

Making Disciples of International Students in Global Migration

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Introduction:

Making disciples of Diaspora Peoples is both a growing opportunity and responsibility, as well as a challenge for the Church. It is a growing opportunity because of the increasing trend of migration of peoples, and also a responsibility for the people of God to welcome and love the foreign-born coming to our communities, campuses, and churches. Making disciples of international sojourners, whether they have become permanent residents or are temporarily living among us, is a challenge because they represent myriads of cultures and different kinds of groups, each with their own distinct needs. Most Internationals are immigrants or refugees, while others may be business people and other professionals, researchers, military personnel, seafarers, laborers, au-pairs, overseas domestic workers, short or long-term visitors, diplomats or government officials, academicians, etc..

The focus of this paper will be on ministry among International Students, who are a relatively small segment of the broad scope of Diaspora Peoples, but who represent a highly strategic component of the goal of “making disciples of all nations”. The immediate next generation of the world’s transformational leadership are in the world’s universities and colleges, and a steadily growing percent of students come from other countries. They may grow in professional and spiritual formation while studying abroad, and become nation-builders after they return home. Many, if not most, international students do return home, either within a year of graduation, or eventually years later as seasoned professionals, adding to the brain-gain and leadership potential for their countries and surrounding region.

II. Why is International Student Ministry (ISM) Highly Strategic in Relation to the Great Commission?

A. Strategic Elements.....International Students & Scholars are:

1. already among us, 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
2. 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 of their language)

3. generally curious to learn about our culture, history, country (city, town) and may wish to have host-country friends who can be cultural mentors
4. often more open, curious, and responsive to learning about Jesus Christ while living abroad, such as has been seen among Chinese scholars and Japanese students

[“But what of the the U.S. church’s opportunity to witness to the thousands of Chinese students in the United States...these scholars and students have importance beyond their numbers. For they likely represent a large segment of China’s next generation of intellectual leadership, and perhaps much of the economic and political leadership as well”, *Chinese Intellectuals and the Gospel*, by Ted Priskett, Evangelical Missions Quarterly, 1993]

5. freer to consider the gospel if they are away from a restrictive society, culture and religion that may be hostile towards Christianity
6. possibly from “unreached people-groups” where the Church does not yet exist or is in an infant stage
7. 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 main missiological lesson is.... found in John and Edith Hayward’s hospitality to a dusky stranger back in 1929. The Haywards professed no great love for the masses, nor did they devise even a single ingenious scheme for evangelizing the world. They *did* love one stranger. What the church in India, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan would look like today had the Haywards not welcomed Bakht Singh into their home is a matter of speculation. The fact is that without their hospitality two of the most significant movements in twentieth-century Asian church history probably would not have occurred”, *Thinking Small: Global Missions and American Churches*, by Jonathan J. Bonk, Missiology, April, 2000]

8. potential world leaders politically and in their professions, nation-builders, and transformation agents [China’s First Hundred by Thomas LaFarge recounts the profound transforming influence on China by the first group of returning Chinese students from the U.S. from 1872-1881, some of whom became Christians]
9. cultural informants or "instructors" who may advance missions awareness;

Two mega-shifts in missions in the 19th and 20th century were spurred on by the informants role provided by international students:

- a.) 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" fueled a response that resulted in 100 of the 251 students signing a pledge of willingness and 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]
- b.) Dr. Ralph D. Winter's development of the Unfinished Task of World Evangelization in relation to the "hidden peoples"/unreached peoples concept effected a paradigm-shift in mission understanding and strategic planning. What contributed to the emerging "people groups" missiological-view of Dr. Winter? He told me in effect, that the Fuller Seminary School of World Missions 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.

10. potential gifts and ministers of God to the host nation and Church; an African seminary student was instrumental in the conversion of a veteran mainline priest, who later became a bishop and played a significant role in the evangelical renewal within his denomination; Christian international students need to be encouraged and allowed to utilize their spiritual gifts and ministry experience while they are studying abroad

B. Returning International Students Impacting their Country/Region

A recent newsletter from a tentmaker friend in a restricted access country states that "more than 500 from our university have gone abroad during the last four years. Under the conditions of their scholarships, most of the students will return after graduation to take up positions at our school". Hopefully most of the returnees will bring back positive influences to their school and society, but some may be carriers of negative baggage (which was a concern briefly touched on

at the World Missionary Conference of 1910).

Certainly a book could, and should, be written about the many Christian international student returnees who were and are being used mightily by God in the service of their nation and the expansion of God's Kingdom in their region. One of the compelling strategic components for ISM is that Christian returnees are Christ's ambassadors to their own people and culture, and should be encouraged and equipped to return home with the conviction that God is sovereignly sending them home as His witnesses.

A survey for this paper was taken of ISM workers to list some Christian returnees who have made significant contributions in the advancement of the gospel and building of Christ's Church in their region. Some of the returnees came to Christ while studying abroad, and others were already believers during their international sojourn. Here are only a few of the returnees cited in the survey:

- * John Sung, who came to Christ in the US in the mid-1920's and returned to China as an apostle and revival spread like wildfire throughout the Far East.
- * At about the same period 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 and the region, 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" (Bonk, Missiology, April, 2000).
- * Many of today's top evangelical leaders of the Church in Malaysia and Singapore were students in Australia in the '60's and 70's. Adding to the ranks are graduates from the 80's and 90's, such as Dr. Patrick Fung, the first Asian International Director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, who was part of the Overseas Christian Fellowship of Sydney.
- * Two sisters from a highly restrictive country came to Christ as international students and returned home to have a very fruitful ministry until they were kicked out of their country. They have continued to have a highly successful ministry in other neighboring countries of the restricted region.
- * 1) Student in Portugal: In the 1980's Procel DaSilva Armando was sent by the government of Guinea-Bissau, West Africa, to study law in Portugal. He came to Christ and grew with the Christian Union of Portugal. After returning home he exercised courage and faith to decline situations that would compromise his convictions and as a result was promoted highly to serve his nation. Lindsay Brown summarizes the story in Shining Like

Stars with, "...in Portugal as an overseas student was able to become a Daniel at court back in his home country. We should never underestimate the influence that someone with courage can bring on the whole direction of a culture".

2) Student from Portugal: a high-school exchange student trusted in Christ in the U.S. and returned home and engaged in a university ministry. Later he became the national director of the campus ministry and entered into partnership with two international mission organizations to launch an ISM at two universities in Portugal. He also is a key leader with the Portuguese Bible Society. (Lausanne Occasional Paper #55).

- * A contemporary Japanese returnee has planted 70+ churches
- * A contemporary Chinese returnee has planted 7 churches, a specialized ministry, and a campus fellowship
- * Nijima Shimeta (aka Joseph Hardy Neesima) stowed away to America and became a Christian in 1866. After attending Amherst College, MA, he graduated from Andover Theological Seminary and became the first Japanese ordained Protestant minister in 1874. He returned to Japan in 1875 to start a Christian school that became Doshisha University and also Doshisha Womens College of Liberal Arts.

C. International Student Ministry (ISM) Benefits Local Churches & Ministries

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

1. the benefits and significant global impact that's possible with a very modest ISM budget; high-yield but low cost
2. ISM provides a tangible dimension to a church's mission vision, with engagement options for the congregation to participate in...beyond prayer and financial support of overseas missionaries and ministries
3. 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.
4. 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; we

had several missionaries and other returned expatriate government, military or business people involved regularly in our church-based ISM

5. 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; it is not unusual to hear volunteers say that they had a desire to be a missionary when they were younger, but circumstances changed their direction in life, and are now being global missionaries at home, and sometimes in their homes.

[“before the Haywards were married, Edith wanted to go India as a missionary, but she could not. The Lord instead enabled her and her husband to host, disciple and prepare a vessel for His work in India and other parts of the world...Bakht Singh...while living with them as a newly converted international student, little did they realize that their guest would one day be the...greatest evangelist and church-planter in India in the 20th century; from Brother Bakht Singh of India, by T.E. Koshy, 2003] [Edith Hayward had committed herself to missionary service in India... when instead she decided to marry a businessman, her “spiritually-minded” roommate and best friend boycotted the wedding, convinced that Edith had stepped out of the will of God; from Note 19, Bonk, Missiology, April, 2000].

6. international students are ready-made language and cultural teachers and mentors for anyone going to the students' countries for long-term or short-term missions, study abroad, work, or simply a visit
7. 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 [my own daughter did a study-abroad in Quito, Ecuador last year and was invited to the home of a former international student who was part of our church's ISM...and now our daughter will return to Quito in a few months to do six months of short-term missions]

[I have heard of returned students who either opened the door for missionaries or closed the door to missionaries, depending on their good or negative experiences in the missionaries' homeland]

8. ISM provides great “pre-field” cross-cultural experience for those planning to serve in another country and/or culture [“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 long before going overseas were shown to be much more effective than their peers”, Tentmaking: Business as Missions,

by Patrick Lai, 2005]

9. 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. Nevertheless, staying home does not mean we cannot engage in cross-cultural, global ministry....ISM is one avenue for engaging in world missions at home

III. Historical Context of ISM

A. John R. Mott: Visionary Pioneer for ISM...."CFR"

It is most fascinating that as Tokyo2010 commemorates and builds upon "Edinburgh 1910", and remembers John R. Mott as the central figure associated with the World Missionary Conference of 1910, that most people do not realize that John R. Mott is the central leader in pioneering the need for International Student Ministry.

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 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 [the CFR] 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 known as the first chairman of the SVMFM, first general secretary of the World's Student Christian Federation, chair of the International Missionary Council, chair of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910 (which is being celebrated at Tokyo2010, Edinburgh2010, and Lausanne's Capetown2010), 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 national 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 national ISM organization in America...nearly 100 years ago.

Even before the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Mott was thinking of the growing number of Chinese students in the U.S.. In 1909 he

helped to organize an independent service agency for Chinese students (Thompson).

As chairman and writer of the Report of Commission I, *Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World*, for the 1910 WMC, John R. Mott included glimpses of his awareness of the importance of ministry among the “increasing number of travelers from non-Christian nations, especially the wonderful migration of Oriental students to Europe and America (p.24)...Effective Christian work among the Orientals in the United States will have an important bearing on carrying the gospel to the lands from which the Orientals come...No effort should be spared to reach the increasing number of the ablest young men who are coming from Oriental lands to study in American colleges”(p. 259-60). Mott also warned that, “students who go from non-Christian lands to study in the West, in many cases, on their return to their homes, oppose Christianity because of the un-Christian treatment which they have experienced”(p. 347).

Among the recorded discussions following the report of Commission I, editor Mott included the following comments, “Mr. F.S. Brockman (YMCA, Shanghai) directed attention to a [mission] field comparatively minute, but important in its relation to the vast oriental field...China is sending her young men now, not by the score but by the hundreds and even by the thousands, to every part of the world, and this is the field, these college students...who are right in our midst, to which I should like to call your attention...Here is a field not distant but at our own doors, a field that is ready, a field that is actually easy...All that is needed is not new organizations, not more money, not more men---only the illustration of our own lives and in our own homes of the outgoing love of Jesus Christ”(p. 418-19).

Within two weeks after the conclusion of the 1910 WMC, Mott’s *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions* was published in which he reiterated and added to the facts and missionary perspectives pertaining to international students found in the report of Commission I.

Many years after the WMC, Mott was still citing the need for ISM at mission mobilization gatherings, as seen in his address at the Student Volunteer Convention, Indianapolis, IN, 1936, “One of the most important opportunities that we shall ever have, and this is true of the colleges represented here, is that of befriending foreign students who come within our gates. Some 11,000 or more are now in the institutions of learning in North America, representing 60 or more nations. I repeat, we will never have a greater opportunity than this of exposing them to the best life of our two countries, of taking them into our homes, of making true friends of them, and of commending our religion to them by life and work.” (p.256, *Addresses & Papers of John R. Mott, Volume I, The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions*. 1946)

There was negligible development of any other national ISM for 40 years following the establishment of the *Committee on Friendly Relations among Foreign Students* by John R. Mott. The CFR changed its name to *International Student Service* (ISS) in 1965.

B. 1950's: Pioneering Decade of ISM

InterVarsity USA led the charge to begin to incorporate ISM into its overall campus strategy when David Adeney became the first ISM Director in 1952. (www.ivcf.org/ism). Interservice Canada also cites 1952 as its ISM start.

In 1953 International Students Inc (ISI) was established as the first national mission to focus exclusively on international students. (www.isionline.org)

The Southern Baptist Convention began its ISM in 1955.

Details of the founding process and descriptions of several early national ISMs as well as some other localized ministries are contained in the research paper written in 1979 by this author for Dr. Ralph D. Winter, *The Historical Development of the International Student Ministry Movement in the USA*, 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, 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. The Association of Christian Ministries to Internationals (ACMI) was birthed in 1981 as a result of the first North American Consultation for International Student Ministry Workers. ACMI, which is now called the Association of Christians Ministering among Internationals, conducts annual equipping conferences for ISM staff and volunteers. One of the useful services of ACMI is that of linking transitioning international students with a Christian fellowship when relocating from one place to another; both *ACMI-Link* and a *Find an ISM Contact* link are on the ACMI website: www.acmi-net.net.

It is likely that the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students had some outreach to international students in Europe during the 50's.

C. Growth in North America; Europe; Asia-Pacific

The next 30 years from the mid-50's to mid-80's saw significant growth of the emerging ISM "movement" with 11 new national or regional ISMs in the U.S., including Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators. Also in the mid-80's ISI loaned staff to launch two indigenous national ISMs in Canada and the UK; International Student Ministries Canada (1984) and International Students Christian Services (now called Friends International) in 1985.

The ISM movement has been developing steadily in North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific Region since the 1990's. The development of ISMs in Africa and Latin America needs to be cultivated.

A summary of 53 major ISMs globally, with information on starting dates, number of staff, and websites is contained in *ISM: From Blind-Spot to Vision* (produced by this author for the Lausanne Diaspora Leaders Consultation, Manila, May, 2009). The paper is available upon request from the author.

IV. Current Status

A. Growth of International Student Population

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.

"Singapore's education blueprint aims to attract 150,000 foreign students by 2015"(The Philippine Star, December 11, 2007)

The Japanese government has launched a project called *Global 30* to increase the number of International students in Japanese universities from 127,000 to 300,000 by the year 2020.

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

B. Global Recognition & Networking of ISM:

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 ISM Leaders Consultation in Singapore and a Greater European Regional ISM Leaders Consultation & Training Conference in Amsterdam in 2009 in preparation for Capetown2010, which will have three ISM Dialogue Sessions.

V. Projections

A. Developing a Global Network of ISMs

One way to share the vision of ISM with the global Church and to encourage and equip denominations, mission agencies, campus ministries, local churches, and other ministries for outreach among international students, is to develop a global network of ISMs which will also encourage, resource, and equip one another to enhance the development of ISM in their area and context of ministry.

B. Networking Networks: ACMI, LCWE, WEA MC, regional networks

Both ACMI and the LCWE ISM SIC have a structure or agent in place to stimulate the networking among mission networks with the vision of ISM. Some preliminary networks to explore collaboration with include the World Evangelical Alliance Missions Commission, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Denominational mission agencies, global or regional campus ministry networks, etc.

C. From Mission Field to Mission Force

ISMs should be intentionally giving priority to discipling Christian international students to discern their calling as God's vessels of grace and the gospel, whether they return home, remain in the host country, or go to another country.

D. Ministry as an International Student; A Priority to Implement

Christian college students in a host country should be encouraged to commit to a semester or year abroad as an international student and in effect, be an intentional student “tentmaker”. Besides the academic and personal rewards of the study abroad experience, the student will both minister while abroad and return with a greater appreciation for and skills to engage a world of growing cultural diversity and “glocal” mission opportunities. Returned study abroad students are a natural pool for ISM engagement. This strategy is “ISM in reverse” for host country students.

Vi. Challenges

A. Continual Need to help God’s People Really See Internationals

God repeatedly emphasized in the Old Testament the command for His people to love and care for widow, orphans, and foreigners (aliens, strangers, internationals). But often people don’t extend help, friendship, or hospitality to marginalized people because they don’t “see” them. Their eyes may notice a foreigner, but their heart and will looks past the stranger. We need God’s grace and love to truly see the international students in our midst and feel compassion for them, just as Jesus felt when he saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd, lost and distressed, and he felt compassion for them. Seeing and feeling with God’s eyes and heart will direct our steps towards genuine welcoming of foreign students.

Last month I was at a conference that had four workshops related to ISM. A question was asked of the participants, “Are more American students noticing or seeing international students?” The unanimous reply by representatives of different campus ministries was “no”. The greatest pool of potential friends and witnesses to international students are their fellow host-national students, but they are practically blind to seeing the mission field sitting next to them or residing on the other side of their dorm-room wall. Who will encourage the local students to lift up their eyes and see world, ripe for harvest in their classrooms? Who will challenge them to ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers into the global harvest on their campus?

B. Need for Formal ISM Academic Training

The first generation of the contemporary ISM movement is at the stage of winding down their race and should be passing the baton to younger

leaders. Most of us who have been involved in ISM since the 50's have not had any formal academic training in ISM because it hardly exists. There is an occasional introductory course on ISM, but no degree with any emphasis or concentration in ISM. It would be irresponsible and a failure of stewardship if this present generation of long-time veteran ISM staff does not address the need to establish some academic courses and possible Masters degree with an ISM focus, so that the next and future generation of ISM workers can at least have an option for academic training and research in ISM, to go along with non-academic training opportunities (e.g. organizational training and ISM conference workshops). This need to explore and establish some academic training in ISM has been picked up by some ISMs in North America.

VII. Resources

A. Websites

The ACMI website, www.acmi-net.net has a link for Ministry Resources. If you go to the 4th page of the Resources link, you'll find, the List of ISM Websites World-Wide which has hundreds of ISM related websites from 36 countries

Other major ISM websites include:

www.ivcf.org/ism

www.isionline.org

B. Lausanne Occasional Paper #55: "Diasporas & International Students"
www.lausanne.org (free, downloadable to print)

Conclusion:

The Tokyo2010 Declaration includes a concluding Pledge that commits us to "seek to know where people are unreached, overlooked, ignored, or forgotten. We will pray for the Holy Spirit to give strength and guidance as we join with others in changing that neglect, to love and make disciples [of International Students] in the way of the Cross.

Amen

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