

How to make your church internationally friendly

Why and How?

1. Teach the Bible

- It's clear in the Bible that God wants the world to know him (e.g. Matt 28, Gen 12)
- It's also clear that God cares for the stranger (e.g. Matt 25, Rom 12 – 'hospitality' lit. translation = loving strangers – it doesn't mean inviting your friends for a meal!).
- Teach these truths to your church!

2. Pray

- It's God's job to change the church.
- Pray alone and with others who share the vision for internationals for sometime before 'doing' anything.

Is your church friendly? (Let alone internationally friendly!)

- Not just 'is the welcome team friendly?' – they have to be friendly, that's their job! It means much more when someone else in the church is friendly towards new people.
- However, a welcome team is needed to pick up new people who get missed by the rest of the congregation.
- Pastoral structures help to make a church friendly (e.g. visiting the sick or the elderly).
- Smaller groups within the church help to make the church friendly.
- People in the church meeting together mid week (in a purely social way) helps the church to be friendly.

Importance of "exposure" and willingness to learn

- "Exposure" means exposing the church to international students (i/s) e.g. inviting international students for a meal and inviting a friend from church too.
- The church needs to learn to appreciate other cultures (not just understanding, but actually appreciating).
- We need to learn to be cultural interpreters:
 - Explaining to people in the church how to relate to international students and why they behave the way they do.
 - Explaining to international students why we do the things we do (especially in the context of the church system – the way we celebrate communion etc.)

What might make a church NOT friendly to internationals?

- Segregating international students from the rest of the church too much – although some special i/s activities are helpful for when they arrive, and for those who aren't here long enough to integrate.
- Language issues – 'in' jokes, complicated language, talking too fast or unclearly etc. (in sermons or in conversations).
- Cliquiness
- Sermon applications that are only relevant in Western countries.
- No use of sermon outlines, slides, etc. (written English far easier than spoken).

Some more “how to” ideas

- Parts of British culture tend to creep into the church and these need to be challenged by scripture:
 - Attitude to the elderly
 - Materialism
 - British reserve
 - Lack of hospitality
- The church is the people so making your church more i/s friendly means making the people more i/s friendly.
- Don't just invite people to visit you, visit them too (in many cultures you honour someone by going to their home rather than just inviting them into yours).
- Get International people in the church involved in doing the prayers/readings/testimonies etc as well as serving on committees or leading small groups etc if they have the experience.
- It's great when international students feel a real sense of ownership in the church and are actively bringing their friends, welcoming newcomers and introducing them to local church members, and encouraging each other to serve.

Internationals will attract internationals.