

Many nationalities enhance our worship

We welcome Christians from around the world to join our congregations. And each brings their own flavour to our worship

THERE are so many Iranian Christians worshipping at St Margaret's Church in Southsea that it displays its song lyrics and congregational responses in Farsi as well as English.

That's just one way in which this church has made those from other countries feel welcome there. These Iranian Christians have often fled from repression in their home country. They've been watching the conflict in the Middle East and praying not just for peace, but for a switch to democracy in Iran.

Many of our churches include worshippers from a huge variety of countries, some of whom were Christians before arriving in the UK, and others who have found faith since. And differences in culture, styles of worship and experiences of God add real richness to our church communities.

Behnoosh Ajdadi, 57, was among those who came to the UK from Tehran in 2022 with her twin children Rozhina, and Arshia, who are now both 19. She found a home at **St Margaret's Church in Southsea**.

"I came here as an asylum seeker having become a Christian in Iran," she said. "My daughter had been ill with cancer and I asked a vicar to



Bishop Jonathan leading a service at St Margaret's, Southsea - with the words in Farsi and English on the screen behind him

pray for her. While he was praying in the church, Jesus touched my heart and I asked Jesus to help too. We went to hospital for her operation, and the doctor said 'What has happened? We can't see the cancer in her windpipe any more'. It was a miracle.

"So I started to go to a house church in secret in Iran. The government came and arrested my friends, so I ran away. I actually travelled to different cities and then through Turkey. And when I arrived in the UK, there was still a lockdown from Covid.

"I came to St Margaret's on my 11th

day here, and realised they had a community shop where they were selling second-hand clothes.

"I asked the vicar for clothes for my son and daughter, and he insisted on giving me some too. He invited me to his home for dinner, and we started to come each Sunday. It is great that we are able to worship in Farsi, as in Iran we can't even worship in our mother tongue.

"I still have family in Iran and we're not able to speak to them. When we watch what is happening on the TV, it is hard. But we know this regime killed 40,000 people in two days just before the bombing, so I

hope this bombing does change the regime.

"People are living without electricity, no power, no water. And there are a lot of sanctions. The regime is spending a lot of money on the military, as well as supporting terrorists in other countries. So it is the normal people who are suffering. I am praying for peace and for a change in the regime."

'Something happened in my heart and I started to walk with Jesus'

And Marie*, 42, also found a home at St Margaret's Church in Southsea. She joined the church in April 2025, and then moved to **St Philip's, Cosham**, alongside the vicar, the Rev Fran Carabott.

Marie had come to the UK in January 2025 to study for a second Masters in educational studies and is now working as a teacher.

"After a month of being here, I was experiencing anxiety and stress, partly due to being homesick and also because my sister in Iran was very unwell," she said.

"I asked a university friend about church and came to St Margaret's because other Iranians come here. It was a Wednesday night and they were running an Alpha Course, so I joined in with that.

"I started coming on Sundays, and I felt better. And we prayed for my sister and she recovered from her injuries. I decided to get baptised in July 2025, and that was a massive change for me.

"I can't put into words how I felt, but something happened in my heart and I started to walk with Jesus. Now I'm at St Philip's in Cosham and on the welcome team.



Some of the Nigerian worshippers at St Jude's, Southsea including Matthew Ojo (far left) and Elona Osu-Bovi (in Bench t-shirt)

Nigerians enjoying church life in Southsea

THE Church in Nigeria is thought to be the largest in the Anglican Communion - with perhaps 20 million worshippers gathering each Sunday.

So it's no surprise that Christians from Nigeria are part of our church congregations. St Jude's Church in Southsea is one of the churches in our diocese that has welcomed several worshippers with Nigerian heritage.

Elona Osu-Bovi, aged 15, attends Sunday worship with her family, and various youth groups run by the church at weekends.

She said: "I like the fact that no matter how often you come, there is always someone to talk to. You are never on your own. I'm excited to be at a church where there are so many activities for young people, including High Tide, Verve and Be Group.

"It is good that there are people here who look like me, and who have had the same kind of experience."

Matthew Ojo, who attends with his wife Nambam, is working for a charity called Friends International, which welcomes students from around the world.

It runs cafés at St Luke's and

St Jude's Church to befriend students who have come to Portsmouth from other countries.

He said: "I'm excited to worship in a congregation that is interested in discipleship, and also where people are from different nationalities. It's a multicultural congregation and I feel at home.

"It's also a church that has a heart for mission around the world and supports various mission agencies, including Friends International.

"It's true that where I come from, our worship is mixed with dancing and drumming and jumping up for the Lord. But I come from an inter-denominational congregation, so I am happy to adapt!"

Friends International hosts cafés for foreign students twice a month, and also organises other social events. They often partner with the university chaplaincy.

Part of the work of Friends International is not just welcoming and supporting students from around the world, but also giving them a chance to hear about the Christian faith while they are studying in the UK. See www.friendsinternational.uk