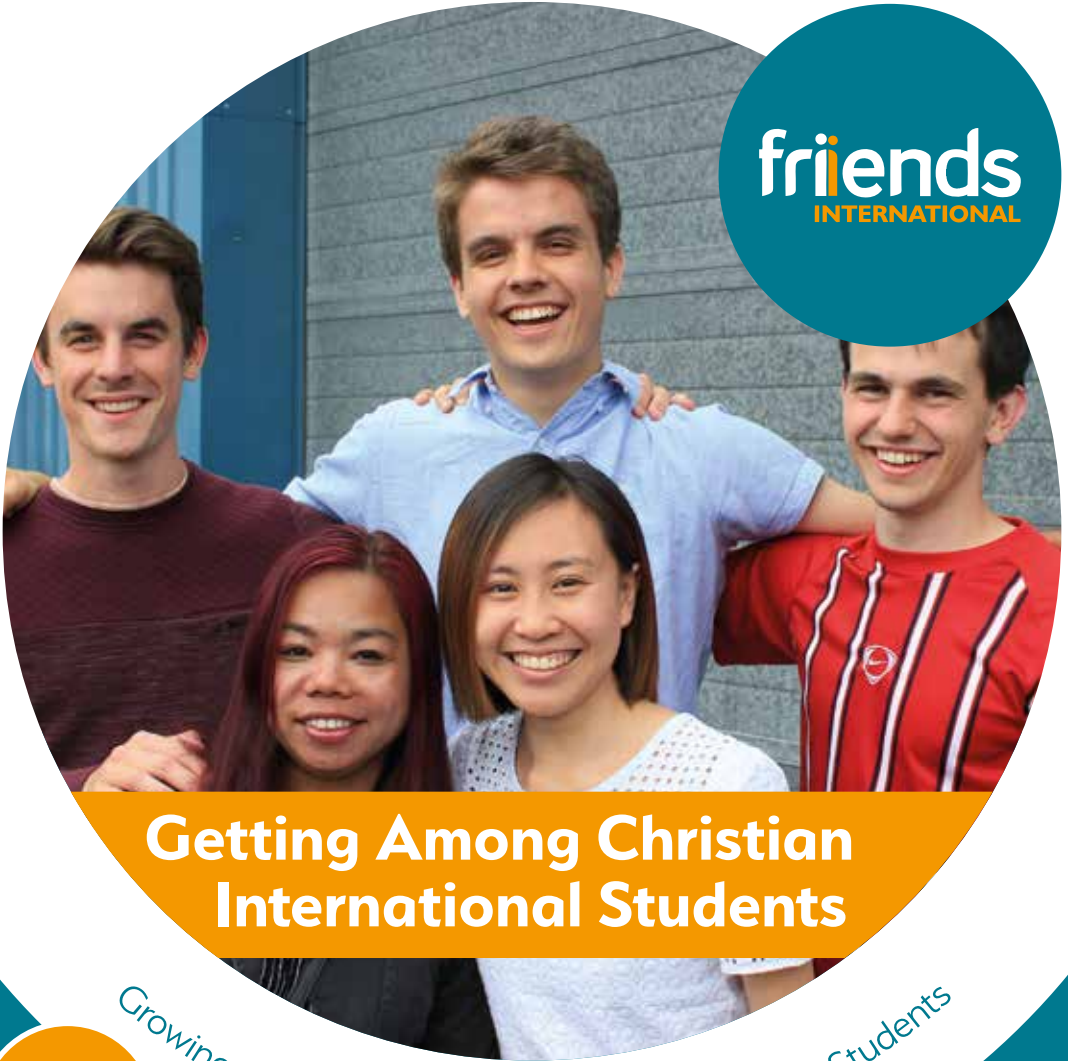


Opportunity

April • July 2023

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Getting Among Christian International Students

Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

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Leading Thoughts

A marquee in the middle of a university campus. Not the place that you expect to hear the reality of being a Christian in Pakistan. Yet, a few weeks ago during an event sharing the Gospel with home and international students, that was my experience when I met Zain*.



A timely reminder that many of the international students coming to study in the UK and Ireland have a Christian faith which we long to see protected and nurtured during the period of their university studies.

family of Christ each has its own way of seeing the diamond. When we talk of Jesus with believers from other cultures we catch glimpses of this amazing Gospel in all its roundness. Many of you reading these words aren't originally from the UK either. Thank you for the rounded glimpses you give us as an organisation as we share Jesus with the world on our doorstep.

As I write the UK is still officially in winter although the days are getting longer and the trees are beginning to bud. However, Easter is approaching and the season for summer outreaches will soon be with us. Read on to see how, through these outreaches, we hope to reach more international students with the truth about Jesus. Please pray for our staff teams and volunteers as they plan for the summer.

Sarah

Sarah Dawkins [Alan Tower is currently on sabbatical]

* Name changed for security purposes

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Skyler Ehly is from Pennsylvania, USA. He moved to the UK in the Autumn of 2016 to study at Lancaster University. Here he recounts his experience as a fledgling Christian.

I was going through the motions of my Christian faith, but I knew I would need some sort of local support system and for that I found a local church. I struggled to make deep relationships at the university and the church did a good job filling those gaps. When I returned to Lancaster in 2019 for my Master's, the day after I arrived, I reconnected with the same church because I knew I would need their support.

When Covid and lockdown started, my need for the church was much more evident. Getting involved in the Christian Union on campus also played a huge part in helping my transition to the UK. I also dipped my toe into going to events focused on international students, like the dinners hosted by Friends International or the Globe Café run by the Christian Union where I got to meet and befriend people that were going through similar experiences to me. It was at the Globe Café that I began to see how interested international students were in the Gospel.

After being exposed to these international ministries, I was quick to say "yes" when the team leader for Friends International's Lancaster Centre invited me to apply to be a Reach trainee. It was a hard year doing the Reach programme during the height of the pandemic, but I knew God had more in store for Lancaster and I stayed on as staff.



For more information about how you can make provision for Friends International in your Will, please go to www.friendsinternational.uk/donate/legacy-giving or scan this code

"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Matthew 9v37-38



Testimony



Thank You For Remembering Us

Leaving a legacy gift in your Will to Friends International is a wonderful way of blessing our ministry and ensuring that international students continue to hear about the love of Jesus for many years to come. We gratefully receive these gifts and your generosity always has a positive effect on the team. In 2022 we received six significant legacies totalling more than £260,000. Thank you for your continued support and can we ask that you prayerfully consider joining others in donating a legacy to Friends International at a later date?

Me First! – setting the tone for discipleship

for international students

A reflection from Peter Teagle.



More than one person has pointed out to us over the years that for international students, visiting nice houses in middle-class suburbs for Bible study, and attending full, lively churches and conferences attended by well-educated, seemingly well-adjusted Christians, is certainly an attractive advert for the Christian faith to many international students. But is it an accurate representation of what it means to follow a Saviour who says, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”? Hardly anyone they know in Britain has lost a career, family, or position in society for the Gospel. The cost that we face as believers in the UK is often hidden, more a resistance to the cultural mantra that tells us we have an obligation to deny ourselves nothing.

Seed Amongst Thorns

Undoubtedly there are some international students coming from Christian backgrounds where their families may have found a compromised middle-ground in their own culture, where education is god, or older generations have wearied of pressure from a more dominant religion and found ways to avoid rocking the boat. Children with such backgrounds arrive in the UK with an already weakened idea of what it means to take up their cross. While their sojourn as students can do wonders for their spiritual growth, the question still remains as to whether they are sufficiently passionate in their love for Christ that all other loves are relegated to distant lower places (Philippians 3:7-11).

So, what can be done? Is it simply impossible to explain the cost of following Jesus when they are being influenced by examples of lacklustre discipleship? In short, are they inevitably headed toward being the seed

sown among thorns (Matthew 13:22)? One question to ask is, am I simply going along with things because they are unavoidable? We cannot change church culture, and neither can we pretend we are being persecuted when we are not. But instead of shrugging our shoulders, perhaps we need to ask ourselves whether our Christian discipleship has failed to affect our use of money and time. Do we truly follow our Servant King in servant-heartedness and humility, or do we just enjoy theological jousting with other likeminded Evangelinerds?

What Does It Mean To Suffer?

When was the last time I said “no” to myself, with any seriousness, in order to say “yes” to Christ? I believe we simply need to keep Jesus’ call to take up our cross daily constantly on the table. I have long been interested in stories from the Persecuted Church. Like the believers in Rome who took courage from Paul’s own suffering (Philippians 1:12-14),

maybe we need to be less afraid of ‘putting people off’ and instead have confidence in the all-surpassing joy that we are unashamedly promised in the Scriptures.

I honestly think the problem is not with the students. It is with us – staff and volunteers alike. When we see a theological gap, our immediate response is to plug that gap with more teaching. I am not denying the great need for good Bible teaching on this. Rather, we must avoid the knee-jerk tendency to think that biblical teaching alone is the answer.

Do I ask, what does it mean for me to obey? What does it mean for me to suffer? What does it mean for me to deny myself? In earlier times, it was far more common for British Christians to speak

of ‘denying themselves’. This had little to do with persecution, but instead actively choosing to forgo worldly pleasures for the sake of Christ. Sadly, this thinking gets canned as old-fashioned, a throwback to more severe days of legalism, instead of seeing it as a beautiful model of living we ought to rediscover.

Having said this, however, I believe that many international students do notice many of the quiet, hidden sacrifices that their Christian friends make. They do notice the willingness to serve, to give up time for no other reason than the pleasure of serving others and honouring Jesus.

Me, Myself And I

We live in a ‘me’ generation, where it is all about ‘Me, Myself and I’. So, I propose a twist on that. The challenge before us when Jesus calls us to take up our cross daily, is to say, “Me first!”; when Jesus calls us to lay down our lives, we say, “Me first!”; when He says, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’, we say, “Me first!”. This kind of ‘Me first’ is the example our international students need to see. It is only by seeing those who are willing to jump into discipleship with both feet and without hesitation, that they will truly learn what it is to follow the Master.

Peter Teagle

Head of Events Speaking



Making disciples not passengers



Chris Kho is from Singapore. He came to the UK in 2017 and got involved with international student ministry, both as an international student himself and then in a leadership capacity. He now leads the international student ministry at Jesmond Parish Church in Newcastle. He asks: "How can churches help Christian International students to live out their faith authentically?"

On returning home to Indonesia three years ago, Kersen* was keen to continue serving God just like he was used to during his time in the UK. Fitting around training to become an architect, Kersen helps plan the young adults' group and leads Bible studies in his church home group. Even though the culture and way of doing things are different, he recalls his time as an international student when God grew his faith and understanding of his place in the Church.

if we don't equip them to read the Bible for themselves and to continue growing in the Word and teaching others. While it's great when international students are committed and regularly hearing God's Word taught, we need to be intentional about making disciples.

We must show the cost and value of following Jesus



By providing opportunities to lead Bible studies, serve at church, and share the Gospel with friends, international students do not just become passengers, but rather disciples of Jesus who can disciple others. Some skills

Continued on P11

Prayer Diary

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Eighteen weeks of prayer points



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

Easter



Week 1
3rd Apr

Ivana Bajić, Stirling

Easter is always a great opportunity to speak about the Gospel, forgiveness and grace. We want to use this time to have focused conversations with international students on their thoughts about the Easter story. We will be organising prayer walks around Stirling campus at this time. Please pray that we will see the Holy Spirit moving, among us and the students.

Week 2
10th Apr

Kirsten Wynn, London

We are taking a group of international students to a passion play in Trafalgar Square: please pray for good conversations about Jesus.

Week 3
17th Apr

Raquel Medina, Norwich

We are organising an Easter lunch. Please pray that all the logistics (venue, cooks, etc...) will be confirmed on time and pray the students will respond as they hear the Gospel message.

Week 4
24th Apr

Abigail Pearce, Coventry

Please pray for us as we share the Gospel over Easter week, that we can be creative and sensitive as we make contact with international students and prepare events material. Please pray for our staff and volunteers as we meet students and talk about the Gospel.

International Student Outreach

Week 5
1st May

Antoine Thenin, Bournemouth

In the Spring, we are going to use the resource 'Jesus through Asian Eyes', an eight-week Bible study course which helps

Asian people to have a better understanding of the Christian faith. Pray for me as I put a team together, and for students to come and the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to the truth.

Week 6
8th May

Raquel Medina, Norwich

Pray for our trip away in Norfolk.

Please pray that this will be an opportunity to have fun, meet new students and to deepen our friendships with them.



International Student Ministry

Week 7
15th May

Madeleine Bonicel, Nottingham

Pray that many church leaders and student workers would come to our Vision Lunch on May 17th. Also please pray that our current partner churches would be re-envisioned and encouraged, and new churches would want to engage with international student ministry in Nottingham.

Week 8
22nd May

Kirsten Wynn, London

Please pray for our teams and volunteers: that they would have wisdom and the right words to say as they support international students sitting exams.

Week 9
29th May

Raquel Medina, Norwich

Think Home Day: please pray that this will be a useful day for students planning to return to their home countries in the next few months. Pray that it will be an opportunity to link them with Christians in their cities and to help them navigate the process of going back home.

Week 10
5th Jun

Joshua Bell, Cambridge

We're travelling down to Cornwall with a group of international students for an evangelistic holiday. Please pray that the week will be a time when the team can show love and care for these international students. Pray that we will be a witness to God's love, as we spend day in and day out together, and pray that the Bible studies each evening will lead students to Jesus.

Week 11
12th Jun

Pearl Kho, Newcastle

Please pray for our summer weekend away (16th-18th) for not-yet-believers who are graduating or returning home soon. Pray that they may hear, understand and accept the good news of Jesus on this weekend. Please pray also for the students leaving Newcastle, that God may continue to draw them to Himself through Christians in their new contexts.

Week 12
19th Jun

Raquel Medina, Norwich

End of term BBQ: please pray for the team of volunteers as they organise this activity while Raquel is on sabbatical. Pray that students will attend as they finish their exams and that it will be an opportunity to say goodbye and establish future connections.



New Staff / Volunteers

Week 13
26th Jun

Kirsten Wynn, London

Pray for the appointment of the Development Project Team Leader in London to help network and develop the ministry here. Pray for the right person and for finances to support this new role.

Week 14
3rd Jul

Warren MacLeod, Edinburgh

We have a lot of students who are interested in connecting with locals through our Local Link scheme, but we need more volunteers. We have stopped advertising Local Link to students, but even so, more students keep signing up. Please pray for more volunteers to befriend international students here in Edinburgh.

Week 15
10th Jul

Mike & Rachel Hill, Birmingham

Please pray as we look to recruit a new apprentice staff worker for Birmingham. We also have a great need for more local hosts to show occasional hospitality and support to students, and women to help with our growing CAMEO ministry. Many women stay on each week for Bible study after the social activity but our team numbers have dwindled. Please pray for workers in the harvest field!

Summer Outreach

Week 16
17th Jul

Joshua Bell, Cambridge

Cambridge International Outreach starts on 9th July and will run over six weeks. Please pray for each team and the team leaders as they prepare, and that we can share the Gospel with lots of international students. We hope to have team members from around the UK and the world; please pray for safe travels and that God will use CIO to help them grow in faith and evangelism.

Week 17
24th Jul

Antoine Thenin, Bournemouth

I am leading the Bournemouth International Outreach; it is three weeks of outreaches to international students from Sat 15th July to Sat 5th of August. Again, please pray for me as I put different teams together and organise the event.

Preparing for new intake (Sept 2023)

Week 18
31st Jul

Ruth Duffin, Leicester

Leicester has two universities. In the past we have found it difficult to establish connections with De Montfort University and to meet the international students studying there. Pray for new ideas and connections to enable us to advertise our activities to new international students in the coming year.



can be gleaned from group Bible study, but for others dedicated sessions teaching on how to read a Bible passage might be more helpful. However, some of the best training opportunities come as we experience the Christian life together. Whether that's getting alongside an international student through a shared activity such as hosting a meal together or a joint Bible study, it's key they learn how to take responsibility themselves. Making disciples can take time, but we reap the rewards when international students become active in God's kingdom and more committed to their own faith when they return home.

A few times a year at our international student meetings, we pause our weekly Bible study to hear from international students who have returned home. Through video they share the challenges and joys of adjusting back to home culture and church. One Malaysian student, who has now returned home, shared how she missed the international student group where she remembered the fun, fellowship and weekly Bible teaching. Sadly, she felt that she wasn't growing at the church she was attending in Malaysia because she hadn't picked up how to read and study the Bible for herself.

Teaching the cost and value of following Jesus

Kai*, a Chinese student, says he believes and follows Jesus. When we asked about what his faith would look like when returning home to China, he said he would keep it private because it would be hard to find a church and harder to pursue certain career paths as a Christian.

It's not uncommon to meet international students who see the great value of believing

in Jesus and see the cost of following Jesus but might not recognise His call to bear the cost. Saka*, an Indian student, started following Jesus before he arrived in the UK. When we asked how his parents reacted to him following Jesus, he said his parents don't know about it because it would create serious tension in his family. We teach that following Jesus can come at a cost. Passages like Mark 8:34-38 challenge us to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus. For some international students returning home, this can mean putting family ties in jeopardy or sacrificing a career that promised security and recognition.

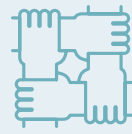
The cost we bear to follow Jesus will be different for each follower

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Showing the cost and value of following Jesus Of course, we can spend much time teaching international students God's truth but if they can't see it in our lives, it's not going to seem real to them. We must show the cost and value of following Jesus by being open and

honest as we share our lives with international students. If we are open with those who poke fun at us because we stick to our Christian values in the workplace, or we trust in God in our singleness, we demonstrate a faithfulness to God and His ways come before living our way.

The cost we bear to follow Jesus will be different for each follower and often incomparable to what some might face in another culture. Still, as we share our lives, international students will begin to see that while it can look different across cultures, it will always come at a cost. In the end, it's Jesus who helps us bear that cost because He has paid the ultimate cost of dying on the cross to save our lives, which makes all of it worth it.



What role does the international student ministry have to play in discipling and supporting Christian international students? Helen Morrissey, Friends International's Centre Team Leader in Exeter, reports.

Sanjay* arrived from India in 2022. Having grown up in a Christian family, he was clear about the importance of getting involved in a church once he arrived in the UK and Ireland. However, he soon learned to his dismay that church services in England are much shorter than he was used to. He felt isolated and confused, and wished there was some way of meeting with others who had more similar experiences to him.

In 2022, the Friends International Centre in Exeter established a group for Christian international students in the city to respond to key questions such as, 'what are the discipleship issues affecting Christian international students that churches are not addressing?' and 'how can we support Christian internationals who are feeling isolated?'

Striking the Balance

The group aims to meet four times a term – often enough to build community but not so often as to deter students from getting

involved in the Bible studies of their local churches. In each meeting, we share a meal together and then spend some time discussing a topic that is of specific relevance to their experience as Christians studying in the UK.

These times together are precious: listening in to discussions about the challenges they face integrating into local churches. In December, we took time to share what a 'normal Christmas' looked like for each of us in our home country. We then discussed which part of our practices were 'biblical' and which were simply 'cultural'. We then asked them to consider whether all Christians should do as some of our African brothers and sisters do, and hold an all-night prayer vigil on Christmas eve, and if not, why not?

In time the international students come to see the value they each bring to the group. They realise they're not just internationals, and they're not just Christians – they are unique and encourage the rest of us.

* Name changed for security purposes



The Philip Project

– Understanding and sharing God's Word

In the book of Acts, Philip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch, returning home from Jerusalem. Philip asks him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replies, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Philip goes on to explain the good news of Jesus to him from the prophecy. The eunuch believes and is baptised – and goes home with a new understanding of the Bible, able to tell others about Jesus. In the same way the Philip Project aims to help international students and professionals to understand the Bible and share it with others when they return home.

Over the last eight years, 94 international students and professionals from Bournemouth, Portsmouth and Southampton alone have participated in the Philip Project South, during which some have been spurred on to set up Christian Unions, enrol for further study at Bible College and apply to join Friends International's Reach Training Programme.

The Philip Project started over 20 years ago and currently operates in six locations across the UK and Ireland. Usually held over nine monthly study days, the Philip Project includes a Bible overview and teaching on understanding and interpreting Biblical genres, world views and contextualisation. Each student is assigned a mentor and encouraged to take part in giving Bible talks and leading Bible studies. Many participants also take part in the annual weekend away and our new Online Learning Platform (OLP) has enabled more students to access Philip Project materials remotely.

Nationally, hundreds of international students have benefited from the Philip Project since it began. Not only has the Philip Project been a blessing to the participants themselves, but it has prepared them for ministry in the worldwide Church in the UK and Ireland and beyond as they preach and support other international students. When they return

home, they lead Bible training courses themselves and live out their faith in their families and workplaces. Please join us in giving thanks for all who have participated in the Philip Project over the years and praying for them as they reach out to others using the knowledge and skills they've learnt.

Susan Caddy Centre Team Leader, Friends International Southampton and Winchester



For more information about the Philip Project please go to www.friendsinternational.uk/the-philip-project or scan this code:





Latest News

Summer Missions

This summer will see international outreaches taking place in Manchester, Cambridge, Belfast, Bournemouth and Dublin. In Manchester, a team of 25 from Christian Unions around the country will offer friendship, English language practice and the opportunity to explore faith in Jesus to the thousands of international students arriving in the city for pre-sessional English courses. Many have never encountered Christianity before and are eager to study the Bible. Relationships will be formed that often continue throughout the students' stay in the UK and Ireland.

Chinese New Year Celebrations

2023 marks the Year of the Rabbit and, across the UK and Ireland, Friends International Centres took a creative and inspired approach to celebrate the Chinese New Year. This special time of year provides a great opportunity to educate our non-Chinese students about this key aspect of Chinese culture as well as providing an opening to develop community spirit among the students. From Belfast to Dundee and Norwich to Dorset, Friends International staff and volunteers organised events including Global Café meetings with themed food and drinks, discussions and explanations on the history of the Lunar Year, special services, and arts and crafts evenings, as well as the mandatory visit to a Chinese restaurant!

Conference 2023

The 2023 Friends International annual conference took place in January at the Hayes Centre in Derbyshire. Over 120 people attended including staff, affiliates, trustees, Reach trainees and guests, all with a passion to see international students develop and grow. Staged over four days, the conference encompassed a range of engaging speakers, including chaplain and freelance writer, Mark Meynell, and student mission developer at Fusion, Aaron Nayagam. Attendees were treated to a series of interactive seminars and workshops where they could explore international student ministry in more depth, discover new giftings and learn from others in similar situations. A huge thank you for all who attended. To read more please go to friendsinternational.uk/conference2023



A Special Partnership

Within Ireland, Friends International has a special partnership with Christian Unions Ireland (CUI) in the form of the ISM Ireland Project. Hollie Tagle (ISM Ireland Project Team Leader) explains more.

The vision behind the joint initiative is to blend CUI's campus ministry experience with FI's international student expertise, resources and global returnee networks. Together we hope to see more international students across Ireland transformed by the good news of Jesus!

A Sprinkling of Grace

ISM Ireland Project staff work alongside CUI to serve, encourage and equip over 30 student-led Christian Unions (CUs) from Cork to Coleraine and all over Ireland. Partnership takes hard work, vision and more than a sprinkling of grace but we wouldn't have it any other way! Through serving alongside our CUI colleagues, we not only grow and sharpen one another but cherish each other's fellowship in the Gospel.



The ISM team

Throughout the CU calendar year there is perhaps no other time when this strategic partnership shines brighter than during Events Weeks. It has been a privilege and delight to see our CUs grow in their understanding of God's global mission alongside cultivating a heart for international students on their campuses.

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Olivia, our current Belfast Reach Worker, reflected on the recent Events Week coordinated by the CUs in Belfast. She said; "We ran 'International Meal and Message' events on three of the nights specifically for international students and we saw up to 70 students each night from over 20 different nationalities coming for dinner, to hear a talk and then discuss. This was particularly encouraging as the conversations after the talks were really open, with many saying they had never met so many Christians or had the opportunities to find out more about Christianity. Now many want to explore what it means to be a Christian."

Please do pray for our team here in Ireland as we seek to grow in number and reach, that we may serve God, his Church and the CUs faithfully as we share friendship and faith with international students across Ireland.



Climb the Mountain

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As a Christian, you want to read the Bible. But it's hard. What does it mean? How does it speak directly into your life and culture? Geoff Low's new book, *"A Better View: A short guide to understanding the Bible for yourself"*, is a guide to help you 'climb the mountain' of studying God's Word for yourself. Written for international students and Christians with a heart for mission, this book helps you interpret and share the Bible's life-giving message in your own culture.

Please pray that God would use this book and other resources to help international students understand the truth about Jesus and draw them to Himself.

Go to www.friendsinternational.uk/shop to purchase this book or many other key resources to help you share faith with international students.

Scan this QR code to go directly to the bookshop.



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