

Reaching International Students & World Evangelization

Ministry among International Students is a highly strategic component of “world evangelization in reverse”, where relationships and interaction with students of the world occur in your own country’s campuses, communities, and churches, rather than in another nation. International Student Ministry (ISM) is a variation of the broader context of *Diaspora* ministry of serving and loving the foreign-born God brings to our neighborhoods. Even though international students are a smaller population of Diaspora peoples, they represent a significant component of the world’s future leadership. Christian international students and scholars who are disciplined during their sojourn abroad, may return home after graduation(or years later) and serve as Christ’s ambassadors and nation-builders.

Growth of International Students Worldwide

There is an accelerating growth of students going abroad, as reflected in UNESCO’s *Global Education Digest 2009*: nearly 3 million international students worldwide in 2007 [an increase of 53% since 1999]; with 8 million projected for 2025.

Most international students are in Europe (49%), North America (24%), and East Asia/Pacific (18%).

Leading host nations are the United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, Germany, Japan, Canada, South Africa, the Russian Federation and Italy. China, New Zealand, and South Korea are also experiencing significant increases of international students. With Capetown hosting *Lausanne III: Capetown2010*, it is interesting to note that South Africa is the only country in Africa that receives far more students (60,000) than it sends abroad.

Countries that send the most students abroad are China, India, Korea, Germany, Japan, France, United States, Malaysia, Canada, and the Russian Federation.

Growth of ISMs Globally

As the number of globally mobile students increases, so do the opportunities to be involved in ISM continue to grow. In order to get a simple glimpse of the global development of the ISM movement, this author conducted a survey in 2009 which yielded the following overview: North America has about 25 national or regional ISMs with over 1850 ministry staff; responses from Europe indicated ISM in at least 15 countries with about 110 staff; and the Asia-Pacific

region reported about 20 ISMs with approximately 200 staff or volunteer leaders. The potential for pioneering ISM in Africa and Latin America needs to be cultivated.

Growing Vision of the Strategic Nature of ISM

At a church's missions conference in 1975, a former international student labeled ISM as a "great blind-spot in missions". Over the last 35 years, that blind-spot has been diminishing as local congregations, denominations, campus ministries, mission agencies, and individuals continue to gain vision about the strategic value of ISM, and decide to get involved in "global missions at home".

There is a growing appreciation and understanding of **International Students and Scholars who are:**

- * already here and now, on our campuses, in our communities, and in our churches; we do not need to wait to go somewhere, over there, in the future; we do not need to get a visa, medical exams and vaccines, or purchase a plane ticket
- * sufficiently conversant in our language in order to study in our schools, or may be in a language institute to enhance the learning of our language, and appreciate the opportunity to practice our language with us (and while we do not need to be fluent in their native tongue, we could have them teach us some expressions in their language)
- * generally curious to learn about our culture, history, country (city, town) and may wish to have us as friends and host-culture mentors
- * often more open, curious, and responsive to learning about Jesus Christ while living abroad, such as has been seen among some ethnic or national groups of students
- * freer to consider the gospel if they are away from a restrictive society, culture, and religion that is hostile towards Christianity
- * often from unreached people-groups where the Church does not yet exist or is in an infant stage
- * appreciative of hospitality, and welcome relationships of mutual intercultural interaction, as well as the intergenerational social context of host-families where younger children, parents, and grand-parents are valued along with peer-age adults

- * potential world leaders politically and in their professions, nation-builders, and transformation agents. Many graduates eventually return home sooner or later, and often grow into leadership positions
- * Christian returnees who may significantly establish the universal Church: many of the top evangelical leaders of the Church in Malaysia and Singapore today were students in Australia in the '60's and 70's; John Sung came to Christ in the US in the mid-1920's and returned to China like an apostle and ignited a wide revival. At about the same time that John Sung was building a ministry in China in the late 20's, Bakht Singh of India, a Sikh, was being attracted to Christ over a span of months while studying in the UK and then in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Bakht Singh received Christ and returned to be an apostle to India, just like John Sung was to China and East Asia. "Bakht Singh's New Testament church planting model multiplied to over 500 congregations in India and 200 congregations in Pakistan, plus a number in Europe and North America" (from *Thinking Small: Global Missions and American Churches*, by Jonathan Bonk, Missiology, April, 2000).
- * informants and "instructors" that may advance the missions movement; Two mega-shifts in missions in the 19th and 20th century were spurred on by the informants-role provided by international students:

- 1) In the 3rd week of the July-long Moody student conference at Mt. Hermon, MA, 1886, a special "*meeting of the ten nations*" was held in which students from 10 countries shared briefly about the need for missionaries in their part of the world. Those "Macedonian calls" by foreign-students fueled a response that resulted in 100 of the 251 students signing a pledge of desire to be missionaries.

The missionary passion coming out of the conference was the initial thrust that led to the formation of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions in 1888. The SVMFM produced over 20,500 missionaries on the field, and thousands more who supported the missionary movement. [source: Student Power in World Evangelism, by David Howard, Inter-varsity Press, 1970]

- 2) Dr. Ralph D. Winter's development of the Unfinished Task of World Evangelization in relation to the "hidden peoples" or "unreached peoples" concept effected a paradigm-shift in mission understanding and strategic planning. What contributed to Ralph Winter's emerging "people groups" world-view and profound message on "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism" at the Lausanne 1974 International Congress on World

Evangelization? He told me in effect, that the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission where he taught at, had 10 students and 100 faculty...and went on to explain that he was a student learning about church growth and evangelism among the world's great diversity of cultural sub-groups, from a 100 "teachers"...his international student informants.

International students have played a tremendous role in the advance of missions understanding and needs, and will continue to be valuable instructors, if we are willing to listen and learn from them.

- * gifts of God to the host nation and Church; an African seminary student was instrumental in the conversion of a American veteran priest, who later became a bishop and played a major role in the evangelical renewal within his denomination.

Local churches are discovering how enriching it is to have a ministry among international students (the following excerpts are adapted from *Global Missions at Home*, by Leiton Chinn, Mission Maker Magazine 2008)

- * the benefits and tremendous global impact that's possible with a modest or even no ISM budget; high-yield but low cost
- * ISM provides a tangible dimension to a church's mission vision, with local engagement options for the congregation to participate in world missions beyond prayer and financial support of overseas missionaries and ministries
- * ISM incorporates the broad range of church members available for involvement, from children to retirees, and utilizes their varied gifts for service---hospitality, helps, administration, teaching, mercy, evangelism, leadership, etc.
- * returned or retired missionaries back home are extending their cross-cultural mission service by ministering among international students from the country or cultural-linguistic group they served overseas; our church-based ISM was augmented by returned missionaries
- * many people who have a desire to serve abroad but are not able to, are having a fruitful ministry with international students from the country or region of the world they had intended to go to
- * international student friends are ready-made language and cultural teachers for anyone going to the students' countries for long-term or short-term missions, study abroad, work, or simply a visit; ISM provides pre-field cross-cultural experiences

- * international students may provide a critical linkage for ministry/mission in their homeland, either personally after they return home or by giving a positive introduction and endorsement of missionaries to their family, friends, and networks; returnees could be gatekeepers that open the door for ministry by foreigners in their country
- * the reality is that most Christians are not called to serve as long-term professional missionaries or to be self-supporting "tent-maker" missionaries in another country, but will remain in our homelands. But staying home does not mean we cannot engage in cross-cultural, global ministry....ISM is one avenue for engaging in world missions at home, and sometimes in your home

John R. Mott is well known for being an extraordinary mission mobilizer, leader, and strategist, and he saw the need for ISM. He attended that first international student Christian conference at Mt. Hermon, MA in 1886, heard the plea for missionaries by students from the 10 nations, signed the missionary pledge, and was one of four who traveled across the country to spread the missionary challenge that gave birth to the SVMFM. "It was undoubtedly out this conference that the idea of a student volunteer organization to assist foreign students in the US grew in the mind of Mott....but it was not to come to fruition for more than 25 years" [Unofficial Ambassadors: the Story of International Student Service, by Mary A. Thompson, ISS, 1982].

John R. Mott is well remembered as the first chairman of the SVMFM, as the first general secretary of the World's Student Christian Federation, as chair of the International Missionary Council, as chair of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910 (which is being celebrated at Lausanne's Capetown2010 and other events), as the national secretary of the Intercollegiate YMCA, and was a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. What most people do not know is that in 1911 he organized and led the US's first organization designed to aid international students, the Committee on Friendly Relations Among Foreign Students(CFR). The CFR spawned and encouraged many programs and structures to service international students. Thus, one of the greatest missionary advocates and leaders of the last century was also the visionary to pioneer the first ISM organization in America...nearly 100 years ago.

Resources for Getting Involved in ISM

The Lausanne Occasional Paper #55, *Diasporas & International Students*, downloadable for free at HYPERLINK "<http://www.lausanne.org>" www.lausanne.org, provides numerous practical ideas including: Contacting International Students; Local Church Model; Campus Model; Getting Started; and Opening Doors to the Gospel.

Among the growing number of ISM websites are: HYPERLINK "http://www.acmi-net.net" www.acmi-net.net; HYPERLINK "http://www.ivcf.org/ism" www.ivcf.org/ism; HYPERLINK "http://www.isionline.org" www.isionline.org; HYPERLINK "http://www.friendsinternational.org.uk" www.friendsinternational.org.uk; and HYPERLINK "http://www.ism.org.nz" www.ism.org.nz.

Lausanne & the ISM Movement

The Lausanne movement included International Student Ministry as a new emphasis for world evangelization at its 2004 Forum in Thailand, and subsequently established the International Student Ministries Special Interest Committee in 2007. The ISM SIC sponsored an Asia-Pacific Regional and a Greater European Regional consultation in 2009 in preparation for Capetown2010, which will have four ISM Dialogue Sessions. Lausanne Regional ISM Leadership Teams are being developed for the Asia-Pacific, Greater European, and North America regions.

The World Evangelical Alliance & the ISM Movement

In the mid-2000's the *Association of Christians Ministering among Internationals* (ACMI), a 29 year old Canadian/US network of international student ministries and ministers, joined the WEA as an Associate Member. ACMI can provide resources for ISM development among the WEA network. Additionally, the WEA fellowship may refer Christian and seeker students coming to North America to connect with an international student ministry through the ACMI website, HYPERLINK "http://www.acmi-net.net" www.acmi-net.net, especially by utilizing the *ACMI-Link* and *Find an ISM Contact* links.

Conclusion

It is no coincidence that the number of international students is growing and they are going to more countries and campuses each year. In God's sovereign plan, the Church around the world has the opportunity to welcome and love foreign students in its midst. The Lausanne ISM SIC is ready to help.

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