

# LAUNCHING A NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY

## A Guide for Congregations

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### Introduction

Campus ministry among international students is perceived as a "foreign" adventure for many congregations. The fear of the unknown, cultural and language differences and other factors dampen the good intentions of campus mission efforts by congregations among students from beyond the borders of the United States.

This section of Tool 7 of the District Campus Ministry Tool Box is presented in an effort to carry out the vision and mission of the Rocky Mountain District Campus Ministry Committee, namely, to facilitate the efforts of District congregations in strengthening the faith of post high school students who have matriculated to campuses of higher education so that they might share their faith with international students and families who have come to the U.S. to study.

This tool will provide a number of valuable guidelines for congregation desiring to be involved in the international campus mission. At least some of the answers will be provided to those typical questions: Why? When? Where? Who? How?

### What is International Student Ministry (ISM)?

A ministry among international students demonstrating and proclaiming God's love both in word and deed to those from all nations, races, tribes, and languages. The Holy Spirit uses this ministry both to bring people into a living relationship with Jesus Christ and to equip them to reach out to others.

### What is ISM, Inc.?

ISM, Inc. is a mission society of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod challenging and assisting the church and individuals to intentionally offer international campus communities friendship, hospitality, and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

See <http://www.isminc.org> for further information

### Reasoning for this crucial ministry:

Why minister among international students? First, the Biblical basis for international student ministry can be summed up as published in the ISM By-laws which state:

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When Jesus says, "My command is this: love each other as I have loved you," He establishes the nature of our behavior to our neighbor. John further comments, "Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." Soon after the children of Israel departed from Egypt, they were told: "You are to love those who are aliens for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt."

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In addition, Scripture directs our mission eyes to the following passages:

**Matthew 28: 18-20.** He told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore go make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this-that I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

**Leviticus 24:22.** "You shall have the same law for the foreigner as for the home-born citizen, for I am Jehovah your God."

**Matthew 5:40-44.** "If you are ordered to court, and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat too. If the military demand that you carry their gear for a mile, carry it two. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow. There is a saying, 'Love your friends and hate your enemies.' But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!"

**Romans 12:13.** When God's children are in need, you be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night.

**Revelation 7:9-15.** After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from all nations and provinces and languages, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white, with palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a mighty shout, "Salvation comes from our God upon the throne, and from the Lamb." And now all the angels were crowding around the throne and around the elders and the four Living Beings, and falling face down before the throne and worshiping God. "Amen!" they said. "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be to our God forever and forever. Amen!" Then one of the twenty-four Elders asked me, "Do you know who these are, who are clothed in white, and where they come from?" "No, sir," I replied. "Please tell me." "these are the ones coming out of the Great Tribulation," he said; "they washed their robes and whited them by the blood of the Lamb. That is why they are here before the throne of God, serving him day and night in his temple. The one sitting on the throne will shelter them..."

**1 John 1:1-4.** Christ was alive when the world began, yet I myself have seen him with my own eyes and listened to him speak. I have touched him with my own hands. He is God's message of Life. This one who is Life from God has been shown to us and we guarantee that we have seen him; I am speaking of Christ, who is eternal Life. He was with the Father and then was shown to us. Again I say, we are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard, so that you may share the fellowship and the joys we have with the Father and with Jesus Christ his Son. And if you do as I say in this letter, then you, too, will be full of joy, and so well we.

Second, ISM fits into the LCMS mission endeavor. How and why? There are numerous facts that compel us to be involved in international student ministry and each should at least be considered when evaluating the pros and cons of involvement in the campus mission among international students. The list of facts and situations include the following:

- ✓ Only ten (10) percent of international students are Christian believers...the remaining 90 percent create a huge potential mission field.
- ✓ Eighty (80) percent will return to their home land...potential ambassadors for Jesus in their country where they speak the same language as family and friends.
- ✓ Seventy (70) percent have not had a meal in an American home...potential for relationships, developing an awareness of Christ, creating a positive attitude toward Christians, and the sharing of faith in a comfortable setting.
- ✓ Sixty-six (66) percent are from Asia...India, China, Japan are the largest sending countries (where the Christian faith is but a small percentage).
- ✓ Forty (40) persons, previously students in the U.S., have returned to their home county to become world leaders. What a potential for Christianity!
- ✓ 40 countries in the world are closed to Christian missionaries. "What if" a former student becomes a Christian leader in one of those countries?

- ✓ Most students demonstrate a significant openness (a positive attitude) toward the Gospel. They mistakenly believe that America is a Christian country – and that creates a marvelous opening to begin sharing.

### **Ministry Values and Principles**

Strategic and broad scope activities in international student ministry should include at least the following:

- ✓ Base the international student ministry firmly on the Word of God.
- ✓ Be consistent in always announcing exactly who and what you represent and what organization you represent when conversing with international students. You need to be up front about being Christian.
- ✓ Focus on the cultures represented by the students, not our own here in the U.S. By doing this, you create a safe place to belong, for all cultures.
- ✓ Remember that there is nothing like unconditional love...mutual respect...be yourself, and ever be open to the serendipitous moments for sharing the faith.
- ✓ With excellence as your goal, work with professionalism...for the glory of our God.

A number of principles ought to be kept in mind when being involved with international students in a campus ministry setting. Basic ministry principles to be aware of:

- ✓ Bond early. If at all possible, pick up students at the airport when they arrive. You may be able to invite them to a first meal in this country. Ask the foreign student office if you might be involved in the international student orientation program, or sponsor one your self. The foreign student office may even permit you to serve a welcome meal at your campus center/church.
- ✓ Presence is crucial. Be where they are.
- ✓ Conflict is inevitable. Learn from it.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to seek your own orientation from international student advisors on your local campus, or the international student organization leadership...ask what to do and say and what not to do or say.
- ✓ Do not jump ship halfway across the pond...do not give up at the first sign of conflict or frustration. Remember, the student may well have the same feelings and really want and need your friendship and assistance...and God's Word. Even if a student does not seem interested in the Good News, continue the relationship (put yourself in his/her religious shoes. Comfortable?).
- ✓ Hospitality is global. Express the best of the warmth that is ours in America...particularly as God's representatives.

### **Some Beginning Steps**

Ships function and international student ministry programs are effective because of the effective training of the crew. Several areas of training that are suggested are:

- ✓ **Orientation Training.** There is need for orientation about the general campus ministry program that is being currently offered by the campus ministry/congregation. There is need for orientation by the college or university regarding the programs and resources already provided by the school, as well as determining how the campus ministry program might fit, or complement, already existing programs. Likewise, it is wise to know as much about the present and prospective life that the international student is having or will have relative to his or her educational experience.

- ✓ **Basic Training.** Knowing the role that everyone is to play in the program is important, and how to carry out that role is essential. In addition, knowing the cultures of the larger countries represented; knowing several words in their native tongue, especially words of greeting and those words that are considered complimentary and honorable. Learn about some of the largest world religions so that you can at least dialog with non-Christian international students.
- ✓ **Specific Task Training.** The training referred to here includes that of acting as a Friendship or Host family (job description for same is found in Tool 6); leading a conversational English group; being a conversation partner; leading/facilitating a Bible study among students who have little or no information about Scripture or the Christian faith; etc.
- ✓ **Continuing Education.** Training is not a one shot program, it needs to be continued, enhanced and revised as new needs arise and situations change. Are there new students from countries not before studied? Has the college or university discontinued a program or changed a program calling for the campus mission program to be revised or added to? Here may be opportunities for present volunteers or outside personnel to be involved in teaching.
- ✓ **Leadership Training.** One problem that occasionally occurs is that of a change in the leadership. People get burned out. Pastors accept a new Call. The DCE retires or is called to another congregation. A supportive family moves to a new city or a person is transferred. Who will create continuity in the program once it is started? The international student ministry leadership (paid or unpaid director) must be prepared at such a time. One should always have a contingency plan that could be carried out by persons who have been trained in the leadership of the program.

Whether launching a ship or a campus ministry program, much less an international student ministry, getting organized is essential as one begins. Some of the essential organizing steps for such a program should include:

- ✓ Find like-minded individuals; persons who are committed to bringing Christ to the international student. Find someone to whom you (or the leader/director) will be held accountable...and obligated to continue once a program has been initiated.
- ✓ Visit the foreign student office on campus. Some of the alternative names for such an office might be: "Foreign Student Adviser," "International Programs," "International Student and Scholar Services," or, "Office of International Educators."
- ✓ Know the characteristics, culture, country of origin of the students whom you are about to meet...get an idea about the demographic characteristics associated with the students.
- ✓ Visit (interview) with a number of international students who are familiar with the type of students with which you plan to be involved.
- ✓ Develop your overall strategy...a careful plan and understanding the methods to be implemented in order to achieve a relevant international campus ministry is wise.

What are these steps designed to achieve? "Customer satisfaction" or international student satisfaction is one primary accomplishment that these steps should achieve. In addition and even more essential is the achievement of an *awareness* of your program and the development, within the international student, of a *positive attitude* toward you the person, and your program and its supporters and associates.

Expecting any participation at all in your international student ministry program *requires* both an awareness of the program and a positive attitude toward it on behalf of the student. If **either** is missing a program will not succeed; students will not be predisposed to participate. In addition to being *willing* to participate, the students must be *able* to participate; having transportation, having ample funds if any are required and the elimination of any other barriers to participation is a basic.

## **Toward Awareness and Attitude**

A few of the many actions that can be taken with which to develop awareness and positive attitudes and enhance relationships include the following:

- ✓ Offer assistance, in any way possible, for the students to learn the English language.
- ✓ Assist in volunteering at the college/university foreign student office in order to plug into their programs and become familiar with students and others involved with international students.
- ✓ As mentioned before, offer to pick up students at the airport when they first arrive or if transportation is required for a subsequent arrival from their home.
- ✓ Create a group of friendship or host families who would be willing to be friends with and mentor students. (A job description for such a position is located in Tool 6 of the Tool Box.)
- ✓ Conduct classes for the exchange of cultural characteristics and the meaning of our holidays. Learn from other cultures. This might include cooking demonstrations for both the students and the hosts.
- ✓ Keep in mind the opportunity to demonstrate gentleness, availability and sensitivity.
- ✓ And other things such as: (See also Tool 6 for additional activities)
  - Rummage sales
  - Parenting classes
  - Family retreats
  - Lunch and or dinner invitations; in writing or in person
  - Hayrides
  - Ice skating
  - Church events

## **The Role of Worship and Faith**

The ISM By-laws state that international student ministry demonstrates and proclaims God's love...to "bring people into a living relationship with Jesus Christ." What should the faith strategy include, or not include, regarding worship and faith?

- ✓ Do not make worship the first activity. It might be so uncomfortable for the student that he/she will not return.
- ✓ Suggest "observing" a worship service rather than "attending" a worship service.
- ✓ Create a safety net for the students regarding worship and faith. Consider how you would feel being invited to a worship service of a strange denomination or cult? Allow the student to convince him/herself that attendance is a good thing to do.
- ✓ BUT, always share Jesus and your faith through expressions and acts of gentleness and kindness when ever possible.
- ✓ Look for openings in discussions and in your relationship into which Christian and God centered discussion could take place.
- ✓ Remember that many cultures openly speak of spiritual things. Don't hesitate to speak spiritually just because our culture tends to isolate religious talk from the rest of conversation. Learn where Christianity fits into their concept of spirituality.

## **For Christ's Workers**

The role of worship and faith is not limited to the receivers, the students. Worship and faith play a crucial role in the lives of all of the campus ministry workers: volunteers and providers, the pastors, lay congregation members, neighbors and friends, and other professional church workers. Some advice:

- ✓ Pray for a new vision.

- ✓ Think outside of the box (or avoid the box altogether). Be creative and innovative.
- ✓ Explore where you have never been before.
- ✓ Be willing to make mistakes. (Seeking permission is harder than asking for forgiveness). If you make a mistake, ask forgiveness and begin again.
- ✓ Do not be afraid to challenge others to walk with you.
- ✓ Expect miracles (great things) to happen.

Glen O'Shoney's word of encouragement for prayer:

*Lord God, You have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by path as yet untrodden, through perils unknown.*

*Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.* (source unknown)

And remember to pray together for the following:

- ✓ Your international friends.
- ✓ Guidance as you begin a new ministry.
- ✓ Wisdom in choosing co-workers.
- ✓ Congregational support.
- ✓ The work of our mission society, ISM, Inc.
- ✓ **Ablaze!** in our own Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
- ✓ Vision for your mission efforts.

### References and Resources

- ✓ The internet including [www.isminc.org](http://www.isminc.org). The list of resources listed on the website is quite extensive. You will find a listing of short articles by LCMS workers on beginning an ISM. Otherwise do a search on the internet.
- ✓ The World at Your Doorstep by Lawson Lau, 1984 (ebay); , or the newest book published (June 2006) covering many topics: God Brought the World to Our Doorstep by Lawson Lau.
- ✓ Site visits including: Alleluia Lutheran Church, Tempe, Arizona (full time ISM director); Saint Louis, Missouri area (one full time and one half time director); Concordia, Irvine (Keiko Yoshimura – part time); University Lutheran, College Station, Texas (pastor using peer ministers).
- ✓ Experienced in the field: Bessie Fick, Ames, Iowa; Augusta Mennell, Slippery Rock, PA; Marcia Mittwede, Round Rock, TX; Paul Hoemann, College Station, TX; and Carl Selle, Stevens Point, WI.