

## HOSTING A STUDENT IS A TWO-WAY STREET OF JOY

**Angela Mueller**  
**Glen Carbon, Illinois**

For a recent Thanksgiving, we gathered with family and friends to enjoy the traditional holiday feast of turkey, stuffing and pumpkin pie. Then we wrapped up the evening by learning some traditional Persian dances.

This mashup of cross-cultural traditions is just one of the many joys of welcoming an international student into your life.

My family has lived just miles away from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville for many years, but we had never had much interaction with the university community until a couple years ago, when the leader of our church's mercy ministries mentioned that an organization at SIUE that supports international students was looking for additional host families. With some trepidation, my husband and I, along with two other families from our church, signed up.

Our family initially was assigned to serve as host family for two female students, one from Iran and one from Poland. Although we got to spend only a limited amount of time with our student from Poland, who returned home earlier than planned due to the onset of the pandemic, each of these students has been a blessing to our family's life, and our student from Iran is truly a part of our family now. She's been with us on holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas and the Fourth of July. She's gone on outings with our church youth group. She's celebrated our children's birthdays with us, and we've celebrated her birthday with her. She taught us about the Iranian New Year, even teaching us to say "Happy New Year" in Farsi so she could send a video of us, her American family, offering a greeting to her family back home in Iran.

As a host family, we simply provide support to our student. She lives on campus and is fully independent, but we take her grocery shopping, help her navigate issues such as setting up a cell phone plan and finding an eye doctor, and work with her through the difficulty of writing research papers in a language that is secondary for her. We strive through each interaction to show her the love of Christ.

In exchange, she has taught my husband and I and our three children so much about Persian culture. Beyond attempting Persian dancing (some of us more successfully than others), we've visited Persian restaurants with her, where she does all the ordering and we enjoy eating whatever she's selected. She's come to our home and cooked some of her favorite meals for us, she's introduced us to the traditional music she loves, and her mother has even shared recommendations with me for the best Persian teas. She has made herself at home in our midst and now

introduces our daughters to her friends as her sisters and calls our teenage son by his family nickname.

And all of this happened much more naturally than I anticipated. I was nervous before meeting our students. My own children are still in high school and grade school, and I was insecure about interacting with a college student, much less one from an entirely different culture. But I was set at ease almost immediately. A friend from church whose family also signed up to serve as a host family told me that other members of her family tried to discourage her from getting involved, telling her she didn't know anything about

international cultures. Her reply was that she did know how to be a mom and provide support – and hugs – when needed. I believe her perspective is correct. You don't have to be an expert in international relations. You just have to have a heart that is willing to share the gifts God has given you with a person who is a stranger in a strange land. It's what God has called us to do. "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 19:34

It may sound intimidating, but it's probably easier than you think to get involved with international students. Contact your local university to find out if they have support programs already in place where you could get involved. Or if you're in a university town, find out if any of your local churches have such programs in place. Or contact ISM to learn more about possible opportunities.

Sometimes an international friendship is closer than you think.



# THE TWO-WAY JOY OF BEING A CONVERSATION PARTNER

Jen Garmon, Volunteer  
Friendship House MSU

**L**AST SPRING, I RECEIVED a call from a church friend, which ended up being a ray of sunshine in the midst of a long stay-at-home season brought on by the pandemic. My friend Betsy, a board member at Friendship House MSU, asked if I would consider being an English conversation partner. Betsy shared her own experience as a conversation partner. She said it was a one-hour-per-week commitment. All it required was showing up and having a conversation.

For context: I am a former high school English teacher who recently — in the wake of the pandemic — become a stay-at-home mom. Quite honestly, Betsy's question was an easy one to answer. Yes! Of course I could carve out an hour a week for conversations with a woman from Colombia.

And what an amazing series of conversations I've had since then.

I first met my conversation partner on Zoom, and some of those early virtual meetings involved technical glitches that made communication challenging — but we powered through. We connected quickly on the topic of motherhood, and

in those first few weeks, our conversations covered cooking, music, and strategies for getting a toddler to take a nap. Later, our conversations veered into vacation destinations and the COVID situation. We also tackled more complicated topics, such as home ownership, poverty, food pantries,



and gun ownership in the United States.

After we were both vaccinated and feeling safer, we met in person, and our conversations flourished. Our time together went from a process of getting acquainted to a process of nurturing a friendship. We went for many long walks together, we went to an art museum and

shopping together, and we even took a few dance classes together! One of my favorite afternoons was when we went to get her a library card, which opened up a world of resources for her and her two-year-old son.

I must say that in the midst of the pandemic, when the grayness of late winter made the days feel long, that phone call invitation from Betsy was a ray of sunshine. The friendship that I've developed with my conversation partner has added a warmth and depth and richness and joy to my life that I never would have expected. My hope is that it continues over Zoom when she returns to her home country this winter.

My conversation partner and I have both acknowledged that meeting each other through Friendship House is because of God, and we are grateful for the people who have made it possible for us to connect.

Please pray for the conversation partner program at your site and consider who you could invite into the program. Your willingness to do so might become a much-needed ray of sunshine for someone.

## LET US JOIN TOGETHER IN PRAYER...

### For students and scholars

- 🌍 That each international student and scholar would experience times of rest and refreshment during the last days of their winter break.
- 🌍 For any new international students and scholars joining campuses in the middle of the year to be well oriented and to make connections to international student ministries on their campus.
- 🌍 That Jesus would be known to each international student and scholar as the "light of the nations" and the one who "shines into the darkness".
- 🌍 That the true story of the courage of St. Valentine and his concern for God pleasing marriage would be heard by each international student and scholar.

### For ISM sites, leaders and Volunteers

- 🌍 For wisdom for those planning the new semester's English classes, Bible studies and activities for each ISM site.
- 🌍 For creative ideas and opportunities to meet with students virtually or face to face despite the challenges of winter weather and continued COVID restrictions.

- 🌍 That during the season of Epiphany as the church celebrates Christ revealing who he is to both Gentiles and Jews, that we would share these truths in appropriate ways with international students and scholars.
- 🌍 That each of us would invite or welcome more Christians to engage with internationals through ISM activities or through one on one interactions.

### For InDepth Bible Seminar

- 🌍 For God to prepare the hearts and interests of students and scholars who would benefit from and be blessed by the InDepth Bible Seminar.
- 🌍 For God's guidance for JJ Voelker, Sue Hasselbring and any other staff, as they prepare the program and content of InDepth.
- 🌍 That God would provide volunteer child care workers so families with children can attend InDepth as a couple.
- 🌍 For a solid team of prayer partners to pray for the staff and participants of InDepth.

- 🌍 That lives would be transformed for God's glory during the seminar.

### Internship Program

- 🌍 Praise God for how he is working through Grace Moody, the ISM Inc. intern serving students at Grand Valley State University along with Pastor Cercez of St John Lutheran, Allendale MI.
- 🌍 That potential interns for Fall 2022 would apply to the internship program.
- 🌍 That ISM sites that would like to be revitalized would see the internship program as a way to restart their efforts to share Christ's love with internationals.

### Board of Directors

- 🌍 For the Board as they meet virtually on January 16 for their quarterly meeting.
- 🌍 For God to provide new board members to take the role of Development Coordinator, Public Relations Director and District Mission Executive.

# 3-WAYS TO FULFILL THE GREAT COMMISSION...WITHOUT LEAVING HOME!

By Kate Cole, ISM Inc. Board Secretary

Answer the questions below and you may discover that you can go into all the world without leaving home and welcome the stranger even on your doorstep!

## Are you a college student seeking direction in your life?

You can immerse yourself in an international community without a passport or plane ticket, while learning about many cultures in our world! Through our ISM Inc. Internship program, you will spend a semester learning from one ministry site, and then help build a new site while experiencing the joy of sharing Jesus with people from around the world. Check our website, at <https://www.isminc.org/internships.html> to learn more.

## Are you a member of an LCMS church that desires to broaden your international ministry?

Through hosting an intern and starting to reach out

to international students and scholars, your LCMS congregation can engage your members more deeply in missions. Our board and staff will train you and the intern to integrate with internationals via conversation classes, friendship family programs, and other innovative methods. We especially hope to start sites in the 24 states that don't yet have International Student Ministry outreach (See chart below). Contact me [Kate@isminc.org](mailto:Kate@isminc.org) for more information.

## Lastly, are you a part of an ISM Inc. site seeking to re-build, or revitalize?

Perhaps your ministry needs a young leader to help it restart after COVID. The internship program can help your site get back on its feet while growing new leaders for God's mission to the nations.

We'd be happy to answer any questions you may have. Just contact us, at: [Kate@isminc.org](mailto:Kate@isminc.org), and we'll explain in detail how you can join us in this world-changing ministry.



## YEAR-END GIVING STATEMENTS

The IRS does not require us to send year end giving statements in January of each year (because we acknowledge gifts during the year). If you would like a year-end statement, please email or call us.

[isminc@isminc.org](mailto:isminc@isminc.org) (715) 869-6460

Thank you for your financial partnership!

## Your gifts to further the ministry of ISM Inc. are always appreciated.

You may mail a check to:

ISM Inc.

P.O. Box 22

Stevens Point, WI 54481

You may give online by PayPal via [isminc.org/give](https://www.isminc.org/give)

Please contact us if you have questions or would like to set up automatic deposit.

Contributions are solicited with the understanding that ISM Inc. has complete discretion and control over the use of all donated funds. ISM Inc. will attempt to honor gifts preference for specific expenses, but the final decision on the use of all funds rests with the organization.

ISM Inc. is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization and your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Donation receipts are sent after each gift and, upon request, at year end.



# "IN-DEPTH" CONFERENCES WILL RESUME IN 2022!

By JJ Voelker, ISM Inc. Board President



time to learn about the faith and Jesus.

This verse in Acts reminds us that faith takes the Holy Spirit, time, hearing His Word, and having a safe place to ask questions. After prayer and consideration, this year we are planning to restart the In-Depth Bible conference! After two years of not being

The dates will be May 16th-20. The place will be at a site to be determined in the St. Louis area.

Please start mentioning this opportunity to students, scholars, and their families in your ministries. We will be sending more specific information as details develop.

We want to help you help students to grow in their faith and love of Jesus Christ! The conference will be a little shorter than in the past with some new additions.

Sue Hasselbring and I, JJ Voelker will be leading the sessions to the students. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or ideas.

**A**FTER JESUS ASCENDED into heaven, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples and the church began to grow by the thousands. What did the people do? "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Teaching was important.

There were many unusual needs, partly because some of the people had come to Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost and ended up staying a long time. Learning and teaching were very important at this time. The believers spent time learning about Jesus, and both asking and answering questions. They needed to take that

able to offer it due to the Covid19 Pandemic we are re-launching this faith building opportunity! We want to help seekers in your campus mission sites to have a special time to ask their questions, hear about the Good News of Jesus, see that there are others in their shoes, and have a great experience while exploring their faith! We also want to help further equip the Christian International brothers and sisters in your International Student ministry sites.



## LOOKING AHEAD: VALENTINE'S DAY AND ASH WEDNESDAY

WE ALL BENEFIT FROM THE IDEAS OF OTHERS.

Here are some ideas which can be done one-on-one as a friend, or as part of a weekly or monthly meeting.

### *Valentine's Day ideas*

- ♥ Have a discussion comparing the love of a "Valentine" to God's love (Phoenix, Arizona)
- ♥ International students and scholars make valentines cards in their own language (College Station, Texas).
- ♥ Show a heart shaped box of candy and a cross. Share about the love we show others and the love Jesus showed to us by dying on the cross. (Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania)
- ♥ Share the story of St. Valentine the Martyr then discuss either
  - ♥ What the Bible teaches about marriage.
  - ♥ The courage needed to stand up for what one believes.

### *Helpful links:*

A devotion from Our Redeemer (<http://ourredeemernewark.org/saint-valentine-martyr/>)

A devotion from CPH (<https://blog.cph.org/read/year-c/valentine>)

### *Ash Wednesday*

Consider inviting scholars and students you know to your Ash Wednesday service. Why might this be a good first service to invite an international student to attend?

- ✠ It focuses on how all of us are in need of God's mercy, and how we are not worthy of our selves.
- ✠ It is something 'special' which they might want to observe.
- ✠ It is more simple in form than other services, so it is easier to understand.
- ✠ It is often followed by a whole season of Lenten services to which we can invite them.
- ✠ It usually includes a full explanation of why we impose ashes.
- ✠ Anyone can receive the ashes. But some do not, so it may be more comfortable than a communion service.
- ✠ Plan to spend time with the student after the service answering their questions about the service.

# CAN YOU IMAGINE BEING AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT?

Sue Hasselbring  
Ministry Catalyst, ISM Inc.

CAN YOU IMAGINE being an international student in Nigeria, Saudia Arabia, China or India? I invited Concordia students attending the Beautiful Feet Missions Conference to share what they hoped someone would do if they were one. Responses included: be patient with me, continue to reach out and invite me to things, tell me about dangerous areas, teach me societal norms... Near the end of the conference, a student who read the list said, "You wrote these, right?" He was shocked to learn what excellent ideas his peers shared. I hope that as the students also marked on a world map whether the international students they knew were 'friends' or 'acquaintances' that they started to ponder how they might deepen those relationships in some of the ways they had just written about.

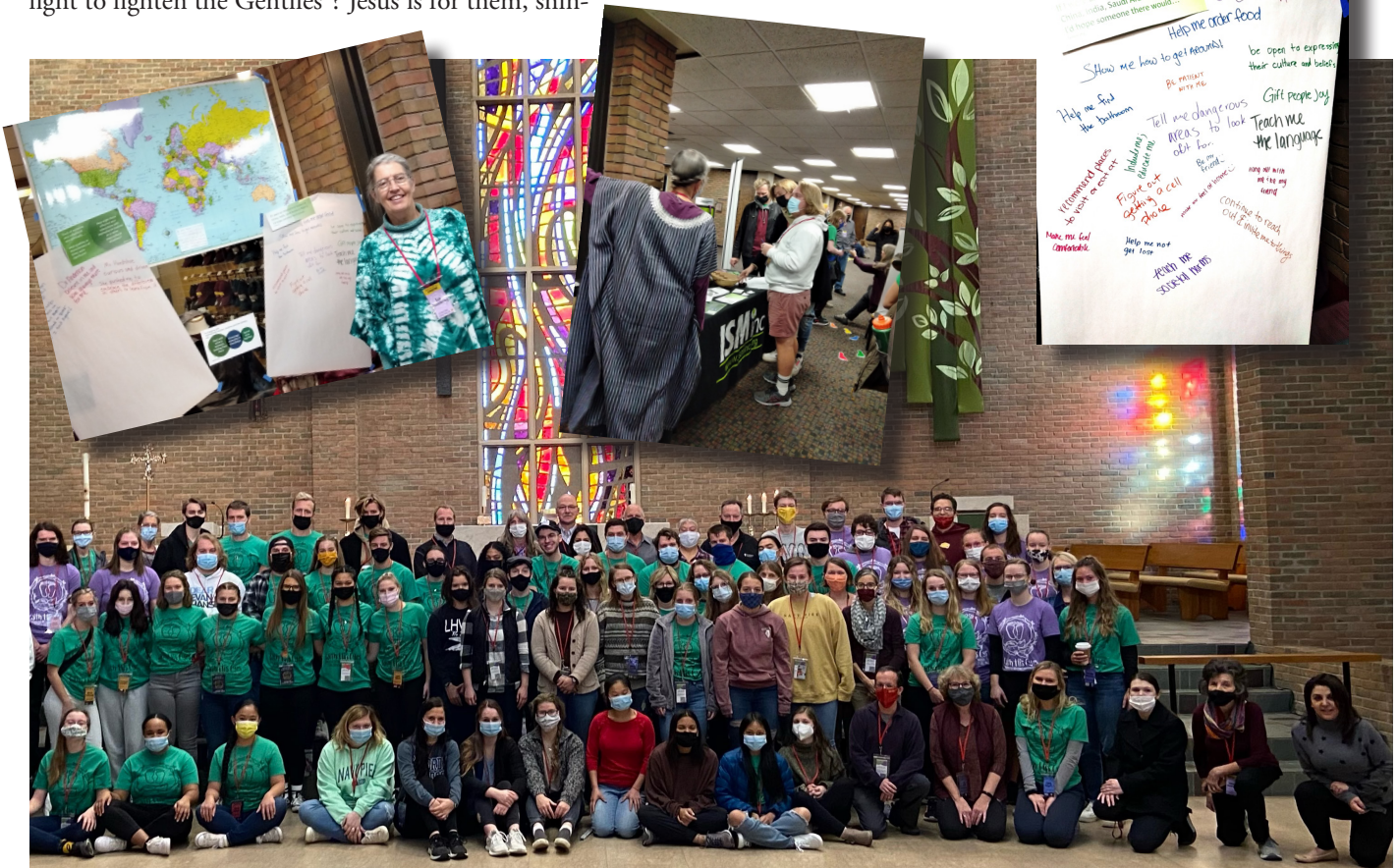
Inviting people to engage in ministry among internationals starts at the level of the heart. Will we see others with the eyes of Simeon as he lifted up Jesus declaring him to be "the light to lighten the Gentiles"? Jesus is for them, shin-

ing his light into their lives through each of His people.

Each of us can invite God's people to join in what God is doing among internationals. Like Jen's friend, we can invite someone from our congregation to join us in meeting an ISM need. Or we can let a family know how they can also be a "friendship family" or a "host" to an international student as Angela's family is. Or maybe, we will intentionally shop at that international food store around the corner and ask someone there to tell us about what they are buying. Who knows the friendship God might develop if we ask a question and share our phone number?

May God give each of us beautiful feet that carry his good news to others.

Together in His work,  
Sue



## BOARD POSITIONS

Board members meet virtually at least three times a year and face to face once a year. All board members call several ISM sites to provide encouragement and learn about their activities and needs. Specific Board positions needed:

**District Mission Executive** - serves as a liaison between ISM, Inc. and the LCMS district mission executives, communicating the work and opportunity of ISM, Inc.; and networking with districts to start new intentional ISM, Inc. sites.

**Development Coordinator** - to guide the board and staff in developing and maintaining strong relationships with all donors and potential donors.

**Public Relations** - provide guidance, coordination and support to all public relations work of ISM Inc. at the national level.

If you are willing to serve in any of these roles or if you would like to recommend someone for one of these positions, please email JJ Voelker at [jvoelker@kent.edu](mailto:jvoelker@kent.edu).