

Opportunity

March • May 2020

friends
INTERNATIONAL



A Vision for the Future

Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

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Leading Thoughts

The crowds along the sides of the ancient streets pressed in, snapping photos and bustling for the best spot. Those walking along the road itself were slow paced and solemn, some visibly putting themselves through suffering, like one man I saw carrying an 8ft cross on his bare back. This was Good Friday in Jerusalem and I had the privilege of standing on the Via Dolorosa witnessing thousands of devotees imitating their Saviour's walk to Calvary.



Easter is as significant as it gets for Christians. A devastating death followed by majestic victory, representing the moment we were given the greatest news. Yet, how can we

communicate this momentous truth and Easter's eternal consequences to those who come from other cultures and may know little, if anything, about Jesus?

At Friends International, we want to help churches and Christian Unions this Easter, to use this powerful Christian celebration to spread life to the students that come to the UK and Ireland from abroad. To this end we have prepared a free resource to help you share the real meaning of Easter with international students which is available as a free download from our website. You can also read inspiring stories in this edition of

Opportunity of how Easter events have made an impact on students.

In this Spring edition you will read about the vision we have for moving the work forward. It is an exciting time for everyone involved in the ministry. We value your prayers and financial support as we work together to fulfil this vision that the Lord has given us.

May you have a blessed Easter and know deeply what Jesus has done for you, and may it be a time of significance when lives are changed for the international students who attend our churches.

Jack

Jack Bentley
Media & Communications Coordinator

Opportunity is published by **Friends International Ministries**. Editor: Jack Bentley. ©2020.
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Friends International is a member of the Evangelical Alliance and Global Connections.
Registered Charity No. 1094095

"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

Matthew 28:6



Testimony



"...there comes a time when you need to give it all into God's hands"

I'm originally from India and I've studied in America and the UK. I've experienced culture shock more than once; every country changes you!

Shortly after I arrived in the UK, I went to Tesco and I saw these ladies with a board saying, 'Friends International' and I thought: that's where I can meet people from different cultures and learn new things. They invited me to a meal with Cilla and she took me to church soon after we met. From there the journey really started. I began attending events and meeting new people.

During the Freshers Fair I had received a brochure about the Alpha Course which I had pinned on my board. It said on it 'Know Jesus More' and that hit me. I thought why not, let's do it... and the best part of the Alpha Course is that I would get dinner too! Having a community and a shared meal with others feels great.

I have tried many religions and my journey has been quite long and there are many things I have discovered within myself. When I came here and met people at Alpha, that's when things changed for me. That was when I realised that maybe Christianity is for me and the peace I am trying to find is here.

I have always been a mature and strong person; I've always told myself that I can deal with any situation... but, trust me, there comes a time when you need to give it all into God's hands. I believe that from now on I've given it to His hands. From here my journey, everything, is going to be taken care of by Him.

Having a community and a shared meal with others feels great.



Our Vision for Growth

Friends International, in partnership with churches and Christian Unions, had contact with 11,000 international students last year... but we're still only scratching the surface.

Our vision for the next 10 years is to expand the ministry to 12 new locations across the UK and Ireland, recruiting 20 new staff members and engaging with 4,000 more international students annually.

The 12 locations we have identified have large numbers of international students but are also places where we currently do not have staff and will be the first places we will focus on as we grow: Coventry, Dublin, Liverpool, Brighton, Reading, Hatfield, Swansea, Huddersfield, Medway, Sunderland, Bangor and Plymouth.

We also recognise that there are other locations where we already have staff, but the sheer number of international students demands an increased presence. Therefore, we plan to add further staff workers in London, Sheffield, Cardiff, Aberdeen, Bath, St Andrews, Durham, and Exeter, to serve the growing numbers of international students.

We have already begun working hard towards this vision. In the last six months we have improved infrastructure to support these new developments by appointing an Operations Manager and two more Regional Development Directors (see opposite). This will enable the growth of our organisation to be smooth and sustainable.

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit” says the Lord Almighty’

Zechariah 4:6

”

The next step, and the most crucial, is to pray. May we ask you to join us in praying for God’s guidance and grace every step of the way? Please ask God to bring the right new people into the ministry and for Him to bring to us many more faithful and generous supporters to back the vision.

Thank you for your continued support.

Alan

Alan Tower
National Director



Introducing our New Directors

Iván Neira Regional Development Director – North England & North Wales



I am Iván, originally from Chile and together with my wife Joanne from Scotland, we have served in overseas missions for the last 30 years, first onboard OM’s ships (where we met) and then as part of the leadership of OM UK.

I’m excited about Friends International’s passion to reach international students in the UK with the love of Jesus. The key for me is the desire to honour the local church as the vehicle for our ministry. Not just befriending students but when appropriate, discipling them so they can make disciples. The ministry is impacting nations through the individuals we meet weekly.

I am energised by the vision and hope to see new staff workers appointed and more churches being mobilised to join with us in ministry, multiplying the impact. What we see is great, the scope is greater if we work together, with a sense of urgency.

Susanne Koch Regional Development Director – South East England



I’m Susanne, I grew up in the countryside in Germany, but I have also lived in five different countries, including time in Spain working as an IFES Team Leader.

My life changed completely when I became a Christian as an international student in the United States, and because of that I’m excited about contributing to reaching more international students with the good news of Jesus Christ and discipling students who are already Christians, but have the opportunity to grow and widen their horizon while being abroad.

I would love to see more students engaging in London and overcoming the typical challenges that we can find in big cities. It would be fantastic to be able to at least partially crack the code and expand and strengthen the ministry across other centres in South East England.

Free Easter Resource

Easter is a special time for Christians, as we reflect on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Yet, for an international student looking in, who may know nothing of Jesus, it can appear very curious. Easter eggs, crosses, and bunnies; a collection of symbols and bank holidays that can pass them by without communicating the truth of it all.

This is where our free Easter resource will help you think through how to open your services and activities to those from other cultures. We want you to communicate eternal truths with cross-cultural awareness that welcomes the outsider into the Easter story.

This free download will give you tips for welcoming internationals, ideas for Easter activities and links to further resources.



Download the Free Easter Resource
for your church now:
www.friendsinternational.uk/easter

Easter Encouragements from Around the Country

Passion on the High Street – Guildford

Eight international students came with us to see the dramatic Wintershall Easter Play, on Guildford High Street, followed by refreshments at Grace Church and a talk on why the crucifixion story is still relevant today. Please pray that those seeds that were sown will grow and flourish in the lives of the students.



Easter Retreat – St Andrews

Just one and a half years ago, I was still an atheist, and had lots of doubts about Christianity. During the Easter retreat I realised I was not a good person and don't deserve what I have, but God still accepts me and sacrificed himself for my sins. I decided to follow Jesus. I would like to devote my life to the work that God assigns me. I think my old has gone and my new has come! – *International student from China*



Easter Café – Bath

We had 28 students attend our Easter Café! A volunteer gave a gospel talk which was helpful and clear and encouragingly several students took away gospel tracts. Please pray that they would read them and be convicted of the reality of the resurrection.

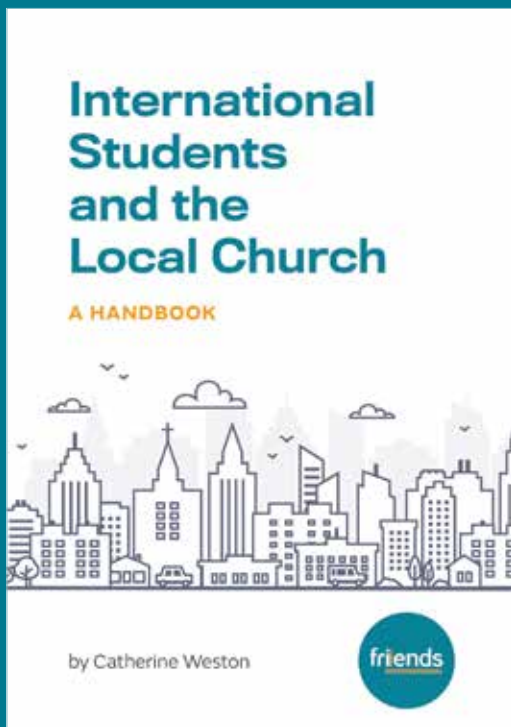
Palm Crosses – Cambridge

Our iCafé team members joined the university chaplaincy team to distribute palm crosses on campus and invite students along to the Easter party in the evening. We played some fun games, enjoyed Hot Cross Buns and Philippa explained the Easter traditions around the world and how they can point us to the death of Jesus and the eternal life that we can have only through Him.

Easter Bible Studies – Bath

A student who recently had attended our Easter Bible studies, included in an email to me a short prayer, which had these words: "Thank you for giving me the opportunity to get to know such nice people from the church, and through them get to know you. I'm still not quite sure whether you are out there listening to my words, but I think I might give it a go and start to talk to you."

A NEW HANDBOOK: International Students and the Local Church



This new handbook from Friends International brings together in one compact volume an easy to read guide for churches wishing to engage with international students.

Drawn from decades of experience, this new resource is written with church leaders and student ministry leaders in mind. It contains both Biblical principles and practical guidelines covering the key topics most will want to know about. Prayer, contextual evangelism, the purpose of social events, student welfare, hospitality, working with universities, church services, baptism and even serving food are all issues covered, together with many more.

For those who are already experienced in running international student ministry in their church, there is much food for thought and pointers for going deeper. For those just starting out there are plenty of ideas and examples, with real student stories and discussion questions to enable deeper reflection.



Catherine Weston, the handbook's author, has been in ministry to international students for over 30 years.

Purchase a copy or digital download:
www.friendsinternational.uk/shop



What others have said about the handbook...

"This handbook ought to be read by the leaders of churches engaging in international student ministry and will be an invaluable training resource for teams working amongst international students."

John Stevens, National Director, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)

"This is a handy, easy-to-read resource that also inspires involvement in this strategic ministry. It captures both the principles and practical ideas and hints to help individuals and churches support and befriend international students."

Elaine Duncan, Chief Executive, Scottish Bible Society

"This should take the fear out of your church's adventure into befriending international students! It contains clear biblical principles, practical guidelines and helpful hints – answering most of the questions your church leaders are likely to have ever asked about international student ministry and many they have never thought about."

Cassells Morrell, IFES Europe Associate Regional Secretary 2001–2018

"A comprehensive guide for churches wishing to engage in international student ministry, wonderfully practical, and the fruit of rich reflection on extensive personal experience. A book which will give confidence to those starting out on the journey and enable experienced practitioners to raise their game."

Ian Parkinson, CPAS Leadership Specialist





Philip Project @ 20



This year the Philip Project is celebrating its 20th anniversary!



Over the years hundreds of international students have received quality Bible teaching, as well as training to equip them to be able to teach the Bible to others when they return to their own countries.

We are thankful to every teacher who has helped run the Philip Project as well as the many others who make it happen every year.

We are also thankful to God for using this Friends International initiative for the last 20 years to positively impact hundreds of lives, and we commit the future of it into His hands.

From those who have been students on the Philip Project:

"Very inspiring and impressive teaching, and a practical approach to look at the Bible. Can't wait to try it myself"

"It has given a starting point for me to build on as I think about how I structure talking about the gospel to those around me."

Philip Project Stats:

- Currently running in 7 cities.
- 70 students attending this year.
- Students from 23 different countries.

Find out more about the Philip Project at: www.philipproject.org.uk



Latest News



Annual Conference

In early January, over 160 of us gathered to celebrate, to share and to learn. The annual Friends International Conference focussed on Bible handling skills, both for reaching out to students and when discipling them. We are particularly thankful to this year's speakers: David Harley (OMF International), Peter Dray (UCCF) and Raymond Brown (Grace Church Brockley).

Coronavirus Update

One of the first known cases of Covid-19 (coronavirus) in the UK was an international student from China, studying at York University (Reported: 1 February 2020, BBC). It is also a difficult time for Chinese students here who are concerned for their families back home. As an organisation we are committed to continue welcoming and meeting Chinese students and will do our best to support them in any way we can, while working with universities and authorities and adhering to official guidelines.

New Property for Housing Trust

We are delighted that our sister charity, ISMHT (International Student Mission Housing Trust), has facilitated the purchase of a property in Canterbury which can be used by our team leader there. Find out more on the website: www.ismhousingtrust.org.uk

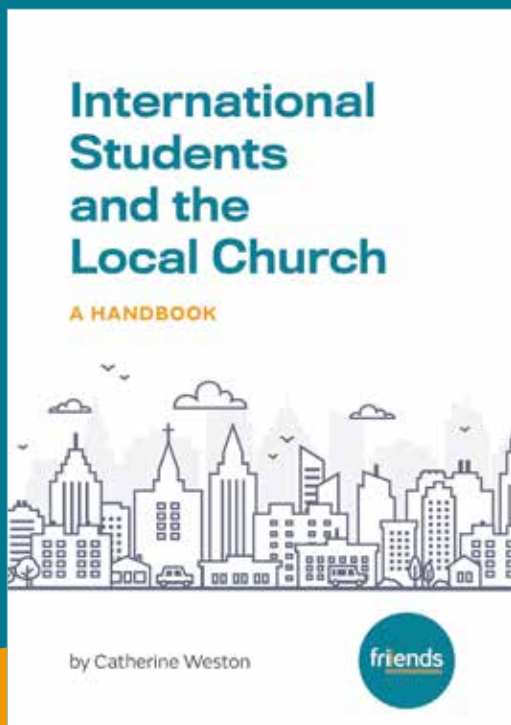


LIFE Leadership Retreat

For 22 international students, the year started with a trip to Shropshire for the Friends International Life Leadership weekend away. Students from nine nations joined the leadership development weekend where we taught topics like teamwork, cultural intelligence, ethics and emotional intelligence. The openness in the students led to many great coaching conversations and opportunities for continued follow-up this semester.



Out now: International Students and the Local Church A Handbook



“This handbook will be an invaluable training resource for teams working amongst international students.”

John Stevens, National Director, FIEC

“This should take the fear out of your church’s adventure into befriending international students!”

Cassells Morrell, IFES Europe Associate Regional Secretary (2001–2018)

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