

## Friendship Evangelism - Our Approach - Guidelines for those on the teams at the Barn and Harry's

*“Personal evangelism must be friendship evangelism if it is to be true to its name. Without any doubt friendship is the most Christian context within which to share the good news of Jesus. True friendship involves getting close to people. Friends enter into one another's worlds. I believe from scripture that in every unbeliever, even in the jolliest extrovert, there are hidden depths of anxiety and pain. Therefore we can only reach them in truth when we are prepared to enter their suffering and to feel their pain.”* (John Stott)

The Barn and Harry's are International Coffee Bars run by Christians. Students have been invited to meet English people in friendly coffee bars, to practice their English and to enjoy any entertainment that has been laid on. In doing so we hope and pray that friendships will develop and opportunities come to share our Christian faith naturally.

The normal programme consists of periods of entertainment interspersed with times when people can chat over cups of coffee. A variety of entertainment is provided at the Barn. When these are participatory (eg Barn Dancing) team members are encouraged to join in and be ready to partner a visitor who wants to join in too. In the middle of proceedings a Bible study is announced to take place in a separate room where those who wish may consider a passage from the gospels for about half an hour. Experience over many years has shown that these are the most effective means of arousing an interest in the hearts of international students. They are entirely voluntary and often a student comes for the first few times purely out of curiosity. There is also no pressure, except that of the Holy Spirit as He applies the truth of God's Word. Many of those who have been converted point to these Bible studies as being the crucial factor in their coming to faith.

We must remember that we are not in the job of “preaching at people” at every opportunity nor of putting any pressure on foreign students either to attend the Bible study or to talk about spiritual things if they don't want to. Our task is to offer genuine friendship, to take a very real interest in them talking about the things they want to talk about, helping them with their English or in understanding British culture. Of course we will want to share the gospel when appropriate but we must make sure we don't press people beyond where they want to go. As Peter says in his first letter:

*“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience....”*

You will find that with foreign students you do have plenty of opportunities to speak about your relationship with Jesus so please don't force them to listen when they are not ready! Be sensitive to their cultural manners - they may say 'yes' when they really mean 'no', or they may not really have understood what you meant.

We do have a time and a place for more direct evangelism with the Bible Studies. There is also, of course, a place for the proclamation of the gospel and there are opportunities to take students to hear this. We have a guest service each Sunday specially prepared with international students in mind. There is an evangelistic sermon and other items designed to communicate the gospel as effectively as possible. Lunch afterwards provides the opportunity to follow this up in personal conversation.

We do have to be very careful in the way we present the Gospel because of our relationships with the language schools. They only allow us to advertise our activities on the basis that students are not put under pressure to talk about spiritual things against their will. One negative report to the language schools can be difficult to rectify and if they were to close their doors to us we would find it very difficult to get foreign students to come along. Furthermore, we do not want to sell people short. Those who come along are not expecting an evangelistic meeting; so those who are not interested in our message should not be confronted with it. This is why we avoid preaching from up front, and imparting any more of our message than they want to hear. It is a fact that most people who become Christians do so because they have

Christian friends and are impressed by their lifestyle before becoming interested in the message. This is basically the approach we have adopted in our coffee bar work and we find it works!