian and his reaction to the father

running towards the returning son. "Fathers just don't do that", he said. What a loving heavenly Father we have! In some cultures, for example, in Kenya, relationships are more hierarchical than here in the UK and Ireland, reminiscent of 1st century Palestine.

As we open our lives to non-Christian international friends, we can show them a loving, multicultural church family, helping newcomers to see the relevance of a life with Jesus. In the book, *Evangelism in a Sceptical World*, Sam Chan describes contextualisation as 'trying to communicate the message of the gospel in a way which is faithful to the way God has revealed the gospel in his scriptures', but also in a way that hearers can understand in their own cultural and existential context. We're not trying to make the gospel relevant; it is relevant. But we are trying to demonstrate to a culture how the gospel is relevant.

Debbie D Philip* [name changed] is a member of OMF Returnee Focus and a Friends International Affiliate.

Development at the University of Hertfordshire

Growth in Hatfield

The University of Hertfordshire is based in Hatfield and attracts more than 32,000 students every year. 13,000 are internationals drawn from over 140 different countries. The University has seen its international student population grow by 330% in the last six years.



Despite these numbers, Friends International does not yet have an established presence in Hatfield. We would love to start a new work, encouraging local churches and the Christian Union in their outreach to international students, offering friendship and faith in Jesus. Our vision is for every international student across the UK and Ireland to be in reach of a Friends International local centre where they can hear the Christian message and enjoy the support of a Christian community.

In June 2023, Dominic Mujawo was appointed as Centre Team Leader in Hatfield. He will be evaluating how to reach international students in Hatfield, starting outreach to them, connecting with local churches, Christian Unions, and the university. Originally from Zimbabwe, Dominic was an international

student himself, and has experience of working with Campus Crusade for Christ. In his former role, Dominic was the director of Awana Zimbabwe, an evangelistic mission agency working with children and young people in Zimbabwe. Dominic will be spending time in the UK over the summer getting to know Hatfield and the surrounding area.

Before moving to the UK Dominic is raising the financial support he needs to provide for his family. Please pray for him and his family in the coming months as they plan and prepare to take up this new role sharing faith and friendship with thousands of international students in Hertfordshire. If you are interested in supporting our work in Hatfield, please contact the Support Centre for more information.





International Students Enjoy A Big Weekend Away

The inaugural *Big Weekend Away* [BWA] took place in Great Malvern over the 5th-7th April. Organised at speed to replace the Word Alive International Student Track, BWA brought together 160 international students and team, from 23 nations, all eager to understand more about the Christian faith.

We were treated to Cornhill tutor Al Gibbs, teaching from Philippians, as well as a training track, topical seminars and a small group programme. The evenings included times of student-led worship plus fun, games and walks in the Malvern Hills for the more athletic. Since then, students have continued to connect across the UK to encourage each other.

One Buddhist student, only recently arrived in the UK, said, "I found answers to the questions that I had about Christianity and Jesus", while there were further stories of people coming to faith and lives being changed. Another, an Indian postgrad student, asked to be baptised after the weekend. We are so thankful that BWA was greatly used by the Lord: challenging some, encouraging others. Please pray for us now as we start planning for 2025!

Lynette Teagle appointed as Regional Development Director

Lynette began her time in the UK in Liverpool as an international student, arriving from Singapore. Her staff experience with Friends International has seen her involved in teams in Birmingham, Oxford, and now Bath. For a number of years Lynette has headed up Learning and Development, including organising the annual conference in January each year, staff training conferences in May as well as those for new staff in March and September. Now taking on additional responsibilities as Regional Director for Southwest England and South Wales, alongside her Learning and Development role, will mean she can be more involved in key strategic decisions that will help develop the ministry.



The life of a Regional Development Director

Steph Knell is the Regional Development Director (RDD) for Southeast England. She began her role in February 2024 and here she explains what the job entails and why she is excited by the challenges ahead.

I am one of four RDDs in Friends International who have responsibility for different regions across the UK and Ireland. I was told by a colleague that it will take a year to really know the job, so these are my early reflections. My initial impression is that I have to face inwards and outwards. Facing inwards involves how we operate organisationally and includes attending trustees' meetings, discussing policy, recruitment, interviewing and training, or even writing for Opportunity magazine!

Outwards, I face towards the staff team, with a responsibility to know what is happening in each of my clusters. I also support local churches who are passionate about supporting and developing the work of Friends International sharing faith and friendship with international students in their community. I'm also looking to develop new Centres across the Southeast, which involves building relationships with churches and individuals to establish a productive supporter base.

I could be overwhelmed, as there is a lot to learn about the clusters, churches, staff, and the inner workings of Friends International, but there have been encouraging moments. I recently heard of

a case where the university advertised and booked a 40-seat coach for a Friends International 'Think Home' course. However, 200 students signed up, far exceeding expectations.

My experience of international student work, gained 20 years ago, is bearing fruit. Since then, I have been involved in church ministry, the leadership of a schools work charity, and completed an MA in Transformational Leadership at All Nations. I feel I am bringing my skills, experience and learning together in the RDD role.





Recruiting success – your support is enabling new staff to join a growing ministry

In the Spring we saw 15 new staff sign up for the induction and new staff training event, meaning we can strengthen some larger Centres and establish the work in new places. Friends International now operates 35 local Centres across the UK and Ireland, bringing friendship, faith and support to international students.

Thank you for your support. We couldn't have done it without you. Your prayers, donations and commitment have meant we could reach out to more international students with God's love.

Please pray – Will you join us in praying for our staff team, and particularly our new recruits, as they settle into their roles reaching out to international students?

Please give – Are you able to make a donation to towards the cost of running our staff teams, both in existing Centres and in places where our work is being established?

Please use the response slip enclosed, or give online at:
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