

## “It is helping us settle and integrate”

How people from Hong Kong have benefitted from conversation classes hosted at Tyndale Baptist Church in Bristol.



**O**n Tuesday afternoons Tyndale Baptist Church sees one of its function rooms fill with people who have only recently made their home here. Its conversation classes for people from Hong Kong are led by church member and retired GP Michael Whitfield, and supported by other members of the congregation.

They explore different subjects each week, such as traditions and customs, food, and sport. The first block of five classes was in late 2021; the second in early 2022. In the session before Christmas Michael led the Hong Kongers around the church’s sanctuary. Each class has attracted around 15 – 20 students.

The classes came about after Michael met Hong Kong pastor the Revd Chi Wai (David) Wu. An experienced pastor, David was part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, a para-church organisation in Hong Kong. After offering help and support to demonstrators, he was told he had to leave Hong Kong for his own safety.

David arrived in Bristol and attended a service at Tyndale last April, where he met Michael and his wife. It turned out they were living in the same road, and they subsequently became friends. David had already connected with Broadmead Baptist Church and encouraged Tyndale, through Michael, to offer the classes to help Hong Kongers learn more about British culture and improve their English language.

David encourages Hong Kongers to integrate as much as they can – and says the church’s warm welcome, alongside the conversation class, has helped him and others do just that.

“It’s an opportunity to learn about the culture and improve our English, but also to meet local people. Other church members are there as helpers. One of the biggest barriers for us is language, and understanding the culture differences.”

He points out that such a class is not on offer elsewhere, and taking an English as a Foreign Language class at a college or language centre, while useful, is costly. He is therefore encouraging other churches to do something similar: for those with suitable buildings, the costs would be low, and there would be huge blessings on both sides.



David with his wife Connie and Baptist minister Rachel Haig at her farewell at Tyndale Baptist Church

(A small number of families now worship at Tyndale Baptist Church, even though a Cantonese-speaking congregation worships on the same premises, because of their desire to integrate.)

Such conversation classes would be popular in the places where large numbers of Hong Kongers have settled, such as Manchester, Birmingham, and London, as well as Bristol where he lives. "It's not teaching grammar, but introducing us to UK culture – and the most important thing is the mindset of members of the local church. When they spot an outsider and extend friendship, it creates an atmosphere of welcome."

Michael has been only too happy to help: "I don't have any background in teaching English as a foreign language – these are conversations, not more traditional language classes. We are different generations: I'm in my 80s and the people who come are much younger!

But they seem to enjoy us talking with them, and I find it fascinating.

"It certainly feels an appropriate thing for us to do."

**David is connected to more than 1000 Hong Kongers in the UK through Facebook, and says he could help to advertise any classes. He can be contacted via: [chiwaiwu25@gmail.com](mailto:chiwaiwu25@gmail.com)**

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