

Welcoming students into our city

SHIRLEY Wang isn't a Christian herself, but she definitely appreciates their hospitality.

The Chinese student is in Portsmouth to research linguistics for five months. She discovered that a café for international students run by Portsmouth Christians was a great place to make friends, practice her English and learn about our customs.

"I may not believe in Christianity, but we've found

these people to be very kind and ready to offer us help," she said. "You have a lot of opportunities to speak English with local people and explore their ideas, and meet people from different nationalities around the world."

The International Café happens every other Monday night, from 8pm-10pm, at Kings Church in Elm Grove, Southsea – from October 8.

It's run by Clare Phillimore, from St Jude's Church, Southsea. She's working voluntarily with Friends International, a Christian organ-

isation that offers friendship to international students of any faith or none during their time in the UK.

Among recent events run at the café are a games evening, a barbecue, a Scottish evening and a murder mystery. The group has also taken students for walks in the countryside, and organised special events for Christmas and Easter. The group has the support of churches from all denominations in the city.

Henrike Coppoolse, 25, from Holland, who is studying criminality and psychology at the university, said: "I like to come to improve my English, and enjoy meeting new people of different cultures."

Students are also invited to meals in the homes of local families. And those who are already Christians or who want to discover more about Christianity can do so in regular Bible study groups.

"Our café is open to everyone, and we don't force our faith on people," said Clare.



"But, of course, if anyone does want to find out more, we can give them that chance. Perhaps they come from a country where they will never have heard the Christian message before.

"But even if they don't take up that opportunity, it's important to offer hospitality to those who may feel a bit lost or overwhelmed in a strange culture. There are 2,500 international students at our university – that's 20 per cent of the total – most of whom value the chance to make friends with English people during their stay."

For more details, contact Clare via St Jude's parish office on 023-9275 0442 or clare.phillimore@friendsinternational.org.uk



Top: Shirley Wang (right) and Linda Long at the students' café; below: Henrike Coppoolse at its barbecue

Caring professionals at hand

Funerals are not a subject that often crop up in conversation very often, we still tend to think they are best avoided. It's surprising really when you think that increasingly they are becoming less morbid, and more services of celebration for a loved one's life. The funeral directors profession and ministers of religion have been coming to terms with these changes over the years as the services become more personalised. There is one thing that doesn't change, and that is the need for a caring professional service that understands the delicate nature of the way the company responds to its clients. Most funeral directors belong to the relevant professional organisations

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such as SAIF or the NAFD who set very strict codes of conduct for their members.

More people are now looking at pre-payment funeral plans, which allow them the opportunity to pay for their own funeral in advance and make their own choices as to how it should be organised. In so doing, they can take a lot of decision making out of the hands of a grieving loved one when the need arrives. There are also certain financial benefits with many funeral plans, which in some ways make them inflation proof. The limited size of our cemeteries has led to an increase in cremations, but this does not take away the opportunity for relatives to leave a lasting tribute in the memory of a loved one. The stonemasons' art has thrived for centuries designing such fitting memorials in the form of gravestones and plaques from marble or granite.



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Discipleship that inspires

THERE are as many ways of following Christ as there are people in the world.

Each one of us is different – as some folk are only too ready to point out about themselves! – yet we all want to look to Jesus as the One who inspires us.

I have had many moments when this has been easy and straightforward, like visiting someone on a special anniversary. I've also known moments when it's been anything but easy or straightforward, as when I was diagnosed with this illness just two years ago.

But from whom do we really get inspiration? I read the New Testament, and I get new glimpses of what Jesus said and did.

It's not a book that you can somehow 'do', like ticking something off a list, or buying the t-shirt! So I often look to certain other people as well,



the last word

by Bishop Kenneth

who have been good examples to me, both when life has been good, as well as when it's not been so good.

I don't want only a collection of quiet heroes – they can be a bit oppressive! I need people who can help me go into the depths as well as the heights of human experience.

I think of the friend who is incapable of not enjoying life to the full, and with whom I always want to have a drink. But I can also think of the person I knew a long time ago who

faced harsh challenges, but took me through them, and didn't try to make it all look easy.

Oh yes, cynics will dismiss all this. We've heard it all before, they will say, as they crave for something new.

But my hunch is that 'inspiring discipleship' most of the time is not about looking for anything special.

It is about a very ordinary trudge through a very ordinary life – and finding God alongside us on that daily journey towards his Kingdom.