

Reflections on Reaching the International Student Diaspora in North America

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Preface: This paper presented at the S.E. Evangelical Missiological Society meeting on March 29, 2014 at Columbia International University incorporates the vision of the strategic nature of International Student Ministry (ISM), the historical genesis and references to national ISMs of the U.S. and Canada, personal reflections of a practitioner, and practical suggestions and resources for engaging in ministry among internationals of the academic community.

Introduction

One way of viewing and distinguishing the broad context of Diaspora people groups is according to their status as being permanent residents or temporary residents in their new or host country. International students, scholars, and faculty, along with their families, constitute one of the sub-categories of temporary foreign residents. They may live on North American campuses or in our communities for a few months to several years. It is no accident, but the sovereign act of God that brings the future leaders of the world to us, and in increasing numbers.¹ Therefore, a profound local ministry opportunity with tremendous global impact exists. But even though the opportunity may exist immediately around us, it does not presume that the opportunity is readily seen or acted upon.

In 1975 at the world mission conference of famed Park Street Church in Boston, a former international student gave a powerful message, “The Great-Blind Spot in Missions Today”² about ministry among international students, and how the Church often failed to see the tremendous opportunity and potential for world missions to and through foreign scholars. That message certainly applied to the Church in 1975, and while there has been encouraging progress during the last 40 years in moving from blindness to sight and vision, there still remains the need for the Holy Spirit to remove and replace various shades of blindness with clarity and vision. Reaching the international student diaspora in N.A. first requires a clear and convincing vision upon which to build. Just as Jesus applied mud to the eyes of one blind man (John 9:6) to give vision, and spit in the eyes of another blind man, with a follow-up touch, to transform partial

1 Acts 17:25, From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him...”

2 Unpublished paper, *International Student Ministry: ‘Blind-spot’ to Vision*, Leiton E. Chinn, Lausanne Diasporas Strategy Consultation, Manila, May, 2009

vision to clear sight (Mark 8:22-25), so too this paper will primarily focus on the vision for ministry among foreign scholars. So, here's to "mud in your eyes" and some spittle too, if necessary, in order for vision to be well established and foster conviction and commitment to action.

Statistics: Seeing Reality

North America continues to attract a growing number of international students. In 1953 there were only 33,000 foreign students in the U.S, but sixty years later in 2013, the population has grown to over 820,000 according to the Open Doors Fast Facts 2013 report of the Institute of International Education. When you include English Language students and post-doctorate scholars and faculty, the number swells beyond a million. America, which is the primary destination of international students, will continue to draw a significant number for the next ten years based on three studies, by the U.K., Australia, and Canada, forecasting the rise of students studying abroad.³ Canada currently has over 265,000 international students and is striving for 450,000 by 2022.⁴

Since the year 2000 China and India have been the top two sending nations of students to the U.S. Currently the top three countries of origin are China (236,000), India (97,000) and Korea (71,000).⁵ To the surprise of many, in the last three years there has been a dramatic rise of students from Saudi Arabia, which is now the fourth leading sending country with 45,000 students. These statistics alone could generate a myriad of strategies with far reaching missiological implications. And where are most of the students located? The top ten states hosting international students are CA, NY, TX, MA, IL, PA, FL, OH, MI, and IN.⁶

Small in Size But Supremely Strategic

A million international students is comparatively small in relation to some of the permanent resident internationals in the U.S. In 2012 there were 13.3 million Legal Permanent Residents (non-U.S. citizens) and during the last two years over 100,000 refugees were admitted into the country.⁷ Nevertheless, ministry among and with international scholars, students, and faculty represents perhaps the **most strategic opportunity to advance God's Kingdom world-wide, and with minimal funding required** in comparison with other ministry/mission budgets. How is this so?

- Foreign students, scholars, and faculty are already here on most North American college and university campuses, at English Language institutions, and increasingly in high-schools. How convenient and inexpensive to engage the world that God brings to the neighborhood. It is not necessary to "go overseas", but simply visit a campus student center or dining hall. Some may even come to your church, or may even be your

3 *International Education Supply & Demand: Forecasting the Future*, Alan Ruby, Trends & Insights for International Education Leaders, June, 2013

4 CBCNews.ca (Radio-Canada National Public Broadcasting), January 15, 2014

5 *Open Doors Fast Facts 2013*, Institute of International Education

6 Ibid.

7 Phone call to the Office of Immigration Statistics, March, 2014

roommate in school. One of my roommates at Columbia Graduate School of Bible & Missions (now Columbia International University) was from Korea and he returned to high leadership in his Korean denomination and in a global institution. Another roommate of mine at Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission was from Uganda and he became a bishop. Anyone desiring to reach the world can tap into the potential of doing so without all the requirements and costs of international travel or relocation, by befriending international students who come from probably every country. And they are here, now, so there is no restraining delay or waiting period for a future date to go across the world.

- International students are sufficiently conversant in our language in order to study in our schools. Or, they may be in a language institute to enhance the learning of our language, and appreciate the opportunity to practice English or French 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). An English Language Institute student from Japan attended our church's Tea 'n Talk conversation program and came to Christ. She is now translating the English sermons into Japanese at her church in Tokyo.
- Foreign students are generally curious to learn about a host culture, history, country (city, town) and may wish to have us as friends and host-nation mentors. A group of churches have been conducting a "Tour of Madison" (WI) for many years, which includes a dinner in the homes of numerous volunteers. These students enter the homes and lives of the local citizens, in contrast to the often-repeated statement that "85% of international students never enter an American home".
- How important is it that international students are often more open, curious, and responsive to learning about Jesus Christ while living abroad than they were back home? This has been seen among some ethnic or national groups of students (e.g. Chinese and Japanese students) who are willing to participate in Christian community activities and demonstrate a genuine receptivity to the Bible. What missiological implications relate to the fact that the largest number of foreign students are from China and the most receptive group of students to the gospel have been the Chinese during the last 25 years?
- Many international students are freer to consider the gospel because they are away from a restrictive society, culture, and religion that is hostile towards Christianity. Do any examples come to your mind? Pray for modern day Sauls of Tarsus who may be transformed from antagonism to become missionary ambassadors while they study in North America.
- How many international students are from unreached or unengaged people-groups where the Church does not yet exist or is in an infant stage (e.g. "10-40 Window")? We do not know and there is a great need for research to be done. Mission faculty and mission agency researchers and strategic planners could include the topic of locating international students who come from an UUPG society as a standard category of "Finishing the Task" research. Mission majors and graduate students may consider topics such as Unreached

Peoples on Campuses in (“X” location in N.A.) as a possible thesis or doctoral research project.

- International students are 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. The Biblical teachings on welcoming the stranger and hospitality transcend head knowledge and ideal principles when people from various cultures experience a relaxed time of food, fun, and fellowship together.
- Certainly one of the obvious strategic values of international student ministry is the likely potential that the students could become national and world leaders politically, in their professions, and spheres of influence. The U.S. State Department has a list of nearly 300 world leaders who studied in the U.S.⁸ Truly, international scholars are the next generation of nation-builders, transformation agents, and cultural shapers. Many, if not most graduates eventually return home sooner or later, and grow into leadership positions. What is a less expensive but highly effective way to advance God’s Kingdom globally? Love international students and change the world.
- Christian returnees may significantly build 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. Returnees from North America who greatly impacted their country and region include:

John Sung who came to Christ while studying in the US in the mid-1920s and returned to China and Southeast Asia like an apostolic missionary and is describe as “the greatest evangelist China has ever known”.⁹

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”.¹⁰

- An overlooked and under-utilized contribution that international students may provide is to be informants and “instructors” that could advance the global 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 Moody student conference at Mt. Hermon, MA, 1886, a special “meeting of the ten nations” was held in which students from 10 countries

8 *Armed with U.S. Education, Many Leaders Take on World*, Ben Wolfgang, The Washington Times, August 19, 2012

9 From the Foreword by J.R. Stott, *Flame for God*, Leslie T. Lyall, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1954

10 *Thinking Small: Global Missions and American Churches*, Jonathan Bonk, Missiology, April, 2000

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.¹¹

2. 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” mission-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 it was the international students at Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission (SWM) where he taught at. He said the SWM 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.¹²

Ralph Winter’s first cultural mentor was Ali Asghar, a keen international student from Afghanistan with whom Ralph had a close friendship for eight years, starting when Ralph’s parents invited Ali to live with them for six months in Pasadena, CA and who later followed Ralph to Cornell to study engineering.¹³

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.

- Local churches are discovering how enriching it is to have a ministry among international students, scholars, and faculty:

International scholars are gifts sent from God to the host nation and Church. Christian international students have spiritual and cultural gifts that could be a rich blessing if a church body and/or campus ministry would incorporate them into both the fellowship and service ministry of the body. An African seminary student was instrumental in the conversion of a well established American priest, who later became a bishop and played a significant role in the evangelical renewal within his denomination. It was this author’s privilege to later serve with the bishop on a seminary board and develop its mission department.

My church’s international student Sunday School class eventually launched an evening worship service specifically to provide opportunities for believers from

11 *Student Power in World Evangelism*, David Howard, Inter-varsity Press, 1970

12 Personal conversation with Ralph D. Winter while the author worked closely with him in 1979-80

13 *Ralph D. Winter Early Life and Core Mission*, Greg H. Parsons, WCIU Press, 2012

various countries and cultures to discover and utilize their spiritual gifts. This stewardship decision resulted in the growth of the international participants and enriched the church. One international returned home as his country's first native priest.

International Student Ministry (ISM) provides a tangible dimension to a church's mission vision, with engagement options for the congregation to participate in world missions beyond prayer and financial support of overseas missionaries and ministries. The congregation can support overseas workers but also be missionaries as well by opening their hearts and homes and sharing their hobbies or everyday life.

ISM incorporates the broad range of church members available for involvement, from children to retirees, and utilizes their varied gifts for service such as hospitality, helps, administration, teaching, mercy, evangelism, leadership, etc.

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. For example, Edith Hayward wanted to go to India as a missionary, but she could not. Instead, the Lord enabled her and her husband John to host, disciple, and prepare an international student as a future vessel for His work in India and other parts of the world. When Bakht Singh lived with them as a newly converted foreign-student, little did they realize he would become the greatest evangelist and church-planter in India in the 20th century.¹⁴

International student friends are ready-made language and cultural teachers for short-term mission participants, North American students planning to study abroad, people preparing for a work assignment or job overseas, or others simply planning to visit another country.

Participants in short-term mission trips may continue their cross-cultural ministry by joining any ISM of their church or in the community after they return home.

The fruits of the ministry are not only the international students whose lives are blessed, but very much the church members who are engaged in the ministry. One significant example is that within a few years of starting my church's ISM several volunteers responded to a call to enter into career missionary service.

An astounding "bottom line" for a church-based ISM are the broad benefits and substantial global impact that's possible with a modest ISM budget, or often, with no line item in the church's mission or outreach budget. This is because the volunteers often cover the expenses of the ministry. Truly no other ministry produces as much world-wide high-yield results but with low or no financial cost to the church's operating expense.

- Mission agencies are realizing the strategic value of engaging in ISM:

14 Brother Bakht Singh of India, T.E. Koshy, OM Books, 2003

ISM provides excellent pre-field cross-cultural experiences and training for new missionaries and “tent-makers”. Patrick Lai states in *Tentmaking: Business as Mission*, “The most effective way workers can prepare to serve overseas is to invest one or more years ministering with international students. Ministering to international students needs to be given a stronger emphasis in the preparation of mission candidates. Workers who minister to international students before going overseas were shown to be much more effective than their peers”.¹⁵ Should mission agencies require or strongly recommend that their candidates participate in ISM or other diasporic peoples outreach as a condition or part of their pre-field training? Should Mission Departments and faculty of seminaries and Bible colleges urge mission majors to engage in ISM or a Diaspora Ministry?

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. For nearly forty years I have met many returned or retired missionaries who are now ministering among international students. Some have declared that they have seen more responsiveness to the gospel by students from the country they served in who are studying in North America than they did in the student’s home country. Should mission agencies include a recommendation to retiring or returned missionaries to consider ISM or other ministry among the Diaspora as an optional ministry back home?

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. A colleague met an African student who came from a tribe that a Bible translation mission wanted to connect with. The student was the son of the tribal chief and a connection was established.

When our daughter went for a year’s mission to Quito, Ecuador she was invited for dinner to the home of an Ecuadorian student that attended our church-based ISM over 20 years ago. Even though the Ecuadorian student has remained in America, her family back in Quito extended hospitality to our daughter.

Start of the ISM Movement in North America

John R. Mott is well known for being an extraordinary mission mobilizer, leader, and strategist, and he also saw the need for ISM. He attended Moody’s first Christian student conference at Mt. Hermon, MA in 1886, saw and heard the plea for missionaries by students from the 10 nations, signed the missionary pledge, and was one of four who later traveled across the country to spread the missionary challenge that gave birth to the SVMFM. Additionally, “It was undoubtedly out this conference that the idea of a student volunteer organization to assist foreign students in the

¹⁵ *Tentmaking: Business as Mission*, Patrick Lai, Authentic Media, 2005

US grew in the mind of Mott....but it was not to come to fruition for more than 25 years.”¹⁶ Mott’s grasp of the ISM vision is well documented in a chapter, “Diaspora Mission on Campuses: John R. Mott and a Centennial Overview of the ISM Movement in N.A.”, to be published in a book on diaspora missions as part of the Edinburgh 2010 Series by Regnum Press in 2014.

Mott may be remembered by missiologists as the first chairman of the SVMFM, the first general secretary of the World’s Student Christian Federation, chair of the International Missionary Council, chair of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910, 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, called the Committee on Friendly Relations Among Foreign Students (CFR).

The CFR spawned and encouraged many programs and structures to serve 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...just over a 100 years ago. The CFR was the only national ISM providing highly commendable ministry services during the four decades leading up to the 1950s.

In 1965 the CFR changed its name to International Student Service (ISS). After more than 70 years of ministry the CFR/ISS has ceased its services, but its legacy and lineage is monumental and its spirit of ministry among foreign students lives on through countless organizations and programs that caught its vision.

Stages and Start-up of Other National ISMs in North America¹⁷

The national campus ministries, mission agencies, and denominations that benefitted from the foundations of the CFR, caught the vision, and decided to engage in ISM include:

1950s to 1970s:

In 1952 *Intervarsity Christian Fellowship USA* launched an ISM Department under the leadership of missionary statesman, David Adeney. www.intervarsity.org/ism

Intervarsity Christian Fellowship Canada also began ISM in 1952. www.ivcf.ca/page.aspx?pid=405

International Students Incorporated (ISI) was established in 1953 and is the oldest mission agency exclusively dedicated to ministry among international students. www.isionline.org

The *Southern Baptist Convention* began their ISM in 1955, but a national coordinating office or leadership position has changed and fluctuated over the decades.

¹⁶ *Unofficial Ambassadors: the Story of International Student Service*, Mary A. Thompson, ISS, 1982

¹⁷ A list with expanded data of national ISMs from a 2013 survey is available from the author

In 1963 *Ambassadors for Christ* was birthed as an off-shoot from ISI and focuses on Chinese students. www.afcinc.org

Campus Crusade for Christ started an ISM department in 1968 that ended in 1978. But *Bridges International* was established in 1983 as a revived ISM for Crusade. www.bridgesinternational.com

The Navigators initiated their ISM in 1977. <http://www.navigators.org/Ministries/Missions/College/International%20Student%20Ministry%20ISM>

International Friendship Inc (IFI) started in 1979. www.ifiusa.org

Details of the founding process and descriptions of several early national ISMs are contained in a research paper written for Ralph D. Winter in 1979 by this author.¹⁸ The concluding wish of the paper became prophetic, “In 30 years [from 1949 to 1979] the foreign field of international students in the USA has grown from less than 30,000 to nearly 300,000. While the increase of the international student foreign field has grown substantially, the increase in laborers and ISMs has grown moderately. During this next decade[of the 80’s], may God grant a “great awakening” and response to the validity, vision, and mission of the ISM movement in America”. Within two years of that wishful prayer, a new ISM networking mechanism was birthed to enhance the development of the ISM movement in the USA and Canada.

1980s to 1990s:

One of the most significant developments of the ISM movement in North America was the first national ISM consultation hosted by ISI in Colorado Springs that brought delegates of most of the ISMs of the U.S. and Canada together in 1981 and resulted in the formation of the on-going North American network of the *Association of Christian Ministries to Internationals (ACMI)*, also known as, *Association of Christians Ministering among Internationals*. ACMI has convened an annual national equipping conference for ISM workers (staff and volunteers) during the last weekend of May since 1982. www.acmi-ism.org

Reformed University Fellowship-International of the Presbyterian Church in America began in 1983. www.ruf.org/ruf-international

Campus Ambassadors of the Conservative Baptist denomination started in 1984. www.missionsdoor.org/campus

International Student Ministries Canada (ISMC) was birthed with the assistance of ISI in 1984. Currently ISMC has 101 staff and the partnership of over 100 churches. www.ismc.ca

China Outreach Ministries (formerly *Chinese Overseas Christian Mission*) incorporated direct ministry among Chinese students and hired ISM staff in 1988. www.chinaoutreach.org

¹⁸ unpublished paper, *The Historical Development of the International Student Ministry Movement in the USA*, Leiton E. Chinn, 1979

Diaspora Ministry of OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) launched in 1988. http://www.omf.org/omf/us/get_involved_1/welcoming_ministry_diaspora

XAi (Chi Alpha Internationals) is the ISM of the campus ministries of the Assemblies of God that began in 1989. <http://www.chialpha.com/XAi/about-xai.html>

Horizons International began in 1990. <http://www.internationalcrossroads.org/other-locations.html>

Japanese Christian Fellowship Network (JCFN) was started by Japanese students attending the 1990 Intervarsity Urbana Missions Convention. JCFN specializes in preparing Japanese Christian students for “reentry” as returnees. www.jcfn.org

InterFACE Ministries started in 1991. www.iface.org

ISM Inc of the Lutheran Church/Missouri Synod began in 1996 and has an extensive network of church-based ISMs. www.isminc.org

2000s:

It was this author’s privilege to serve as president of ACMI from 2000-2008 during which time deliberate effort was made to network the North American ISM community with ISM leadership in other countries. To facilitate global networking I visited ISM conferences in Asia and Europe and also invited ISM leaders from those two regions and South Africa to participate in our ACMI N.A. conferences so that we might learn from their experiences and cultural contexts. Additionally I was asked to initiate ISM as a new category of mission emphasis in conjunction with Diaspora ministry for the Lausanne Movement since 2004. Global networking of ISM leaders will not only facilitate the reaching of the international student diaspora in N.A. but also greatly enhance the connection potential of international students returning home or relocating to another country with a Christian fellowship.

Church-Based ISM Models in North America

Based on various surveys by ACMI and research by this author, it is plausible that there could be about 500 churches intentionally engaged in directly reaching the international student diaspora in North America. Additionally there may be approximately 3,000 other “partnering” churches providing financial, logistical, and volunteer support for ISMs.

Probably the longest running church-based ISM is “FOCUS” of Park Street Congregational Church in Boston (<http://www.parkstreet.org/focus>). Two churches with at least a 30-year ISM are Briarwood Presbyterian Church’s “BIO-Students” (Briarwood International Outreach-Students) in Birmingham, AL <http://www.biostudents.org/>, and Truro Anglican Church in Fairfax, VA <http://truroanglican.com/grow/tips/>.

More and more cities and towns are seeing collaboration among churches along with campus-based ISMs in an integrated and unified outreach among internationals on campus. FOCUS in

Portland, Oregon began in 1986 and currently has nine campus-based ISMs cooperating with about 50 churches who provide volunteers to minister among international students in Portland (<https://sites.google.com/site/focuspdx/Home/about-focus>). HIS (Helping International Students) was founded in Manhattan, KS in 1979 by a couple that returned from Africa with a determination to have the churches in Manhattan extend hospitality to international students at Kansas State University. HIS has about 25 churches working together with a few campus-based ISMs. (www.hismanhattan.org).

Seeing: Vision with Compassion is Essential for Reaching Out

Throughout Jesus' ministry we notice that he saw people's needs and responded with compassionate action. This is essentially summarized in Matthew 9:36-38 where Jesus saw the crowds and felt compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, and asked God to send forth workers(shepherds) for the sheep. Certainly international students and all diaspora peoples may feel culturally harassed and helpless and in need of compassionate friends to guide them in a new and strange environment.

Some people see a need and respond in a timely manner. Such was the case with Bob Finley who saw the impact of Chinese students who returned from Russia with a conviction and commitment to adapt Communist ideology in China and were catalysts for the political revolution.¹⁹ After he was expelled from China in 1949 he applied the strategy of global transformation through returning international students, within the framework of the Great Commission, and started International Students Inc. Another example was an African seminarian at Columbia Graduate School of Bible & Missions who I met in 1978, and took to a conference for international students. The experience and vision from that conference guided him into career missionary service among international students where he serves as a city director for his ISM today.

Some people receive a vision-seed that remains buried for an extended season before germinating. This was John R. Mott's experience who caught an early glimpse of the potential for ISM, but it didn't bud until 25 years later with the birth of the CFR.

Some people have a general vision for ISM and are led into a special niche. While at Fuller Seminary Dr. Jack Burke considered the traditional avenue of campus-based, church-based, or community-based ministry among international students but ended up as the Director of the International Student & Scholar Services Office at the University of Houston for decades. He ministered by providing excellent and exceptional services for thousands of international students from within the campus system, and exponentially expanded the services both at his university and nationally through recruiting and mentoring 27 future International Student Advisers and directors.

Some people see with their eyes but not initially with their hearts or heads. That was my experience. Even though I should have been inclined to identify with international students because I was ironically classified as an international student (as an American citizen with a foreign-student scholarship at California Baptist College in 1962), I saw students from Asia on campus but did not connect with any emotional affinity. I saw them as foreign students in their

¹⁹ Reformation in Foreign Missions, Bob Finley, Christian Aid Mission, 2010

own world on campus, and I was in my American social context. They did not appear to need any help or friendship so I left them alone. There was no racial bias on my part, but simply no interest. I saw them but did not feel any compassion, perhaps because they did not appear as sheep needing or wanting an American shepherd. But as a student with a foreign-student scholarship, I went to the Thanksgiving conference for international students and my awareness and appreciation for foreign-students from the various campuses came alive. I felt “at home” and enjoyed the rich array of cultural diversity. Unfortunately that new positive experience did not return to the campus with me in terms of any further intentional, prioritized engagement with the international students on campus. It was not fear of cross-cultural interaction or ethno-centrism, but perhaps the inertia of complacency that dulled the weekend conference experience. My transformative and enduring vision for international students and ISM came 11 years later.

Sojourning in ISM: Personal Reflections

Proverbs 16:9 reminds us that, “In their hearts human beings plan their course, but the Lord establishes or directs their steps”. My plan was to serve God overseas as a “tent-maker” missionary, but God redirected me from a fruitful and fulfilling ministry in Korea back to America with a strong sense to remain in my country. I didn’t know what God had in mind but felt the need for some biblical and missiological training and He led me to Columbia Graduate School of Bible & Missions in 1975. During my second year I had a strong desire to return overseas but did not sense that Lord had released me from the call to remain in the United States. It was a confusing period of wanting to go overseas but feeling restrained to remain at home. This is when I met a visiting student at a one-week January course who served with ISI and explained the ISM vision to me.

Finally I saw the missiological potential of ISM and asked the school if I could begin an outreach among international students at the University of South Carolina. Permission was granted and I ventured out to the USC campus alone and without any coaching or training in ISM. The Holy Spirit said to offer sincere friendship to international students at USC and that is what I did with a few students. I attended an ISI Easter conference where the director asked if I would substitute for him at the ISI house in Atlanta that summer and lead a church’s ISM program. While coordinating the local church’s ISM I realized that many churches in North America did not realize or see the tremendous potential for world missions afforded through ministry among international students in their community. Seeing the need to cast the ISM vision with the Church in North America became God’s call to full-time ISM missionary service. My calling was to be a Johnny Appleseed to spread the ISM vision-seed throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Rather than return to campus in the fall, I joined ISI to travel throughout the U.S. and western Canada to share the ISM vision at weekend missions conferences. Another seminarian built upon the initial foundation I laid at USC and developed the ministry, and through that field experience became a full-time ISM worker at Clemson University until today. For nearly 40 years the Lord has led me to be an ISM mobilizer not only in North America and then globally since 2004.

Birth of TIPS

Part of the sojourn in ISM included the vision to have our church reach out to the nearly 20,000 international students at several schools and English Language Institutes in the greater Washington D.C. area in 1984. So I asked the rector of Truro Episcopal (now Anglican) Church in Fairfax, Virginia if my wife Lisa and I could start a ministry to the foreign students at nearby George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College and he replied, "Go for it". So "TIPS" (Truro International Programs & Services) was launched and we began with less than 10 volunteers. We sent a Potluck & Program invitation to the area schools and over 70 students and volunteers enjoyed a wonderful fun-filled time at a farm, where we talked about Culture Shock in September, 1984. Word of mouth promotion by satisfied students enlarged the turn-out at our next monthly dinner where we discussed American Values.

The monthly Potluck & Program was the primary event that fed into other avenues of ministry that included the Tea & Talk English Conversation meetings, trips, practical helps and resources, a Sunday School class, and other relevant activities of high interest to the students. The programs also allowed the students to be unofficial ambassadors of their country and they shared their food, music, and other cultural traditions. Within the first two years TIPS involved about a thousand church members in ministry among students from over 100 nations. Volunteers from several other churches also participated. The International Sunday School became the core of establishing an evening international worship service called "Sundays at Six" where Christian international students and other diaspora peoples could more readily exercise their spiritual gifts and leadership.

TIPS has evolved from an ISM genesis to being a fully integrated or blended ISM and Diaspora ministry that includes ministry to immigrants, refugees, diplomatic personnel, and professionals. After seven years as the volunteer TIPS director the church was willing to create a full-time staff directorship position that was filled by a person I recommended and mentored. That new director had wanted to serve as a missionary in Asia but circumstances did not allow that dream to materialize. Becoming the TIPS director has allowed him to significantly engage in global missions while remaining in America.

Suggestions for Involvement

- Find out what ISMs exist in your community and visit their activities.
- If you are a student, ask a professor if you might be able to get extra credit if you participate in an ISM. If you are faculty, consider how a student might be involved in ISM to receive extra credit. Numerous students here at CIU participate in different outreaches among international students in Columbia.

Also, consider being an international student by doing a semester or year abroad. Some American students not only ministered among the students of the host nation but also among fellow-international students when they studied overseas.

- Consider approaching the campus International Student Services Office to see how you might volunteer in any of their programs. Are they looking for Host families or friends, or for English Conversation partners? Also, find out what social activities are sponsored by any of the international student associations or clubs (e.g. a regular participant at our TIPS program was the president of the German Students Association at George Mason University).
- Would you consider renting a room to international students?
- How might international students serve your (personal, family, organizational, church) needs? Do you need a cultural mentor to share about their culture or country? Is there a need for a language helper?
- If no ISM exists in your area, would you be willing to explore beginning one? It could be a simple service such as organizing an English Conversation meeting for mutual cross-cultural learning.

Sources of Practical ISM Help

There are many resources to help you pioneer, develop, and enhance an ISM service or to consider various ways of getting involved. Whether you are new to ISM or an experienced veteran, it is highly advisable to join ACMI which immediately networks you with the broadest connection of ISM staff and volunteers who can share advice, resources, and the connection of relocating students who come into your community or leave your area, with a Christian fellowship at their new location in North America, and sometimes globally.

The Association of Christians Ministering among Internationals provides the richness of a 33 year-old network of ISM workers from churches, campus ministries, denominations, and mission agencies, in Canada and the United States. If at all possible attend the annual, national ACMI conference that usually has at least 30 practical workshops in addition to plenary presentations all relating to ISM.

Several of the national ISMs also conduct annual conferences which may be found in their websites listed above.

Additionally, explore the websites of Intervarsity USA, ISI, and others for extensive resources and practical tools and guidelines for ISM.

A free downloadable version of the Lausanne Occasional Paper #55 on *Diasporas and International Students* is available on the Lausanne Movement website at <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops.html>

Summary Conclusion

The reality is that most Christians are not “called” to serve as long-term professional missionaries or to be self-supporting “tent-maker” missionaries, or engage in “business as mission” in another country, but will remain in our homelands. But staying home does not mean we cannot participate in cross-cultural, global ministry.

Reaching the international student diaspora in North America is a highly effective and relatively inexpensive avenue for being involved in world missions at home. Practically all Christians can be involved in ISM in some fashion, but will not, unless they have a vision for it. Will you share the vision?