



Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

OPPORTUNITY

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SPRING 2026

Inside:

**Migration at
the Doorstep**

Page 4

**Facing Traumatic
Times**

Page 6

Prayer Diary

Page 7-10

**Friendship and
Faith in the
Anonymous City**

Page 12-13





Welcome!

'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was a stranger and you invited me in.'

Matthew 25 v35

Migration – the Old Normal

Migration has been a theme throughout human history and is central to the biblical story – God disproportionately uses and speaks to his people when they are on the move and when they are displaced.

Indeed, this was the theme of Dr. Sam George, Director of the Global Diaspora Institute, in his address to our annual conference back in January. We note that our calling to international student ministry has God's fingerprints on it. Our quiet and often hidden service can have tumultuous ripple effects as those who cautiously or anxiously come to faith in the UK or Ireland become leading players in God's plans in their home countries or elsewhere. Likewise, and just as gloriously, our visiting friends from abroad become our colleagues and cheerleaders and stand beside us as we seek to support and encourage the next generation of

international students.

Friends International are on the move too. From July we expect to be in a new location, with new neighbours. After 15 years at our base in Hertfordshire, at All Nations Christian College, we are relocating to Oxford, sharing again, this time with Church Mission Society and Wycliffe Bible Translators. There will be some personnel changes – our HR Manager Diane Smith, after 15 years, is retiring – new tyres surely for new tasks ahead!

The book of Hebrews says that 'faith is being certain of what we do not see'. As migration takes hold we believe it is time to step out in faith. London is home to

178,000 international students and on p12 you can read about how we are reaching out in faith to build a team that can love, serve and support international students in the city. Elsewhere in this magazine you will see examples of faithful people stepping out to support international students in resourceful ways. We are mindful of the resilience exhibited by international students as they adapt to a new environment when they come to this country and similarly we want to show that same character ourselves as we hold onto Jesus, who we know is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Alan

Alan Tower

friends
INTERNATIONAL

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“God is our
refuge and strength,
an ever-present
help in trouble.”

New Staff: *Interviews*

Ogbonna Onyenweaku is an ordained Anglican Minister from Nigeria where he was a lecturer and university chaplain before moving to the UK in 2025.

“It was this experience in the university that kindled my interest in international student ministry. Before arriving at university as a freshman I was planning to join a campus cult but God had other ideas. God had already positioned the Christian community to both welcome me and witness to me. That was the turning point in my life. Earlier in school, I had firsthand experience of the challenges of a student who is situated far from home for studies and the importance of having a Christian community on the ground to share friendship and faith.

As a staff worker with Friends International my role is to build genuine friendships with international students at University of Loughborough where I support their wellbeing, their faith exploration, and integration into local life in Loughborough. Different Bible passages speak to me at different times in my life but ‘God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble’ [Psalm 46:1] is one of my favourites.”

Jasmine Svanda joined the Centre team in Colchester in September 2025 after working with UCCF Relay and then with IFES Interaction in Bulgaria.

“I grew up in Southend-on-Sea, Essex and became a Christian in my teenage years. During university, I realised that this is a deeply transformative season of life and a unique opportunity for sharing the gospel with people from all nations. Becoming friends with international students who had sacrificed so much to come to the UK deeply shaped my perspective and compassion. My time living in Bulgaria also gave me personal insight into what it feels like to live abroad and navigate the challenges of culture shock.

Life in international student ministry is so varied but Matthew 6:34 – “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” – is a real encouragement to me. It reminds me to trust God with what lies ahead and focus faithfully on what he has given me today.”

“Therefore do
not worry about
tomorrow, for
tomorrow will worry
about itself.”



“Some have never met a Christian before arriving in the UK.”

Migration at the Doorstep:

A posture of humility and ethical witness



Migration is one of the defining realities of our age

Wars, economic pressures, climate change, and the pursuit of education are driving unprecedented global movement. Among those on the move are millions of international students – young adults who cross borders not only to gain qualifications, but to step into unfamiliar cultures, languages, and worldviews. For Christian mission, this movement is not incidental. It is profoundly formative. The biblical narrative reveals a God who is on the move and calls his followers to embark on an adventure with him to glorify his name and establish his reign everywhere in the world, and few places reveal this more clearly than ministry among international students.

The nations are arriving – quietly and temporarily

International students rarely dominate headlines. Yet they represent one of the largest and most strategic migrant groups in the world. Many come from countries where the Church is small, restricted, or socially marginalised. Some have never met a Christian before arriving in the UK. Moreover, a move abroad is rarely easy. International students often experience loneliness, culture shock, academic pressure, financial strain, and the exhaustion of living and studying in a second language. Many are navigating these challenges far from family and familiar support systems. The distance from home can create space to ask deeper questions about identity, purpose, and belief.

Outreach reshaped by migration

This combination of vulnerability and openness requires great care. Christian outreach in this context must be rooted in genuine friendship, integrity, and respect. Yet it is precisely here that faith conversations often begin – not through arguments, but through trust. What matters most is presence: shared meals, patient listening, and everyday hospitality. For many students, what stands out is not what Christians believe, but how they live. Invitations into homes. Help navigating life in a new country. Communities where questions are welcomed rather than shut down. Christians who live out the gospel even as they help students understand biblical truth. This kind of outreach is slow

and deeply relational. In this way, migration challenges the status quo of established church activities, pushing the Church away from efficiency, and towards faithfulness and genuine relationship.

A posture of humility and ethical witness

Christian outreach among international students also exposes our need for humility. Effective ministry requires listening before speaking. It means being willing to learn from the global Church as students bring their own experiences of faith, suffering, and resilience, enriching our understanding and deepening our discipleship. As we welcome international students, we ourselves, are often the ones being changed!

With openness comes responsibility. Students' vulnerability must never be exploited. Faith must be offered freely, never pressured. Safeguarding, transparency, and respect for conscience are essential. This ethical posture does not weaken Christian witness – it strengthens it. When students experience integrity, patience, and

genuine care, trust grows. And trust is the soil in which faith can take root. Migration calls the Church to embody the character of Christ as much as proclaim his name.

The ripple effect beyond the campus

One of the most striking impacts of migration is what happens next. Many international students return home or move to other countries, to take on influential roles in business, education, healthcare, or government. Faith formed during student years does not stay put. It travels. Graduates carry with them friendships, questions, and convictions shaped by what they have seen and experienced. Some return as believers. Others return as bridge-builders – people with a deeper understanding of Christianity and of those who follow Christ. In this way, migration multiplies mission far beyond what any local ministry could achieve alone.

A biblical pattern hidden in plain sight

The Bible is rightly called a diasporic narrative: from Abraham's

call to leave home, to Israel's exile, to the scattering of the early Church, migration has often been the means by which God advances his purposes. The apostle Paul, a migrant himself, is an outstanding example of how every part of his life, training and experience prepared him to cross political and ethical boundaries for the advancement of the gospel.

An invitation to Friends International supporters

For supporters of Friends International, this moment invites both gratitude and reflection. The work of welcoming international students is not simply kindness; it is participation in God's mission shaped by migration. It invites prayer – for students navigating unfamiliar worlds, for volunteers offering friendship, and for wisdom in complex cultural spaces. It invites generosity – of time, homes, and resources. And it invites a reimagining of mission, not as something distant or dramatic, but as faithfulness in everyday encounters.

“For many students, what stands out is not what Christians believe, but how they live.”



“I was a stranger
and you invited
me in.”

Facing *Traumatic Times*

It is widely recognised that international students face significant challenges when they move from their own culture to live and study in the UK and Ireland. A new country, a new culture, with all the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which the new context demands assimilation and alteration, while feeling the separation and loss of family and friends.

Many international students experience personal traumas like illness, relational struggles or failing studies, often made all the harder because they are in an alien culture. And when you add in all the usual traumas of family life that can take place back in their home countries, international students can be left carrying a huge emotional burden.

For others political unrest and regional wars have had a significant impact. Russian students have felt the backlash of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with some even afraid to speak Russian among themselves. Israeli

students, faced with the overt anger of many about the situation in Gaza and growing antisemitism, have felt vulnerable. Following the recent uprising and protests in Iran that left thousands dead, Iranian students have been left feeling vulnerable, confused and uncertain about their future. Due to government controls and blocks put on the internet and other electronic communication channels many students are left unaware of what is going on back home. One young lady we spoke to recently, told us: “I have no idea if my parents and

grandparents are dead or alive.” How has this situation affected her? She felt unable to meet with people who care deeply about her, despite their loving messages and promises of prayer; it was just too much emotionally.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives us a template for how to reach out to the poor and lonely. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.’”

Sharing life and faith with international students who are facing traumatic times calls us to greater love and compassion, greater prayerfulness and perhaps a greater giving of ourselves.



Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

PRAYER DIARY

17 WEEKS OF PRAYER POINTS

SPRING 2026

Please pray for students that are returning home or moving elsewhere, as we try to connect them with other Christians globally.

Phoebe Ridout



VISION AND OUTREACH



Week 1

06/04/2026

Charis Stirling – York

We are taking students on a special Easter day trip to a country estate with a fun programme. One of our volunteers will also share the gospel message about Easter with the students. Our Evangelism Discovery group is moving to a bigger venue due to increasing numbers of international students attending and please pray that God will guide us as we move.



Week 2

13/04/2026

James Adair – Sunderland

During the Easter holiday, we will be offering Bible studies in place of our normal Globe Café. Please join us in praying for many students to attend and for the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of those who show up and that they would be keen to attend church and read the Bible.



Week 3

20/04/2026

Rachel Hubbard – Reading

Big Week Away in Wales. Pray for Alan Tower driving the minibus with international students from Reading. Pray for good connections with, and between, students, and changed lives as we encounter Jesus.



Week 4

27/04/2026

Sabine Stockton – Manchester

Pray for the Global Impact Conference in Hungary 17-20 April to inspire and equip staff, volunteers and students involved in International Student Ministry. Pray for Sabine as she leads a seminar on 'Reaching Gen Z'.



Week 5

04/05/2026

Matthew Ojo – Portsmouth

Pray for our multicultural event as we celebrate God's image in every culture. Please pray for God leading, that it will be well attended and that the event will be meaningful to all international students that attend.





Week 6
11/05/2026

**Steph Schmaltz –
Sheffield**

We are hosting our first Curry and Quiz Night in Sheffield to help build awareness and support the work we do here in Sheffield. We would love prayer for a good attendance, the chance to share our vision more widely in the city, and for more volunteers and partners to join us in reaching international students in our city.



Week 7
18/05/2026

**Madeleine Bonicel –
Nottingham**

Please pray as we host a lunch for church leaders and student workers, that they would be inspired and equipped to provide good cross-cultural discipleship for the international Christian students in their churches.



Week 8
25/05/2026

**Jonnie Green – Oxford
Gail Willows – Oxford**

Please pray for the Explore summer party. We will have a meal together as well as a talk exploring the Christian faith. Please also pray for our summer day trips for students who will be staying in Oxford and for language school students who are in the UK over the summer. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel and get local volunteers involved.

GIVING THANKS



Week 9
01/06/2026

Matthew Brindley – Durham

Give thanks for the launch of a new international café with Durham Christian Union and local churches. Pray for the café to grow and be effective for God's glory over the next term.



Week 10
08/06/2026

**Catherine Ayre – Coventry
Ruth Duffin – Leicester**

Give thanks that we have been able to recruit several new branch members from new churches in Coventry. Please pray that they will be able to raise the profile of Friends International in their churches.

We are thankful for new volunteers and a new member of staff joining our team in Leicester. Pray that we will work well together and help one another to grow.



Week 11
15/06/2026

**Jenny Brown – Apprentice Programme
Ivana Bajic – Stirling**

Give thanks for the Apprentice Programme and Feiyi, Jennie and Sushanth as they begin serving in their respective centres. Please pray for Steph Schmaltz as she oversees the programme.

Let's also give thanks for a Japanese student from Stirling University who is preparing to be baptised. We praise the Lord for his faith that he now wants to confirm publicly with baptism.



Week 12
22/06/2026

Madeleine Bonicel – Nottingham

At our Prayer & Praise event we give thanks for another year of God's faithfulness and our partnership with local churches. Pray that those who come would be encouraged and inspired as they reach out to international students.

SUMMER TEAMS AND EVENTS



Week 13
29/06/2026

**Ruth Farquhar –
Philip Project Summer School**

Pray that the Philip Project Summer School taking place in the North of Scotland would equip international students to serve the Church worldwide and share their faith with others of different cultures and backgrounds.



Week 14
06/07/2026

Graham Stockton – Manchester

The Manchester International Outreach takes place 4-18 July; pray that there will be a strong team who work well together to reach new students arriving in the city with the gospel. Also pray for the other summer international outreaches planned in Canterbury, Cambridge and Dublin as they reach especially, but not exclusively, language school students.

RETURNEE STUDENTS



Week 15
13/07/2026

Kirsten Wynn – London

2026 is a year of renewed focus on London within Friends International. Pray that God would raise up more workers and provide all the finances that are needed.

Pray for students, as they finish courses and head to new places, that we will be able to link them up with other Christians.



Week 16
20/07/2026

**Phoebe Ridout –
Southampton**

Please pray for students that are returning home or moving elsewhere, as we try to connect them with other Christians globally. Pray that the students will be able to join our monthly returnee zoom call, where they can meet with familiar faces, make new friends and be encouraged.



Week 17
27/07/2026

**Sue Burt –
Head of Returnee Ministry**

Please pray for Sue Burt as she undertakes research into Japanese returnees. Please pray for good insights and analysis from her interviews with returnees and church leaders during her trip to Japan. May it all translate into helpful training and discipleship resources.



Future Trends in Mission:

What Global Voices Are Telling Us – and Why It Matters

“Leaders said the gospel was best shared by ‘everyday’ Christians.”

What does the future of global mission look like? According to the recent *Lausanne Global Voices* report, the answer is both encouraging and challenging. Drawing on insights from 1,030 mission leaders across 119 countries, the report highlights a Church that is adapting, collaborating, and rediscovering where God is already at work.

The report highlighted five clear drivers: collaboration and partnership, deeper discipleship, digital technology, marketplace ministry, and youth engagement, that will have the greatest positive impact on mission practice over the next decade. Together, these point to a vision of mission that is more relational, more holistic, and more rooted in everyday life. Leaders said the gospel was best shared by ‘everyday’ Christians. Mission is no longer seen as the task of a few specialists, but as the calling of God’s people wherever they are placed. The report found that 95% of

global Christian leaders affirm that digital spaces are now part of the mission field.

Leaders highlighted the impact of migration and global diaspora movements. As people move in unprecedented numbers, mission is no longer ‘over there’ but happening everywhere. Younger generations, in particular, seek purpose and meaning, often in secularised contexts where faith can feel marginal.

So what does all this mean for us at Friends International?

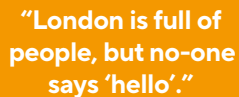
At our heart, we believe in equipping

people for ministry where God has already placed them. Our staff serve as specialists, but our work also focuses on equipping believing international students to share friendship and faith with their peers.

Collaboration is central. Regularly, we work with partners such as Fusion, Agapé, the Navigators, and UCCF, recognising that we are stronger together. We are also committed to deep, lasting discipleship. There are no quick fixes. Through resources like the *ID Course* and *Returning Home*, we help international students to strengthen their faith. Digital tools play an important role. Our relaunched app and online resources are proving especially valuable for returnee students, alongside the more traditional methods of communication.

International students are part of a much bigger global movement – and many will go on to serve in prominent secular workplaces. By preparing them to live for Jesus in those spaces, we are investing not just in individuals, but in the future of the Global Church.






“London is full of people, but no-one says ‘hello’.”

Friendship and Faith in the Anonymous City



The world famous philosopher, Paddington Bear, once said: “In London, everyone is different, and that means anyone can fit in”. He was right. London is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, with a population of more than nine million.



It attracts people from all walks of life and from everywhere and this includes international students. A quarter of all the international students who come to the UK and Ireland choose to study in London; that’s 178,000 students enrolled in degree courses in more than 40 universities and colleges in the city.

In 2023-24¹ more international students came from Asia than from anywhere else, including 43,712 from India, 38,415 from China and 8,701 from Pakistan, all countries where it is becoming increasingly difficult to be a Christian. What an amazing opportunity there is to reach and disciple this new generation!

The reality for international students

Being an international student in London is an exciting, challenging, and often transformative experience. London is a city full of opportunity, diversity and culture – but it also comes with many unique practical and emotional adjustments that shape both the students and how ministry is done here. A common refrain is, “London is full of people, but no-one says ‘hello’”, and few know the names of their neighbours!

Loneliness is a reality for many international students. They struggle to find a new community. Some live in halls, but many live in private

accommodation far from where they are studying. It’s normal for students to travel over an hour to get to university. Because of this, having international student activities near where they live – and hosted by local church volunteers – is key to ministry in London.

“I’d love to come to TABLEtalk Thursday evening, but it takes me over an hour to get to you, and I don’t have classes on Thursdays.”
– Student from Bangladesh

London is expensive. Many international students need to work part-time to cover the basics of life such as accommodation, food and travel. With irregular shifts it’s hard for them to commit to regular



events, and this can make it hard for teams from Friends International and local churches to build meaningful relationships with them.

Friends International's work in London

Currently, Friends International have three staff members in London and a team of nine affiliates. We work closely with other student-facing ministries across the city to share Jesus. And then there is the local church: throughout London, churches welcome international students through English conversation groups, international cafés, Bible studies and hospitality.

It's a privilege to work alongside like-minded Christian brothers and sisters, yet the truth is that between us, and despite our best efforts, we are barely scratching the surface of

reaching the 178,000 international students in the city.

Vision for 2026

2026 is a year of renewed focus on London within Friends International. We've divided London into five sectors, South East, North West, North East, South West and Central, each covered by a Sector Leader. These will be pioneering roles, focusing on developing ministry across multiple campuses, and working in close partnership with local churches in each sector.

It's not only students who find London expensive – this is true for our staff too. The posts will be supported initially from the strategic growth fund, acting as launch or seed funding, which we are actively seeking from trusts

and other generous donors.

Kirsten Wynn, Centre Team Leader for London alongside her role as Sector Leader for South East London, outlined her vision for London. She said; "My vision is that every international student in London is welcomed by local Christians and invited to learn more about Jesus. With our mighty God going before us, and as our London team grows, we'll seek to mobilise more local churches to reach students on their doorstep. I'm excited to see how God will work through us for His glory."

We are excited about what this could mean for international students, churches and supporters alike, and we are deeply grateful to all who journey with us as this vision takes shape.



Pray

Please pray that God would

raise up more workers and provide all that is needed. Pray for students to encounter Jesus while they are here. You can sign up for our London News for regular prayer updates: london@friendsinternational.uk.



Recruit

You can help recruit new staff

and volunteers. Is there someone you know who might be just the person to join the team? We're always happy to have an informal chat with anyone who wants to know more about working with us.



Give

We'd love to hear from

you if you'd like to help provide seed funding.

To donate go to: www.friendsinternational.uk/donate

or scan this QR code:





2026 Annual Conference

During the snow-laden days of early January, Friends International decamped to Swanwick in Derbyshire for its annual conference, and an extended time of teaching, fellowship and encouragement. The conference gave us fresh opportunities to connect, and pray together, and we were excited as plans for 2026 were announced.



Plenary sessions were led by Dr. Sam George, Director of Global Diaspora Institute, and Associate Pastor Jackie Mann, of Wycliffe Baptist Church in Reading. The conference enabled us to bring together a wide collection of people connected with Friends International including staff and affiliates, CU representatives, branch members and invited guests, all with a shared passion for sharing faith and friendship with international students.



Diane Smith

Diane Smith joined Friends International as Supporter Relations Administrator in 2011 but now after 15 years she is retiring.

“My background was in scientific databases but after the HR Manager left, I took over. I had not previously worked for a Christian organisation, but my experience came in handy when we migrated to a new supporter database. Some of my most memorable moments have been visa related. An early Minister of Religion application was refused because we were still on a learning curve, but after receiving help from a solicitor, it succeeded and the staff member is now a British citizen! Above everything I learned the truth of Proverbs 21v31: “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” We have a duty to do our roles as well as we can, but ultimately success belongs to the Lord.”

Did you know you can make a real impact just by getting paid?

Payroll Giving is one of the simplest ways to support Friends International and make a difference in the lives of international students. Each month your donation is taken straight from your salary and helps bring friendship and faith to international students all over the UK and Ireland. Because your gift is deducted from your salary before tax, it means your support can go even further. Regular giving helps us plan better, and your gift can go straight to where it's most needed...bringing the love of Jesus to international students.

To find out more or to donate through Stewardship, go to www.stewardship.org.uk/partners/FriendsInternational or scan this QR code:



An Answer to Prayer:

Liverpool Centre Team Leader Appointed

“We are excited to see how God will use this new partnership in Liverpool.”

Liverpool is well known for its musical heritage, iconic football clubs and rich maritime history. It is also a thriving university city, consistently ranked for its affordability, vibrant culture, and welcoming, student-friendly atmosphere. With more than 64,000 students across the city – over 11,000¹ of them internationals – Liverpool has long been on the heart of Friends International as a place of exciting mission opportunity.

For many years, local churches in Liverpool have been faithfully serving international students alongside Christian Unions and the Anglican Chaplaincy. Over the past five years, our Liverpool development group, made up of leaders from influential evangelical churches across the city, has been praying with us for the right person to lead a new Friends International centre and help strengthen and support this existing work.

We are delighted to share that God has answered these prayers with the appointment of Anna

Odur as Liverpool Centre Team Leader. Anna is an international development professional with a deep passion for international students, shaped by her own experience of studying abroad. Originally from Uganda, Anna completed both her undergraduate and postgraduate studies in London. Until recently, she worked with the Netherlands Alumni Association of Uganda and an NGO, bringing valuable cross-cultural and organisational experience to this role. Anna’s initial focus will be on building

relationships with local churches, listening carefully to discern how Friends International can best serve and complement the work already happening in Liverpool. She will also be joining churches in reaching out to international students across the city’s campuses. Anna is currently raising financial support, and we are praying that she will be able to begin her role this spring.

As a mission organisation, we are deeply thankful for the prayers, patience, and support of churches over the past five years as we sought the right person for this role. We are excited to see how God will use this new partnership in Liverpool and look forward to the opportunities ahead as we continue to welcome, befriend, and share Christ with international students.



Appeal

Help us ensure every international student is welcomed and invited to discover Jesus.



“In London, everyone is different, and that means anyone can fit in.” Paddington Bear’s words ring true – yet for 178,000 international students in London, fitting in is not always easy. Many arrive from countries such as India, China and Pakistan, where following Jesus can be costly. Here is a remarkable gospel opportunity on our doorstep.

But London can be lonely. Students travel long distances, juggle part-time work, and struggle to find community. Friends International, alongside local churches, offers faith and friendship, a friendly face in an anonymous city – yet we are only scratching the surface.

In 2026, we will launch new sector leaders across four new areas of London to grow ministry and mobilise churches. With nearly 50 university campuses spread across the city there is so much more to be done and we need your help.

Will you help us ensure every international student is welcomed and invited to discover Jesus?



Pray
That God would raise up more workers and provide all that is needed. Pray that students will encounter Jesus while they are here.



Give
Your donation will help

Friends International establish a new team of sector leaders across London to grow ministry and mobilise churches. These will be pioneering roles, focusing on developing ministry across multiple campuses and working in close partnership with local churches in each sector.

Give online at: www.friendsinternational.uk/donate or scan this QR code:



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