

A Taste of Heaven

by Terrell Smith, ISM Staff in Madison, WI

The International Students Track at Urbana 06 is designed for Christian international students and scholars and North Americans who are currently involved in friendship and ministry with internationals. The Track will deepen faith, broaden horizons, sharpen skills, and clarify God's calling.

As part of the larger Urbana 06 Student Missions Convention, the Track will host 1,000 participants who will:

- Live together in a specially assigned hotel, which will provide opportunities to network with other Christian internationals from all over the world.
- Participate in practical seminars that motivate and equip.
- Meet in country specific small groups for prayer and worship in many different languages and customs.
- Enjoy multi-cultural Bible studies and worship.

A worship team made up of international students will lead worship in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, English, and other languages, in a variety of worship styles, giving us a taste of heaven. A student from Togo said, "After Urbana and the International Students Track, one sole idea continues to cross my thoughts: to reply to the love of our Father by sacrificing my life for mission in my country and elsewhere."

Evening prayer groups will be arranged by countries, so internationals can pray for their countries in their own languages, and worship God in their own styles. "The country

and area specific prayer groups helped me to network, grow in my love and vision for my people and country," one student shared. Another said, "We pray for our country, that God would provide pastors and evangelists and missionaries. Those that I have met here have a mission. They want to do something for God and for China."



Daily Bible studies in the Book of Ephesians will draw participants closer to the heart of God, and give them a passion for reaching his world. "The multi-cultural Bible studies helped me to see Scripture from many perspectives and to apply it in my life," one participant said. Another added, "Urbana helped me understand my place in God's purposes in the world."

Practical seminars specific to the needs of internationals will train and equip internationals as they return home or go to another part of the world. "There are elements from Urbana which I could bring home to challenge and mobilize the current generation of NZ students to heed God's call to participate in his worldwide mission," a Track participant said. International Students Tracks of the past have been the birthplace of national movements, such as the African Christian Fellowship and the Japanese Christian Fellowship Network (originally called Urbana-Kai).

Perhaps God is calling you to participate in the next International Students Track at Urbana 06. You can gather a group of friends to register and go together! Or, perhaps you know of an international student or scholar who should be there to experience a taste of heaven, and you could even help them pay for it.

Partnering with Students: Culture Learning through Risk Taking in Evangelism

by Janet Atkins, ISM Staff in St. Louis, MO

My first year on InterVarsity staff I searched for Indian students on campus. Many first-time conversations erupted, but they led nowhere. And then this summer, the interns in City Lights (InterVarsity's Urban Project in St. Louis) assisted me in outreach to international students. "Why are they all Chinese?" they asked me. "I know a lot of Indians at my school; why aren't there any Indians in this fellowship?" They drove me crazy with their questions! I had given up. I was surrounded by Chinese students and scholars, and I already had a full plate with all the I-GIGs (International Groups Investigating God) going on and relationships forming. I didn't really want to have time for other nonbelievers. I loved China, and they were the largest group of internationals on my campus. Wasn't that enough? Just to get them off my case I said, "Let's pray. Then if God wants to bring Indians, He will."

Within a week, two Christian Indians showed up at two of our summer fellowship meetings. From the moment they arrived, I knew they were sent from God. I had never met them or even seen them before, and I certainly hadn't been the one to invite them. The students who invited them were long-time friends of our InterVarsity international student chapter but weren't attending themselves. They didn't even know each other. And it was the first week I had ever cooked Indian food for our weekly Bible study. In fact it was the first week I had ever attempted to cook Indian food.

It was a God thing. Right away the two of them plugged in. The woman helped start an I-GIG in the fall. The man plugged in to our discipleship group and became fast friends with other students and my husband. I started asking questions about Hinduism and learning to cook from an Indian cookbook. I had

never read about Hinduism before. I had never had a Hindu friend before. I felt like God was going to work through these two students. I was satisfied.

But God wanted more for me and more for our fellowship. In the fall, I walked through the dorms with a student leader and Chinese snacks, still focusing on outreach to East Asians. We went through the freshman halls looking for rooms that had posted where people were from. Little to my knowledge there were only two freshman from India in the 2005 freshman class. I met over thirty students that night, from all over the world, and among them were the only two Indian freshmen.

My husband and I, both twenty-three years old, became surrogate parents for these two freshmen!

One, deeply Jain, and the other, nominally Hindu, were open to talk, but they were a little suspicious of me. The Jain spit out his Chinese snack after hearing that egg was used in the

baking. I was in for trouble. I knew nothing of Hinduism or Jainism. I had cooked Indian food but wasn't very good at it. I didn't know the geography of India at all. And on top of it all, I was used to reaching out to Chinese students who had no religious beliefs and were very scientific and methodical in their approach to learning about God. I prayed for a miracle. "God, you know that there is no reason these men should ever talk to me again. I pray that they will become my friends through a miracle from you."

And so, a week later, I invited them to go out for Indian food. They said yes, but when I was ten minutes late, and they had been told Americans leave on time, they thought I had left them. I bought some extra samosas that night and returned to the dorms to see why they hadn't come, hoping they weren't angry with me. Amazingly, they received me warmly and were overjoyed to have samosas! I was taking it slow. I didn't know how much they would be interested in talking about spiritual matters or how much offense I could bring to them as a Christian. I had a sense by then about how offensive the word "Christian" could be to a Hindu. I prayed for

wisdom and focused on talking about devotion to Jesus and prayer in my own life. They shared about how they prayed. We had connected.

During parents' weekend, when everyone on their floor was out for dinner and buying groceries with parents, we took them out for Indian food and Indian groceries. Their eyes showed their excitement as we walked through aisle after aisle of familiar sights and smells. My husband and I, both twenty-three years old, became surrogate parents for these two freshmen! A month later, we went again. All the while I started sending emails to invite them to our Friday gatherings. I wasn't sure when to start an I-GIG with them and was praying for God's timing.

By the end of the fall semester, the Indian woman from the summer had grown tremendously in her love for sharing the gospel with non-Christian friends. And remarkably, she had a gift for reaching out to Hindus, who didn't feel threatened by her spiritual conversations. And God prepared me through training I received at InterVarsity's recent nationwide International Student



Ministry (ISM) Staff Conference, which focused on reaching Hindus. We prayed and decided to start an I-GIG just for Hindus, as we had seen that Hindus and Chinese were having a hard time understanding each other in the same I-GIG the semester before.

Our first four weeks of the I-GIG we had talked openly about spirituality, my views, your views, what questions do we have for each other. This was the week we had decided to push a little further and bring in Scripture. Most Indians are not people of the book, as Christians and Muslims are. In fact, religious texts provide interest, but more of the spiritual development is based on storytelling through family or respected spiritual people in their lives. And so I typed out the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet and printed it up, experimenting to see if this might be a way to bring the book that means so much to me and that is the living Word of God into our I-GIG. The Christian Indian leaders had prepared food and prayed that this night would be received well.

And there was my Indian son, reading aloud the words of the living God and impressed with the humility of Jesus. The group itself was so imaginative. From a storytelling culture, they all jumped in, guessing what people were feeling and thinking and trying to paint a picture of the scene. There were no prewritten questions, as I was afraid that it would feel too forced, but we didn't need them. Observations, interpretations, and applications were flowing richly. Of course there were also the side comments of disbelief or comparison with each of their own gods. It was a great start! They all wanted to talk about prayer the following week.

On the drive home, my "son" and I talked. "What is your god like? Is he to be revered and respected from a distance because of his holiness, or is he close and personal?" I asked him. My son answered proudly. "Definitely revered and respected from a distance. A holy god cannot be close to a human." I responded, "Wow, that's similar to how we understand God. In fact that is why the story tonight was so important. We believe that God is holy and that imperfect people can't be close to him. But Jesus, as he washed the disciples' feet, was symbolically showing how he offers cleansing



through his death so that we can be close to God in a personal way." He replied, "Yes, I heard that before, that Christians can be personal with God."

He seemed interested, so I went on, "I love how Jesus puts it, 'I am the vine; you are the branches...Abide in me...Abide in my love.'" He looked at me, smiling. "Wow, I felt such peace when you read that. That's amazing. Where is that from?" I showed him that it was in the Bible, in John 15, and he said he had a Bible in his room. As he got out of the car, he said, "I really enjoyed coming tonight. I look forward to next week." Driving home, I thought about how God had changed me in the past nine months. He had been birthing a new ministry in our fellowship and a new love in my heart for a people group. In 9 months he had brought friendships with a dozen Indians, three of whom were now co-laborers in the gospel with me.

My prayer as we reach out to my "son" and to the other friends is this: *Father, show your son your presence. Show him that you are real and you offer cleansing so that we are no longer your slaves, but your friends. Let Jesus come to life and bring living water to the hearts of the people of India, my friends.*

1993 NAFSA: Association of International Educators

Members with responsibilities in Community Organizations working with Foreign Students and Scholars shall:

- Make certain that organizations providing programs for foreign students and scholars have a clear statement of purpose and responsibility, so that all parties can know what is expected of them.
- Accurately portray their services and programs, making clear the identity, the intent, and the nature of the sponsoring organization of each particular event or service.
- Provide appropriate opportunities to observe and to join in mutual inquiry into cultural differences.
- Provide adequate orientation for volunteers and participants in community programs so that they may understand each other and may interact constructively. The organization should make clear that surreptitious, deceptive, or coercive proselytizing is unacceptable.

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