



Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

OPPORTUNITY

THE FRIENDS INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2026

Inside:

**Glasgow engagement
and Partnership**

Page 4

Community Builders

Page 6

**Manchester Summer
Outreach**

Page 12

Big Week Away

Page 15





Welcome!

Building community

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:30-31

friends
INTERNATIONAL

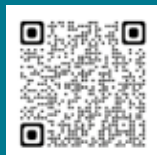
Opportunity is published by
Friends International Ministries

Editor: Allen Moxham ©2026

Friends International
CMS House, Watlington Road,
Oxford, OX4 6BZ.

Tel 0345 5120026
info@friendsinternational.uk
www.friendsinternational.uk

Scan to contact us:



Friends International Ministries is a charity
registered in England and Wales (1094095)
and in Scotland (SC 048838).

As I write this column the men's football world cup is underway. The biggest ever, 48 teams from every continent will be competing for the prize of being football's world champions.

Even if football is not your thing, it will be difficult to escape the 'beautiful game', and while football fans of every nation will be cheering their team on, the majority will be disappointed as there can only be one winner! The parallels with international student ministry are numerous; some are obvious such as getting off to a good start, choosing the right combinations and positioning ourselves well to make the most of every opportunity.

Getting off to a good start with new arrivals shapes contacts for the whole year. First impressions count. Anonymity at the outset does not help us make connections, so how to organise, what to offer,

where to position ourselves, and how to partner with churches and Christian student groups, are all key factors for international student ministry. Others are more obscure, but nevertheless just as important, as we enter a new season with high expectations, although our hope is in God and our faith is in Christ.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast: Man never is, but always to be blest." wrote Alexander Pope in 'An Essay on Man'. More pertinently: 'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And

we boast in the hope of the glory of God.' (Romans 5:1-2).

Global tournaments such as the football world cup provide an opportunity for people of all nations to get together, forgetting the things that keep us apart, to enjoy each other's company and celebrate a common spectacle. As we prepare for another student year, we can be certain that whatever our cultural differences, God is for us and his Spirit is working in us as we seek to answer the call to bring friendship, faith and hope to international students throughout the UK and Ireland.

Alan

Alan Tower

New Staff: *Interviews*

Anna Russell

"Everybody wants to be loved"

Anna Russell – joined the team at St Andrews from Friends International's partner, ISI, in Dallas. Anna puts the spotlight on local ministry and explores learnings from international student ministry that can be applied locally

QU - What has been your experience of moving to the UK and a new location?

Close to half of the population of St Andrews are students and half of the students are international. It's beautiful to see the churches here value the transitory nature and see it as an asset. I've noticed churches are intentional about students being a part of church life and health, wanting to prioritise discipleship, knowing that they will be sending students off to various places after graduating.

QU - What differences have you noticed between international student ministry in Dallas and here in the UK?

One unique difference between St. Andrews and Dallas is that I am now working with more American students than I ever have. One in five of the student population at St. Andrews are from North America. When I first arrived in St. Andrews it was a couple of days before I encountered a Scottish accent.

In the US, I worked with International Students Inc. (ISI), a recognised student group on campus, similar to

a Christian Union. Typically, in the US our ministry was well supported by the universities but here in the UK we don't have the same established connection and we are more dependent on individual churches for support and involvement.

QU - What do you think international students in St Andrews are looking for?

I think the students are looking for a space where they can be accepted as they are. We see many students walking around trying to prove themselves but carrying enormous pressure and struggling to find their true selves. Everybody wants to be loved, but so many of us think that we must change ourselves to be lovable. But God has 'formed our inward parts' and created us 'for good works', which God prepared for us in advance. (Psalm 139:13, Ephesians 2:10). My hope and prayer is that each student at St. Andrews comes to know the sacrificial love of Christ for them so they can 'stand tall' and be the person God has created them to be.



"They welcomed him and included him in community meals and outings."

Church engagement and partnership

Welcoming new international students



"What would it take to welcome every international student that arrives in Glasgow this September?"

We met Chinese student, JQ*, at a welcome event. It was the first time he had visited a church. One of our team asked if he believed in God and he said, "I believe in money". As the event drew to a close, JQ stayed for the church's evening service, sitting at the very back so he could leave quietly in case he decided it wasn't for him. He stayed for the whole service and despite not entirely understanding the sermon, he said he felt a sense of peace and felt welcomed by those around him.

He then began attending another church in the city, because he spotted a Chinese flag in the window. They welcomed him and included him in community meals and outings. Slowly he opened up

and began exploring the Christian faith. Eventually, JQ gave his life to Christ and remained committed to the local church until he left Glasgow after graduating and settled in a new city.

JQ is just one of the 24,000 international students that come to Glasgow each year, far too many for our small Friends International Glasgow team, and sadly many international students never meet a Christian during their time studying in the city. Many of the international students coming to Glasgow are from countries like China, India, Pakistan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, places where international students are unlikely to have encountered Christianity.

The International Welcome is launched

Our vision is to meet and share the love of Jesus with every international student in the city, so we asked ourselves, 'What would it take to welcome as many international students as possible, and connect them with Christians?' In response to this challenge we launched the International Welcome initiative, drawing on our partnerships with local churches across the city, and encouraging them (as well as Christian Unions at the five universities) to host one or more welcome events for international students.

Events could be anything, from a free dinner, a walking tour or a trip to the countryside, to an afternoon tea or ceilidh – it is up to the individual church to decide whatever suited

them best. We do ask that events are social and focus purely on getting to know the students arriving in the city. At each event, we take the opportunity to share about the work of Friends International.

As the beginning of the academic year approaches, Friends International arrange a prayer meeting for all organisers to come together to pray for the International Welcome, stressing that we're all in this together. Then in October we host a thanksgiving prayer meeting, gathering together all those involved for encouragement and to share experiences.

A flag for every nationality

One church in Glasgow organised a ceilidh as a welcome event – and invited the whole church family to join in. It was a great event full of a family atmosphere, and the international students were really appreciative of the opportunity to meet local people from different generations. Another hung flags inside the church that represented each nationality in the church family, and provided an easy conversation starter whenever

a student spotted their own flag. The Friends International team provide the organisation and advertising enabling more churches and Christian Unions to be involved than would otherwise be possible, welcoming newly arrived international students and inviting them to ongoing church run activities. And together in partnership with local churches, we begin the process of sharing friendship and faith.

In 2025, a total of sixteen churches and four Christian Unions organised 32 events. We manned seven stalls at Freshers Fairs and in total, meeting and welcoming around 1,900 international students from over 60 countries to Glasgow. Given the huge numbers coming to Glasgow, this represents only around 7% of all international students in the city. A lot of the contact was nothing more than a brief interaction at a stall, a chat while on a walking tour, or a conversation over a hot meal. But we encourage church members to make the most of the opportunity and invest in growing friendships with students they meet at welcome events. We believe God

prepares students' hearts and minds, and that the success of a welcome event is not simply measured by how many came.

*name changed for security reasons

**"We believe
God prepares
students' hearts
and minds."**





Finding Community in a City of Nine Million
"I will be forever grateful for discovering TABLEtalk. It turned out to be an amazing, safe and welcoming place, full of loving and caring people," says Martha, an international student from Eastern Europe.*



Community builders: *Table Talk*



London is a city of opportunity, diversity and endless activity. Yet for many international students arriving from abroad, it can also be a place of loneliness and uncertainty. Away from family, friends and familiar routines, many are searching for more than academic success. They are looking for friendship, acceptance and a sense of belonging.

No Distinction between Volunteers and Participants

For more than ten years, TABLEtalk in Greenwich has been providing exactly that: a warm, welcoming space where international students can build friendships, practise English and explore questions of faith. While some aspects of TABLEtalk have evolved over the years, its heart remains unchanged. A typical TABLEtalk evening begins before the students

arrive. Team members meet to pray, while others prepare the room and organise activities. Icebreaker games such as Jenga, Uno and Dobble help create a relaxed atmosphere, making it easy for newcomers to join in and feel at home. At the registration table, students sign in, collect a programme card and have the opportunity to join the TABLEtalk WhatsApp group. Name badges may seem like a small detail, but they play an important role, particularly as new students regularly join. We do not see a distinction between volunteers and participants – together, we are TABLEtalk.

We focus on a variety of topics such as life in London, cultural experiences and relationships, all generating lively discussion. We also seek to build on the interests and talents of those attending. Alongside the social activities, each evening includes a

short Bible discussion connected to the theme. Using a brief passage and a few open-ended questions, we create space for international students to explore faith in a natural and accessible way. This gentle approach sometimes leads to deeper conversations, and we pray, lasting spiritual impact.

Over the years, it has been a joy to see some students move from simply attending TABLEtalk to accompanying team members to church, exploring the Christian faith more deeply and, in some cases, coming to faith in Christ themselves. In a city of nine million people, TABLEtalk continues to demonstrate the power of friendship, hospitality and God's love to transform lives – one conversation at a time.

**Name changed.*



Growing Friendship and Faith with International Students

PRAYER DIARY

17 WEEKS OF PRAYER POINTS

SUMMER 2026

**Please pray for us
as a new cohort of
Reach trainees will
be starting their
intern year.**

Luke Hammond



NEW BEGINNINGS



Week 1
3/08/2026

Madeleine Bonicel/Skyler Ehly
– Nottingham/Lancaster

We are running summer Globe cafés in Nottingham and have a trip planned in August. Pray that these would continue to provide community for international students staying here over the summer, and for Madeleine in her role as Chaplain at Nottingham Trent University. Please pray for Olivia as she joins the team in Lancaster and transitions into ministry after completing her PGCE.



Week 2
10/08/2026

Raquel Medina – Norwich

International students Welcome Week at UEA – Pray for good connections with the new international students, a good partnership work with the CU and for open doors on campus. Also pray for us as we get all the volunteers together to plan the year ahead.



Week 3
17/08/2026

Luke Hammond – Reach Programme

Please pray for us as a new cohort of Reach trainees will be starting their intern year. We will be investing in their young leadership and discipleship journey, preparing them for the challenges that lie ahead.



Week 4
24/08/2026

Matthew Brindley – Durham

As we restart the Durham International Life Café, please pray for word to spread among international students and for a committed team of CU and church volunteers who can build community with the international students throughout the year. Also pray for increased financial resources for Friends International in Durham, that will enable existing staff to increase working hours and facilitate further staff appointments..



Week 5
31/08/2026

Matthew Ojo – Portsmouth

Please pray for the new academic year and for Freshers' Week at the University of Portsmouth. Pray that we would build strong connections with new international students, and that local churches would warmly welcome and support the international students as they arrive.



Week 6
7/09/2026

Rebecca Davies – Glasgow

It's our International Welcome! Over 24,000 international students will be arriving in the city. We will be partnering with around 18 different churches to organise a variety of welcome events, with the aim of getting to know new students. Please pray for good numbers, less opposition and favour with the different universities and accommodations as we get the word out.



Week 7 14/09/2026

Kirsten Wynn – London

As welcome events at Greenwich University start, please pray for good attendance and great conversations. Pray for churches across London as they seek to welcome new students; for creativity and for favour with university authorities and accommodation officers. We hope to have three new staff starting in London in September. Please pray that they will develop quickly and that they secure the necessary financial support.



Week 8 21/09/2026

**Baiba Strause-Kalmere / Alex McCann
– Canterbury / Colchester**

Pray for our teams during Freshers Week and beyond in Canterbury and Colchester, that they would have opportunities to reach new international contacts.



Week 9 28/09/2026

Charis Stirling – York

At the beginning of the academic year, we are running an event called International Student Market. With the help of local student accommodations, we have received many donations which will go towards new student ministry. We are setting up a free café area for conversations. Please pray this event will boost our first contact with students and serve the purpose of sowing gospel seeds.



Week 10 5/10/2026

**Sally Miller / Judith McKeown
– Birmingham / Newcastle**

Give thanks for the launch of work in Birmingham City Centre. Pray for opportunities to get to know students during welcome weeks at Birmingham City University and Aston University. Also pray for Globe Café as it starts up again in Newcastle. Pray that students we have met during the fresher events at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities would engage with us over the academic year.



Week 11 12/10/2026

Jonnie Green – Oxford

FEUER – European evangelists conference – Please pray for good opportunities to share about international student ministry, and for opportunities to make good contacts with partners across Europe. Please also pray for our first Explore event, an international student dinner and Bible discussion event. Pray that international students come along and for many to be drawn to our saviour Jesus!



Week 12 19/10/2026

Helen Morrissey – Exeter

At the beginning of October, we will be taking a group international students on a weekend away of Bible teaching, looking at the book of Colossians together. Pray that those who don't yet trust in Jesus, would find the teaching inspiring and those who do know Him, would be compelled to deepen their faith.

BUILDING COMMUNITY



Week 13
26/10/2026

Iain MacGowan – Bournemouth

Pray for the dinner we are planning for new international students. Please pray that we find a space large enough to cook for a large number of students. Also pray that we can assemble a volunteer team and complete the necessary health and safety training required to run future events.



Week 14
2/11/2026

Bethany Marsh – Aberdeen

Over the summer we ran EA's Discovering Jesus course. Please pray for deep connections with those on the course as they learn more about Christ, and that conversations might continue outside the weekly evening sessions and into the future.



Week 15
9/11/2026

Phoebe Ridout / Lydia Bown – Southampton

Pray for us as we continue to meet international students and connect them with local Christians through Local Link, churches and other key avenues. Pray that the international students will be curious about what it means to be a Christian.



Week 16
16/11/2026

Joyce Swan – Edinburgh

Please pray for Napier and Heriot-Watt universities as we seek to build community among international students offering social and faith support. At Heriot-Watt, pray for our new admin/social support team member and that we will all work well together as a team. And finally pray that we can find a new cook.



Week 17
23/11/2026

**Madeleine Bonicel
– Nottingham**

Pray for Local Link hosts as they open their homes to international students, that deep friendships will grow. Pray that many international students would come to the Globe Cafés and close friendships would be built. Also pray that our autumn trip would bring us into contact with new people and deepen connections with those we already know.

RETURNING HOME



Week 18
30/11/2026

Please pray for all international students who have now completed their studies, both those that have returned home and for others who remain in the UK. Pray that the contact they've had with Friends International will continue to have an impact on their lives. Pray also for graduates of the Reach programme will be able to use what they have learnt in their future ministry in their home countries.

Let's have coffee

International coffee day

Let's have a coffee – 1st October is International Coffee Day but what's the 'go to' drink for international students?

It Starts with a Cup of Tea [or Coffee]

For many years, Friends International have used the phrase, 'It all starts with a cup of tea'. It captures something important about our ministry: simple acts of hospitality can open the door to life-changing friendships.

When international students arrive in the UK, they are often navigating a new culture, language and way of life so a warm welcome, a listening ear and an invitation to share a hot drink can make a remarkable difference. Through these everyday encounters, friendships develop naturally, creating opportunities to share friendship, faith and the hope we have found in Jesus. By offering hospitality

and genuine friendship, supporters and volunteers help international students feel valued and cared for. Many international students come from countries where there is little opportunity to hear the gospel and relationships formed over a hot drink can have eternal significance.

Recent trends

While tea remains popular in Britain, younger generations are increasingly choosing coffee. International Coffee Day on 1st October will celebrate the increasing diversity in coffee, the growth in international trade, and the millions of producers worldwide for whom coffee now provides a livelihood. Today, even among tea drinkers, preferences have expanded far beyond the

traditional cup of tea. Green tea, fruit infusions, herbal blends and mint teas are all commonplace. International students are not immune to this explosion of choice. Bubble tea has become a favourite among many young people, while matcha – powdered green tea prepared in a variety of ways – has seen a surge in popularity.

Hospitality creates connection

Yet the specific drink is not really the point. What matters is the willingness to meet people where they are. Sometimes that means introducing students to British customs; at other times it means stepping outside our comfort zones and trying something entirely new together. The principle remains unchanged.



Hospitality creates connection. Friendship builds trust. Through sharing time, conversation and everyday experiences, we help international students settle into life in the UK and discover a supportive community. As we do so, we pray that many will also encounter the love of Christ through the friendships they experience. Whether it begins with tea, coffee, matcha or something else entirely, there is no better way to welcome, befriend and share the good news of Jesus with international students from around the world.

“Each year,
MIO reaches
significant numbers
of students.”

Manchester

International Outreach



In Manchester, one of the UK's largest cities, there are around 28,000 international university students as well as many others studying at summer language schools. Friends International's work is firmly established in partnership with local churches and since 2013 we have run a two-week summer outreach in the city, under the banner of the Manchester International Outreach [MIO]. Since 2019 we have also run 'MIO extended', with the direct involvement of up to ten churches, aiming to provide activities every week of the summer up until the universities' welcome week.

Our aim is to connect and welcome any early arrivals by running fun activities, introducing them to the city and perhaps demystifying their ideas of church. As international students meet ordinary people giving their time and opening their homes

and making them feel welcome, barriers are broken down and opportunities provided for volunteers to share the hope they have in Jesus. This partnership with churches extends beyond the summer and by connecting with international students as they arrive in the city, they are more likely to attend churches and events for internationals with the new friends they have made.

Local churches engage with MIO in a wide range of practical and relational ways: Elmwood Church collects students and takes them to Picnic in the Park, including walks and games in Worsley; Union Hall organises fun and games in the park; Grace Church hosts an English afternoon tea; Hope Church provides evening meals in church members' homes; City Church offers a city tour; Victoria Park Christian Fellowship leads countryside walks; and Platt

Church hosts a ceilidh. Churches also support the outreach by hosting team members, providing team meals, and contributing cakes for cafés.

The Full Impact Is Unknown

Each year, MIO reaches significant numbers of students; last year we engaged with more than 200 students. While some came to faith, many others begin a journey towards belief in Jesus through Bible studies and spiritual conversations with the team. These journeys often continue through regular cafés, Bible studies, and ongoing contact with Friends International staff. We could try to quantify the number of students who have benefited from this engagement over the years, but the reality is that the full impact on the lives of those who come into our orbit will not be known until eternity.

John* said, "I want to thank you

**"I feel very
blessed to meet
so many nice
and friendly
Christians."**

and all the other people for being so welcoming. It really made a big difference having the café there, to relax and meet all these different people. It's a great thing to look back on."

Another international student, Sarah*, added; "I feel very blessed to meet so many nice and friendly Christians. Meeting them has helped me to cope while I try to adapt to this whole new situation."

For churches, the partnership is twofold. By having members of the congregation volunteer with Friends International, they are trained in cross-cultural evangelism and gain confidence in international student ministry. The impact goes beyond the international students, as local churches minister to refugees and immigrants as well the experience gained through international student ministry can be applied in other contexts. MIO also gives churches an opportunity to see this mission field more clearly, and

such relationships can have lasting effects, including deeper partnership with Friends International and the development of churches' own international student ministries. Some of our former volunteers are now in church leadership and others in mission service abroad.

Partnership at the Heart

MIO is led by a planning team made up of Friends International staff, UCCF staff, and some church leaders. This shared leadership reflects the partnership at the heart of the outreach. The planning team's challenges range from finding sufficient hosts and cooks to welcoming large numbers of international students with different backgrounds and behavioural expectations. Welcoming large numbers of students is also a challenge for the MIO volunteer team, along with publicising the event for those who have not done it before.

The vision for MIO and the wider ministry in Manchester is that more local churches will catch the vision for international student ministry as an integral part of the global mission outreach of their church. This ministry is on their doorstep, enabling many more church members to become actively involved. Through MIO, churches can discover the joy and significance of welcoming international students, while Friends International continues to support a growing network of relationships, cafés, Bible studies, and church partnerships across Manchester.

For Friends International, the arrival of students in the summer is an opportunity, in partnership with local churches, to show students that they are loved, and that a church is not just a building you go to on a Sunday, but a family of believers who love because they were loved first. Some of these friendships last a lifetime.

* names have been changed





Staff Appointment

We are pleased to announce that Divya Priya will be joining the team in Derby, our newest local Centre. Originally from India, Divya sensed God's call to serve Him from a young age. Before coming to the UK, she led prayer groups, started youth initiatives, and served in outreach ministries across northern India and the Nepal border region. Divya moved to Nottingham to complete a Masters. During her studies, she volunteered at the Globe Café in Nottingham and helped launch a fellowship for Indian students in the city. Divya says what excites her most about working for Friends International is the recognition that international students are individuals with unique stories, questions, and needs.



Global Impact Conference

Every couple of years the International Student Ministry movements from around Europe gather together. This year the conference took place in Budapest in Hungary and included representatives from Germany, Netherlands and Bulgaria. Organised by International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, [IFES] the conference gave delegates an opportunity to hear the latest developments in international student ministry and time for training and vision-casting. In many countries the work is less developed than in the UK and part of our role at Friends International is to encourage and equip others to help develop a ministry that will effectively engage international students for years to come.



You're Invited To Our New Office Opening Event!

Friends International would like to invite you to celebrate with us at the opening of our Support Centre in Oxford on Friday 18th September, from 6pm – 8pm. Join with local staff, meet fellow supporters, tour the new office space, and connect with the wider Friends International family over refreshments. We really hope you can make it. To book your free ticket go to: www.tinyurl.com/fiofficemove26.



 Scan QR code to book your space

A Taste of Heaven in Mid Wales:

Big Week Away 2026

"We saw a glimpse
of God's global
family"

Against the backdrop of the rolling hills and stunning scenery of mid-Wales, 170 people gathered at Cefn Lea conference centre in mid-Wales, earlier in the year for the Big Week Away 2026. Now in its third year as an independent event jointly run with OMF, the week provided a unique opportunity for international students, staff and volunteers to experience the richness of multicultural Christian fellowship while growing together in God's Word.

International students drawn from 34 nations, including large groups from China, India and Nigeria, made this year's gathering truly representative of the international student population in the UK and Ireland. Throughout the week, the diversity of the global Church was evident as students worshipped, learned and shared life together

across cultures and languages.

While some things change, the Word of God doesn't, and the Bible teaching programme remains at the heart of the Big Week Away. Peter Teagle shared from the life of Joseph, helping students explore God's faithfulness and purposes through both blessing and hardship. The challenge of Joseph's decision to forgive family hurt was particularly poignant. Teaching was carefully contextualised with an emphasis on discipleship and preparing believers to live for Christ when they return home.

A highlight for many attendees was the opportunity to meet and learn from Christians from their own cultural backgrounds. These conversations offered encouragement, practical wisdom and examples of how to follow Jesus faithfully when faced with the

unique challenges of family, work and societal change in different parts of the world. Around a third of the students attending were exploring faith, a higher proportion than in previous years.

The programme included a range of seminars and sessions introducing the Philip Project and Reach training which generated immediate interest and applications. Through shared worship, fellowship and friendship, the Big Week Away offers a glimpse of God's global family: believers from many nations learning from Scripture and from one another. In the beauty of Cefn Lea, many experienced not only the welcome of Christian community but also a foretaste of heaven itself.

*Lynette Teagle on behalf of the
BWA2026 planning team*



Why Legacy Giving Matters



"Thanks for the work you do for Friends International. My mother and father took a close interest in the work you do and prayed for you often". Executor of a legacy gift from a long-term supporter.

Much of Friends International's work is funded through the faithful support of churches and individuals who give regularly. But legacy gifts are different - they're long-term, strategic, and often transformational.

- They enable new ministries to begin and grow.
- They sustain staff in key roles.
- They ensure future generations of students hear the gospel.

A gift in your Will to Friends International is a simple, yet powerful way to make a lasting difference — impacting lives for decades to come.

Your Invitation

Would you consider including Friends International in your Will?

Your gift will be a source of encouragement, provision, and create a spiritual legacy to benefit those who follow in your footsteps.



To learn more, visit www.friendsinternational.uk/legacy-giving or speak to your solicitor about adding Friends International to your will. Alternatively click this QR code.



@friendsint



@friendsint



@friendsintl