

4. Becoming Friends with International Students



☎ Friendship That Makes A Difference

In the recent years there has been an influx of international students in our country especially in the private universities and colleges. They are a very diverse group of people coming from many different countries, near and far. Some are wealthy; others struggle financially. Some are assertive, adventurous, and outspoken; others are timid, shy, and cautious. Some international students are easily understood; others know very little English. Some are warm and affectionate; others reserved and aloof. Some handle cultural adjustment smoothly; others have a difficult time with culture shock. Most are young and single.

Therefore becoming friends with international students is quite an adventure. Your friendship can make a difference in his/her life, in our own life, and for eternity's sake. Let's look at the differences it can make.



First, as disciples of Christ, when we demonstrate Jesus' love to others, we enable them to see the reality of who Jesus is. Practically, generous giving of your time, interest and love for the international can be a powerful tool of evangelism. They may ask, "Why are you different? Why take such special interest in me?" This provides a wonderful opportunity to share sensitively how Jesus has filled your heart with His love. Through your friendship he/she may accept Christ.

Secondly, your friendship enables the international to have a trusted friend. Most of them have left family and friends behind to study here. Cross-cultural counselling shows that internationals often feel lonely, lacking close, caring friends and sometimes do not perform well academically. They have intense pressure to do well.

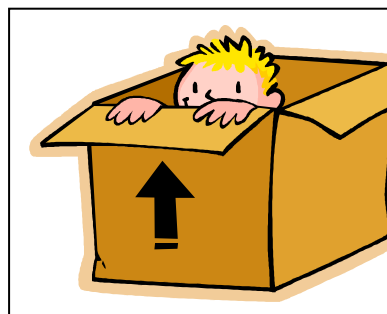
Thirdly, your friendship provides practical help to the international student. They'll take time to get used to our culture, food, and so many other things we easily take for granted. For some, coming here means learning to live in a drastically different climate or finding a place to stay or part-time job for the first time - in addition to their studies. You can help the international student understand the ways of people in our country.

☎ **Friendship That Bridge Cultures**

🌟 **STEP ONE**

A friend is someone who knows who you are.

In befriending an international student your first step is to allow the international to get to know you and for you to get to know him or her. Extend genuine hospitality. Invite your international friend to join you in the usual things you do like relaxing, watching TV, playing games, shopping, and eating. Invite him/her to bring his/her own friend.



DO include the international student in your ordinary way of life.

DON'T focus on formal, special, or costly entertainment.

An important step in getting to know your new international friends is learning their names. They might be using a nickname often an English one. Discover their real names and ask which name they prefer you to use. Perhaps a desire to use their native names will bond you to them in a special way.

Ask them about themselves and listen carefully. Focus on drawing them out. Ask about their families, friends, favourite activities, holidays, foods, religion, and custom. Respond with statements of interest and acceptance, which begin to build trust. Say, for example, "That sounds interesting, tell me more about...". Building a deep sense of trust will take time, as it does with any new friendship.

Avoid controversial political discussions and projecting an attitude that "We are better." Instead, take the opportunity to discover their perspectives of the world.

DO listen with understanding, not judgement. Seek to appreciate their different view and values.

DON'T argue with or condemn an international's point of view.

🌟 **STEP TWO**

Friendship means moving beyond a superficial knowing to a deeper experience of being understood.

As a friend, you will want to listen beyond the surface facts of life experiences to the meaning and feelings behind the facts.

DO take time to read and discover what is taking place in your international friends' country. Ask informed questions, such as, "I've read about serious environmental problems in your country. Does that directly affect you and your family? How do you think your country will address the problem?"

DON'T assume you know all about a country without some added time spent learning.

STEP THREE

Real friendship accepts the other person as he/she is.

True acceptance says, "I respect who you are. God made you in His image and I value your thoughts and opinions. I will not try to force you to accept my way of thinking, or base my friendship on how much you agree with me.

Only in a sincere atmosphere of acceptance will the international student risk exploring Christianity and its personal message. He or she needs to see a demonstration of unconditional love, which Jesus demonstrated to us. You are His heart reaching out in love.

DO offer loving, unconditional friendship, accepting the international's different view of life, world, and religion.

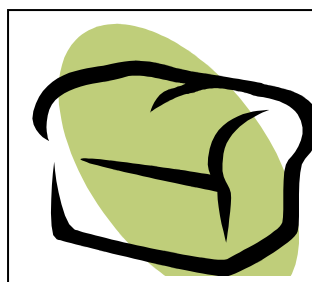
DON'T base your time with the student and your offer of friendship on how interested he or she appears to be in Christianity.

Once you have establish a deep sense of love, acceptance, and trust, you will discover many opportunities to encourage your friend along the way of personal growth. You will earn the right to be heard. As he or she feels safe to share problems with you, you are able to advise toward a wise godly solution.

When your friend comes to you anxious about his or her future or sorrowful about family situation back home, you have a natural opportunity to empathise and then to share how you handle those same struggles through your relationship with Jesus Christ. This can be a powerful witness to the reality of Jesus living in you.

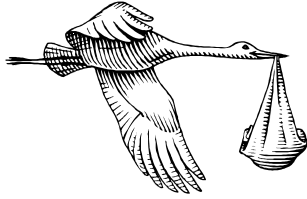
DO openly share how you handle the difficulties in life through the presence and power of Jesus Christ. Model how you make decisions based on God's value system.

DON'T judge or condemn them for how they choose to handle a situation.



Practical Friendship Builders

- Participate in outdoor activities
- Discover and share their interest
- Take them to different types of restaurant and introduce them to local foods and fruits
- Invite them to cook a native meal with you
- If they are new help them find their way around town, inform them of our banking system, phone services etc.
- Include them in any normal activity - exercising, shopping, going to church, etc.
- Invite them to your place or home especially during holidays
- Find out about their family back home
- Find out when their birthday is and plan to celebrate
- Introduce the local public holidays and explain them



Sharing Christ Across Cultures

DO have realistic expectations.

DON'T expect a quick conversion.

DO learn about their religious beliefs and values.

DON'T focus on telling them the Gospel only.

DO clarify the meaning of terms such as sin, guilt etc.

DON'T assume you both mean the same things by words you use.

DO pray without ceasing and let them know you are praying for them.

DON'T assume that knowing the facts about Christianity is enough. Help them see God at work in your life, your family and friend's lives, and his/her life.

DO share your personal experience with Christ.

DON'T just focus on what your international friend believes.

DO focus your conversation on who Jesus is.

DON'T deviate from the person of Jesus Christ, who He is and what He has done.

DO introduce your international friend to other Christians.

DON'T be possessive and isolate your international friend.

DO invite your international friend to church and relevant Christian events.

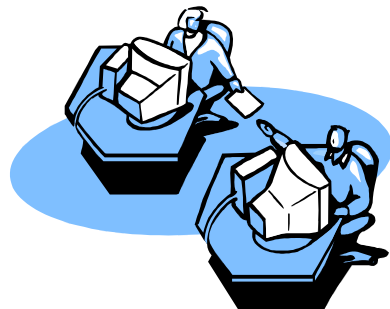
DON'T misrepresent the religious event in anyway.

DO provide appropriate Christian literature.

DON'T pressure your international friend to take or read it.

DO explain the cost of becoming a Christian

DON'T press for a response or commitment to Christ



Suggested **Questions**

About One's Religion:

- How does your religion assist you in your daily life?
- How does your religion define the purpose of life?
- How does it view death?
- What do you think of Christians and Christianity?
- What do you know about Jesus?
- How does your religion describe God? What are His characteristics?
- How do you relate to God? How does this God view you?
- How does your religion define sin? How does it deal with guilt?

About Personal Values:

- How does your culture view friendship?
- What are the responsibilities of the family members to one another in your culture?
- What do you believe would be the most meaningful way you could live your life?
- How do you view failure?
- What does it mean to be successful?

Planting Seed Through Conversation

- If you practice giving thanks before a meal, explain that it is your practice to give thanks to the Living God who provides all things for us. Don't turn your prayer into a sermon. After praying, ask your friend how he or she expresses thanks back home.
- After asking how your friend's day was, share how God answered your prayer or provided for you in some way.
- Invite your international friends to join you and your Fellowship when you are out helping others or visiting a home for elderly or children. Explain how we are called to show love to one another because God has first loved us.
- If your international friend shares about family concerns and difficulties back home. Ask if you could pray for him/her to the Living God who hears and is concerned about us. Unless he/she asks or shows interest in knowing God do not say more at this point. Be prepared to show from Scripture that God hears and is concerned for us (Isa 65:24, 1 Pet5:7).
- Use examples in your personal life to demonstrate godly values. For example, in a situation when you are given extra change, explain how you return it because God has called us to live as people of integrity and honesty.
- Talk about special events such as marriage, death and birth of a child.

Adapted excerpts from "Becoming a Friend with an International Student" by Meri MacLeod, International Students, Inc., USA.