

International Café Ministry

Questions to consider and practical suggestions about starting a café

In our ministry to international students we are looking for:

- Contact:
 - In a context that encourages friendships to develop.
 - In a context which encourages people to explore Christian faith.

Among many other effective ways to achieve these aims, *cafes* have been greatly used by God as a means of creating contact between local Christians and international students. (It is interesting to note that the days of "coffee bar evangelism" among our own national youth seem largely to have passed, but not so where international students are concerned.)

Questions to consider before starting a cafe:

- What sort of international students are in our area and with what sort of needs? (nationalities, educational level, language level / friendship, language)
- Consider whether children are likely to be present (post-grads and academic visitors are sometimes here with their families) and whether children are welcome or not – if so – who will look after the children and are team members CRB checked?
- Are there existing Christian cafes/activities which need to be taken into consideration – there is no point of being in competition?
- What sort of Christians will be best able to minister to them and how to recruit the right sort and number? (fellow students, young professionals, older Christians, mixture – what kind of gifts should they have? Are they in agreement with the aims and vision for the café? Are they recommended by their church? Are they prepared to meet with students outside of the café? Are they prepared to receive training?).
- What suitable venues are available? (accessible and safe to get to Church halls, university rooms or neutral venues). Can you easily provide hot drinks (food?) and snacks? Is it comfortable and inviting? Does it have the necessary furniture? Is there a cost?
- What sort of activities will be most helpful to achieve our aims? (table games, sports, conversation facilities, talks, Bible studies)
- How will the café be publicised and international students attracted? (it needs well produced and strategically placed cards/posters/website/facebook pages but personal contacts and invitations are the most effective. NB. Be clear about the activities offered and transparent that it is run by local Christians).

Getting started:

Having done your research, gathered together a committed café ministry team, arranged a venue, developed a financial plan, planned and publicised your activities - you are ready to get started! A few things to remember:

- Have a programme or set of themes planned ahead to make the café attractive and interesting (see 'Ideas for café programmes').
- Ensure that the team arrive in good time before the café starts to pray together and set up the café.
- Give clear instructions about where the location is and how to get there – have a poster on the door and someone waiting to welcome and direct people as they arrive.
- Create a friendly, welcoming atmosphere with background music, posters, team members ready to greet and sit with people as they arrive, chat and play games.
- Have team members serving drinks and snacks.
- Have Christian literature available for those who want to read it.

- The café leader needs to welcome everyone once most people have arrived, explain the programme and give out notices.
- If an optional Bible study is planned either during the café (in a separate room) or on a separate occasion have at least two team members prepared to lead this. (see separate resources on leading a Bible study and Bible study material).
- Review how the café went with team members or café leaders.

Getting the balance

If we decrease the emphasis on the third aim, we may end up running a social club with little further impact. If we emphasise the third aim, we may see a more clear-cut Christian impact, but we risk alienating those who could otherwise develop a Christian interest over time through the example of Christian friends. Ideally the cafe and its team will be attractive enough in themselves to bring in lots of people, and keep them coming, while still allowing a definite Christian element for those who want to take advantage of it. Those who don't can still enjoy being there.

The Team

The team needs;

- Good, mature leadership
- Regular prayer and training
- Regular “new blood”
- Periodic evaluation to keep up-to-date and avoid getting into ruts