

## Iford Baptist Church - International Friendship Group



The International Friendship Group takes place at Iford Baptist Church on the first Sunday of each month, at teatime, from 4pm-6pm. It's a place where internationals can come to practice speaking English with native English speakers, who are all members of our church. We have a team of about 10

people who are committed to the work.

Since the group started, 32 different individuals from Hungary, Italy, Japan, India, Germany, Holland and the Philippines have attended. They are all contacts through EFL / EAL teaching and come from various areas in Bournemouth. The age range is from babies to grandads! The level of English is from beginner to quite fluent (mostly the children!)

The first half an hour involves tea and biscuits and chatting, with craft, a quiz and other table activities, as well as table football and pool. Then a vocabulary game and a speaking activity are organised (sometimes with a short teaching slot beforehand). We then share food together (everyone brings a plate of food to share which means we get to try food from the various cultures!). The final half an hour involves a narrative /dramatised Bible story or presentation, followed by a song. The whole event usually follows a theme linked to the Bible story . We are also developing a slot where the internationals can present something – so for example, some of the Hungarian children played a traditional Hungarian piece of music on the keyboard for us.

It is an opportunity to befriend and support the internationals in our community, as well as to share something of God's Word with them.

Over the summer we hope to have a picnic in the park and a BBQ on the beach, which will involve the whole church family too.

Agnieszka Tennant (Associate Editor of Christianity Today) recently said: "Teaching English may well be the 21<sup>st</sup> century's most promising way to take

the gospel to the world.”

The families come to us in order to practice their English, so it's great that we have a team willing to be there from the church to model good English!

The Bible talks a lot about men and women from every tongue, tribe, and nation being in heaven. Intrinsic to Paul's gospel was a barrier-breaking, hostility-destroying power that brought ethnically diverse people together in Christ and created a species of humanity that was no longer defined by its tribe or ethnicity, but by Christ.

The Bible verses that have been our motivation are as follows:

Deuteronomy 31 v 12-13:

*'Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God.'*

And Ephesians 2 v 19:

*'Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow-citizens with God's people and also members of his household.'*

As a team, we recently benefited from some training on cross-cultural work, provided by Maura and David from the organisation Two Nineteen. We looked at what culture is and different aspects of culture, as well as thinking through some practical ways of working with people from other cultures and reaching out to them. It was really helpful, enlightening and a real encouragement to us too.

We pray that genuine friendships will be formed and ultimately lives will be transformed, as the internationals hear something of God's Word and get to know us, the church in Iford.

