

# Developing an International Ministry

## Sending Church Element #5 - Involving the Entire Church

By Mike Easton

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One of the incredible opportunities we have right here in America is to reach internationals. Immigrants, International Students, International Scholars, and Refugees are all over our great melting pot of a nation. 40,000,000 people living in the United States were born outside of the United States.<sup>1</sup> There are 1,095,299 international students in higher education as of 2019<sup>2</sup> from over 200 countries.<sup>3</sup> It is often said that 80% of international students never set foot in an American home.<sup>4</sup> This is not just a tragedy for the Gospel, this is a tragedy of hospitality and foreign relations for our nation.

If you have ever gone to a foreign country it is very likely that you were in the home of a national very early in your trip overseas. Hospitality in collective cultures, like most non-Western nations, is a way of life. Hospitality in America is often either a show or an inconvenience. Whereas overseas hospitality is a primary way of showing honor to others. Naturally our cultures will define how we invite those who are different than us into our daily lives. Every culture has something to learn from others. Hospitality is particularly one that Westerners could learn from other cultures. Only 20% of international students setting foot in an American home in the 4 or more years that they are in America is a sad reality.

This not only needs to be redeemed in our culture, Christians are to be the leaders in this:

*Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it. - Hebrews 13:2*

*Practice hospitality. - Romans 12:13b*

Certainly you have heard that the definition of hospitality is not simply welcoming those in your home who are friends, but that the definition of hospitality extends to strangers. If you've been able to labor through Leviticus and get to chapter 19, you will see the beautiful Old Testament prescription for the Jewish people in relation to hospitality:

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/cspan\\_fb\\_slides.pdf](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/cspan_fb_slides.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iie.org/Why-IIE/Announcements/2019/11/Number-of-International-Students-in-the-United-States-Hits-All-Time-High>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2017-11-13/6-things-to-know-about-international-students-in-the-us>

<sup>4</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1094887.pdf>

*When an alien resides with you in your land, you must not oppress him. You will regard the alien who resides with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. - Leviticus 19:33-34*

An international ministry leader tells a story of a Saudi Arabian friend who came to the United States to study. He brought an extra suitcase with him of gifts that he had planned to give Americans as he entered their homes. It is a common custom in many countries to bring a gift when you come to someone's house. Unfortunately, this young man was not invited into American's homes for his entire time in the United States. When he returned home, he brought the suitcase back with him completely full. Cue the monkey covering eyes emoji.

It is very sad when internationals have this story. What is even more heartbreaking is that they did not have the opportunity to hear the Gospel. 200 countries are represented in America's higher education. Most of the countries and many of the people groups from the 10/40 window are in American schools! At Iowa State alone there are 115 countries represented, with over 3,300 internationals.<sup>5</sup> While I love Iowa State University, it is not the most prestigious university in the US and yet has 3,300 internationals. 12% of Iowa State students are an international student. The nations are at our doorstep! The opportunity to reach the unreached and unengaged is here. Believers can reach the nations without having to learn a new language, or leave their home, or workplace. The opportunity is on your local campus. It's in your neighborhood, at the local library, or the grocery store.

As missions leaders we often work very hard to get people in our congregation to understand global missions, send short-term trips, and send people long-term. Yet most churches I have interacted with have spent little time thinking about reaching the nations in their city.

## **An International Ministry Example**

In 1972, Jack Owens, along with 3 other men from a Baptist Student Union at the University of Oklahoma were sent with a vision to reach the Big 8 schools (the predecessor of what is now the Big 12). One landed at Kansas State, another at the University of Nebraska, and Jack at Iowa State University. Jack took his family at age 40 to South Korea in 1985 to do missions. Upon returning in 1996 Jack founded the International Friendship Connection (IFC) at Cornerstone Church in Ames, Iowa. Why? Because when he went to South Korea, he experienced hospitality he had never given while he was in America.

This ministry grew slowly over the years to include internationals from many different countries and eventually began to include Cornerstone members from all ages and walks of life with a

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.registrar.iastate.edu/enrollment>

passion to reach university students. Currently, IFC has over 80 leaders, both American and International, engaging with 120 students in family groups from over 20 different countries. That's 120 international students hearing and interacting with the Gospel and with Christians regularly. Here's how:

The basic strategy of IFC is: 1) Welcome; 2) Evangelize; 3) Disciple; and 4) Commission. The main context by which IFC accomplishes this is through Family Groups. These groups meet each week in the homes of American leaders around the city. In these family groups, the first goal is welcoming. There is always a meal, getting-to-know-you questions, a welcoming environment, and time to play afterwards. I host one of these groups in my home and the students stay well beyond when I have already gone to bed! The joy for both international and American college students interacting with each other well into the night is a great way to fall asleep! People from different cultures and religions sharing laughs, joys, ideas, and hurts brought together by a group of believers who love God's heart for the nations.

Beyond creating this family environment, each week the Bible is taught in a simple but clear way. In bringing the Gospel to those of different cultures it is important to consider: 1) they often do not have a Judeo-Christian background so their basic understanding of the Bible is not present as is would be in most Western cultures; and 2) their level of English, even if they attend university tends to be too low for religious discussion. Understanding engineering, when you have been studying engineering in your country, is much easier to learn than discussing metaphysics, philosophy, and religion in a different language. This takes understanding from the heart and this is often difficult to grasp in the large group setting of the American church. For this reason, Cornerstone provides options for internationals to study the Scriptures separate from our normal Sunday morning gatherings. While we are working to create an environment for people of many cultures to worship together, the language and basic understanding of Christianity creates a barrier that is hard to overcome for international students to hear and respond to the Gospel. Wrong context for that in our church.

Beyond family groups, our leaders meet with students as their friends to continue to welcome them, and share the Gospel with them. For those who become Christians or who know Jesus already, they are discipled by those same American leaders. As they look towards life after graduation or returning back home, our international ministry staff team provides equipping opportunities by which they are commissioned to join a church or to become church planters in their home country.

Much more could be said about international ministry, but let's take a look at international ministry in the context of sending and why it's such a vital part of being a sending church.

## **If Not Here, Why There?**

This has been touched on already, but if we're working hard at sending short-term trips and long-term workers to the 10/40 window and there are internationals from that country in our midst today, why would we not start with that? If, as missions leaders, we can mobilize believers in our churches to reach the nations without having to get a new job, move, learn a language, and we can reach people from those countries in our own backyard, shouldn't this be the starting point? I would encourage you to consider that if you are not reaching internationals in your own backyard, you ought to consider redistributing financial and personnel resources towards this before you send overseas. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Set aside a group of leaders in your church to focus on reaching internationals. Doesn't have to be the entire church. Start with 2-4 people.
- Get together regularly as a missional team. Study the Scriptures, study books on reaching internationals and pray.
- Have that missional team regularly go out and meet internationals in your city. Go to the campus. Check in with the international office at your local about conversational English programs. Go to a local, authentic ethnic restaurant and get to know the owners and staff. Say hello to those of a different country in your local library or grocery store.
- From those relationships create intentional hangout times for your missional team to invite the internationals they have relationships with over for a meal or a game night.
- As the Gospel is shared in relationship, pray and work towards that intentional hangout becoming a Bible study for internationals.

Keep doing all that. I can't guarantee that will lead to a movement of internationals loving Jesus, but these are some great and intentional steps towards that.

## **The Best Assessment and Development Opportunity You Have**

How do you know if someone from your church is qualified to go overseas? It's often said that there is no plane transformation, meaning, just because someone jumps on a plane it doesn't mean they will be great missionaries. There are certainly other factors to consider, like their character and how they will work on a team. But as a missions leader, you also want to send people who show that they are disciple-makers in their normal everyday life, not just when they are full-time overseas. International ministry is a wonderful way to observe this prior to affirming their calling and sending them cross-culturally.

While it's not a requirement for those going from our network to work with internationals, it's highly encouraged and natural for this to happen. One of our first recommendations to anyone who wants to go overseas, no matter where they want to go, or what type of mission they want to do is to start working with our international student ministry. There are so many benefits for us in assessment and for them in their development.

In assessing our goers, some qualities we are looking for that are specific to global ministry include: faithfulness when ministry is hard, flexibility when the schedule or situation changes, and the ability to adeptly speak the message of the Gospel cross-culturally. While much can be assessed within the normal rhythms of the church life towards reaching others from the same culture, there are critical aspects of assessment of missionaries that cannot be done without seeing how they do day in day out in interacting with internationals. They can be doing evangelism, leading Bible studies, be preachers in our churches, and even have gone on short-term trips. But there is something about the daily, weekly, monthly grind of reaching out to internationals while they have a job or go to school that truly helps us to see how they will do overseas.

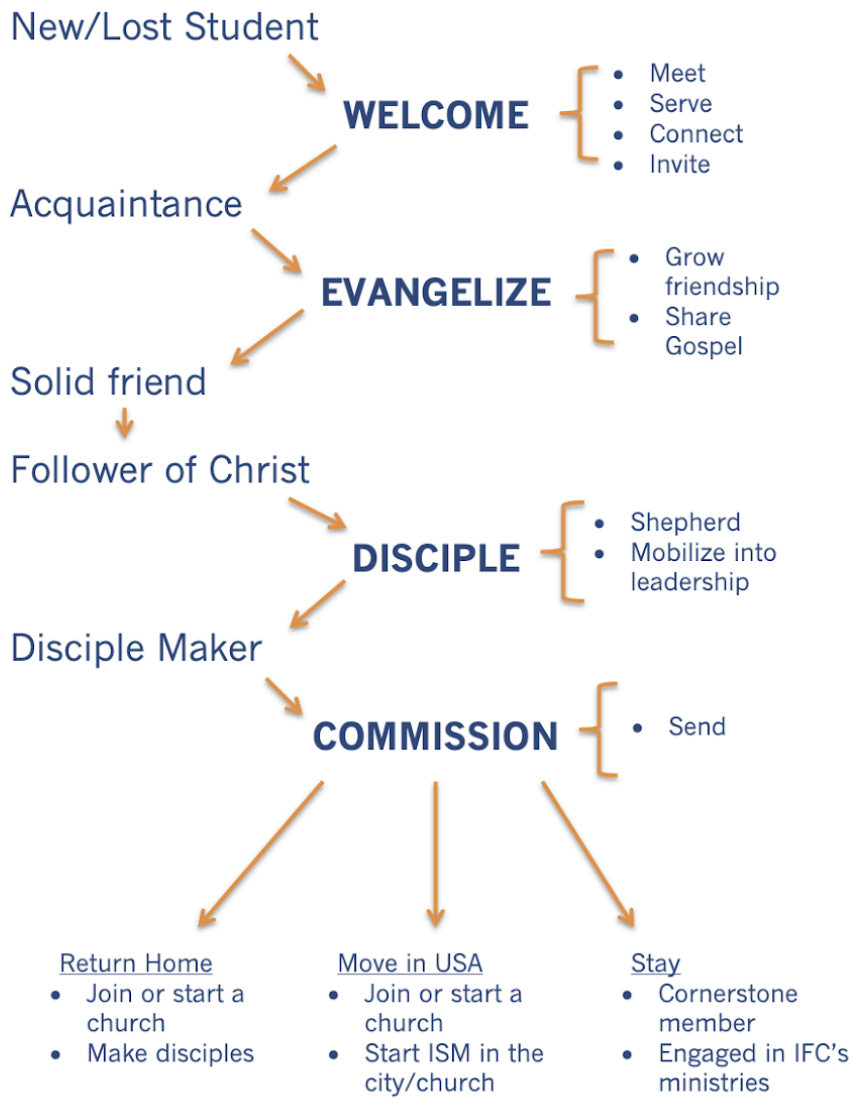
In the end there is no “Plane Transformation.” The sins, the strengths, and the weaknesses of those who go overseas will vary, but will not be vastly different when they go overseas. We can never expect someone to do overseas what they are not already doing in America. International ministry gives us one of the best opportunities to observe and develop the character traits and skills in those we want to send overseas.

Much more could be written about doing international ministry. If you are looking for more resources check out:

- [Across the Street and Around the World](#) by Jeannie Marie
- [Spiritual Multiplication in the Real World](#) by Bob McNabb
- [No Passport Required](#) by Tom Knight

The following 2 pages are the visual overview of international ministry at Cornerstone Church. Feel free to reach out to The Upstream Team to ask questions about International & Refugee Ministry.

# IFC Vision



# How We Carry Out the Vision

## Intentional-Strategic

**Big**  
**Going Wide**  
**Staff-Driven**  
**Generalized**  
**Air War**  
**Scheduled**

## Organic-Relational

**Small**  
**Going Deep**  
**Leader-Driven**  
**Personalized**  
**Ground War**  
**Flexible**

### WELCOMING

Kickoff  
 IFC Events  
 Conversation Partners  
 Marketing

Fishing  
 Missional Opportunities  
 Mission Trip to Campus  
 Leveraging Labor Day

### EVANGELIZING

IFC Getaway

Gospel Followups  
 One-on-one Engaging  
 Global Prayer Meeting

### DISCIPLING

iD Group  
 Intl Leadership  
 iG101  
 Intl Spring Break Retreat  
 Intl Worship Gathering

Life-on-Life Discipleship  
 Intls Engaging Their Own

### COMMISSIONING

Returnee Retreat?  
 Partner Networks

Remaining Connected





# DEVELOPING AN INTL MINISTRY WORKSHEET

## SENDING ELEMENT #5

As you get started on thinking through developing an international ministry, here's a basic worksheet on how to get started on international ministry.

<p><b>Stats for Your Campus</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of College Students: _____</li> <li>• Number of International Students: _____</li> <li>• Top 5 Countries Represented at Your University &amp; Number of Students</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. _____ _____</li> <li>2. _____ _____</li> <li>3. _____ _____</li> <li>4. _____ _____</li> <li>5. _____ _____</li> </ol>	<p><b>International Groups on Campus</b></p> <p>Christian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> </ul> <p>Secular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Current Students Who Could/Should Consider Intl. Ministry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> </ul>	<p><b>Year 1 Steps to Take</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> <li>• _____ _____</li> </ul>



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