

# Help them feel welcome

**IF you are interested in supporting international students and newcomers to the UK to integrate into society, Crossing Cultures might be for you.**

It's being organised by the Christian charity Friends International and is being held in Portsmouth on Saturday 5 March.

There will be a blend of worship, inspiring speakers and workshops aimed at supporting and developing cross-cultural relationships and understanding.

International student worker Clare Brooks said: "The aim of this day is to inspire and equip people from local churches to welcome, befriend, reach out and minister to international students and other people from different ethnic groups – whether long term residents or recent immigrants.

"While the focus of Friends International is on international students, a lot of the ideas are relevant to all newcomers to the UK.

"We will start the day with a time of worship and encouragement from God's word, followed by three sessions



**International students enjoy food and activities in the regular International Students' Cafe**

of seminars and workshops.

"These will cover areas such as: returnee issues, resources for helping prepare students to return home, help with facilitating an international home group, support group or Bible study group, support with building cross-cultural friendships and hospitality, becoming an international church and toolkit for reaching the Chinese.

"There are more than 5,000 international students living in the city of Portsmouth, as well

as many immigrants and asylum seekers, some of whom will be coming to our churches and may need help to integrate.

"Some understanding of other cultures is vital if we are to help people access church and the gospel in the UK and prevent major misunderstandings. Even more important when we think about reaching out to those who may not yet have a faith."

Clare has been working with Friends International for 10 years, running a regular International Students' Cafe that meets in term-time. The Crossing Cultures Day is an annual event but this is the first time it has been held in Portsmouth.

Clare said: "The event usually

alternates between Southampton and Bournemouth but we felt it would be good to have it in Portsmouth to encourage participation by those who maybe couldn't travel or would be discouraged from coming by having to travel to another city.

"If you are interested, I would encourage you to come along and find out more, no previous experience or involvement is needed."

The event will be held at Kings Church, which now meets in St Peter's Church, Playfair Road, Somers Town, between 10am and 4pm.

It's free to attend but donations would be welcomed to cover the costs. To register a place, visit

[www.friendsinternational.uk/what-s-on/crossing-cultures-2016](http://www.friendsinternational.uk/what-s-on/crossing-cultures-2016).

Friends International is a Christian charity that supports international students in the UK. It does this through equipping churches and volunteers to serve, minister, and engage with international students.

It also organises a range of social events and activities for international students to be a part of.

It wants to give as many people as possible to have a great time in the UK, chances to experience real British culture, and opportunities to hear about the Christian faith. For more details, see [www.friendsinternational.uk](http://www.friendsinternational.uk).

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## Stats are not whole story

THE release of recent statistics suggests that once again Anglican church attendance in this country has fallen – and for the first time ever there are fewer than one million people in our churches each Sunday.

But let's not beat ourselves up too much about this. Yes, it is true that the number attending weekly has declined and that the average age in church is increasing, but let's look at in context.

First, the same number of people may be going to church as have done for some time, but they go less frequently, partly due to the competition for our time. In the past, many people went to church every week – now those same people might go once every two or three weeks. This makes it look like fewer people go to church, when in fact they don't!

Secondly many churches report an increase in midweek



## the last word

by the Very Rev David Brindley  
Dean of Portsmouth Cathedral

numbers. Life patterns change. Why should Sunday morning be the only time we can worship?

Cathedrals have seen an increase of up to 25 per cent in numbers attending services in the week in the last decade. Perhaps this is an incentive to offer a greater variety of times and styles of worship.

Thirdly, the bald figures miss out the effect the church has on society. Most food banks are stocked and run

by volunteers from churches; church schools have a huge impact on their communities and contain large numbers of worshipping adults and children; church buildings are in many places real focusses of support for many people.

So bare statistics tell far from the whole story. In a society in which joining and commitment are at a low ebb, the Church of England is not doing nearly as badly as the media would have us believe.