

## Cambridge International Student Welcome

Every year the Christian Graduate Society (CGS) at the University of Cambridge runs the International Student Welcome

(ISW) programme, which is aimed at radiating Jesus's love in the form of hospitality and friendship to all new international postgraduate students arriving in Cambridge at the beginning of the academic year. This year ISW ran between September 24<sup>th</sup> and October 11<sup>th</sup> 2008 and consisted of three

main activities: welcoming new students at the train and bus stations in Cambridge (9am to 9pm), visiting new students in their places, and organising a week-long schedule with social events including: a pudding party, a punting trip in the river Cam with a picnic on Jesus Green, two traditional cream tea parties, two "really useful tours" of the city, a jacket potato party, a snapshots of student's life presentation, a cultural games evening, a night of interna-

tional group dancing, an international food tasting, a visit to the Botanic Garden, and a big welcome

party.

All the events were open to all new students regardless of faith or ideology and—thank God—were very well attended. At the first event, based on last year's numbers, we were expecting 5 to 10 people and the turnout was about 40, which happened to be the average turnout throughout all ISW events except for International Food Tasting (aprox 180 people) and the welcome party

(about 100 people). Every evening most of the faces were new, so that at the end of the ISW period we had befriended about 550 new students out of the approx. 2000 total new graduate students that arrived this year.

Preparations for ISW began last April by assembling a committee of volunteers from the Christian Graduate Society—which I had just joined. I had never been involved in ISW—or any other extra-curricular activity—before and joined the committee with the sole idea of helping out and learning along the way, but by the second meeting

I ended up with the role of co-ordinator of the whole programme! Preparations included speaking during church services in order to recruit volunteers, booking venues for all the events, asking Cambridge colleges to include our publicity in their welcome packs, and bulk shopping food and disposables for all the events, among many other things.

I must admit that at first I wasn't quite sure what was going on, but as the committee meetings progressed I started to



realize the magnitude of the event. “What have I got into?”—I thought—but thank God the people in this year’s committee were a real blessing, with every one of them contributing in a distinctive and unique way that nobody else could. For instance Joshua—

a PhD student in Engineering from Singapore who had been last year’s co-ordinator—provided the historical perspective and steered the first meetings until I gained enough confidence to take over. Chris—a PhD student in Chemical Engineering from Colorado—contributed with his American pragmatism and enormous enthusiasm in running the bus station. Quyen—a bubbly Californian PhD student in His-

tory—teamed up with Angela—a quiet Northern Irish PhD student in Environmental Chemistry—to co-ordinate volunteers in visiting students. June—a married Korean PhD student in Engineering—was in charge of running the train station, while

Jarrold—a master’s student in Divinity from Florida—was responsible for organizing and leading the tours of the city. Special mention deserve the non-student members of the committee,

whose “real world” experience proved instrumental in making ISW a success: Calvin—a married Malaysian and former Queen’s college student—was responsible for the IT and designed all the publicity for the event, not to mention the week off he took from his job in order to welcome students at the bus station. John—an English Physicist from Wolfson College with a full-time job in the printing industry—designed the booklets to be handed out during the events. And Judy—a staff member from C3 church, originally from Hong Kong—who

did everything from printing out the 900 booklets, to putting up publicity around the city, to driving students around in her church’s minibus. ISW involved lots of work, preparations, and sometimes improvisations. It also



“...after we heard the students’ opinions, we knew that it was worth every second of our time”

meant delays in writing PhD theses and conducting lab experiments for many of us in the committee, but after we heard the students’ opinions, we knew that it was worth every

second of our time. “I really felt very welcome! Thank you for living your faith in such a practical way!” wrote Chris, a master’s student from Malaysia. “Unforgettable day” commented Dr Jacob, a master’s student from India. “I have been enjoying the food and the warm welcome from all of you” wrote Joanna, a master’s student from Hong Kong.

One of the main objectives of ISW is to establish true friendships with the new international students, and in the case of non-Christian students, to create opportunities for sharing the Gospel with them. I can mention the cases of Robert, a

master’s student from Serbia who expressed his interest in reading the Old Testament in his native language—we got him a Bible in Serbian with the help of Bartow from the Kairos Trust—and is now visiting CGS Bible study groups and asking lots of questions, and Shradda, an Indian PhD student in Chemistry, who is a Hindu and joined a Christianity Explored course after attending the welcome party.

I can honestly say that being part of ISW has been the greatest, most rewarding, and most meaningful project I had ever been part of. It will have a long lasting effect in my life as a Christian. I

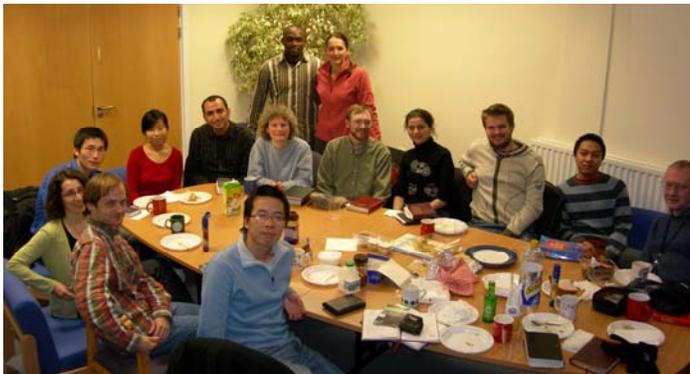
will always remember the disposition and self-sacrifice of volunteers at the stations—there was a lady who wanted to wait until midnight at the coach stop—the generosity of the church members who provided lots of delicious food, and the generosity of committee members who suspiciously “lost” all their invoices and receipts for things they had bought when it was time to claim the money from the ISW budget—which in turn was the result of donations by local churches. But I was not the only to be impressed, as many of the new students could hardly believe that all the events and the great food were the result of Christian volunteers’ work and their contributions. Well, they’d better believe it, because all of the wonderful things that happened during ISW have a simple and beautiful explanation: Jesus Christ. In His name, everything is possible and makes absolute sense. May His name be praised for ever! Amen.

**Humberto Gumet**

## Durham University

We have been so encouraged to read Remi's newsletters and to hear of all the graduate fellowships that have been springing up at universities around the country over the last few years! Groups just like ours in Durham. In October 2006, a Bible study group was set up here to provide support for Christian students at Ustinov College, the postgraduate college in Durham.

In our first year the Bible study group was quite small. This year over 30 students have attended the group, with 12-15 coming along each week, which has been really encouraging. We are a very diverse group with students coming from many different countries including China, Japan, India, South Africa, Nigeria, Jordan, Armenia, Hungary, Germany, the Caribbean, USA and UK. Students also come from different Christian backgrounds and attend several different churches across Durham and the North-



east. Although the group was set up to minister to Christian students, several students from other faiths or no current faith, but who have an interest in reading the Bible and learning more about Christianity, have joined us.

We meet every week on Tuesday evenings in the College meeting room to study the Bible and pray together. We also often share food together, with the table being covered in a wonderful array of dishes from all around the world! We have been amazed by how the group has grown this year, not only in terms of its numbers, but in the depth of relationships, the growing

sense of community, and the way people pray for each other and encourage each other. Although people come from very different countries and backgrounds, we have found unity through the love for Jesus that we all share. We have witnessed some amazing answers to prayer over the year and every week we hear testimonies of God's faithfulness.

As the summer arrives it's sad to be saying goodbye to some of our members as they return to their home countries or venture on to new places. But our prayers go with them and we know that they will take with them all they've experienced in the group over the year. As we keep in touch by email and Facebook, and continue to support them through prayer, it's almost as if the group extends far beyond Durham - to Jordan, South Africa, China. And so another new academic year is on the horizon and we look forward to welcoming the new students that God will bring to Durham and to our group this year.

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## Cambridge Launches 'CGS Café'

On November 7<sup>th</sup> about 50 postgrads from the University of Cambridge gathered for coffee, conversation and live music during the first ever 'CGS Café'. Organized by the Christian Graduate Society, the Café was launched to fill a vacuum in the activities organized by CGS: an attractive and relaxed setting where Christians and non-Christians could mingle and chat. As such the Café sought to fill two needs: first, a place where those connected with CGS could come together as a whole, and get to know each other (CGS sponsors weekly Bible studies, but no weekly large group event); and secondly, a place where Christians could bring non-Christians to meet and socialize with Christians in a more 'low-



threshold environment' than a traditional evangelistic event (there was no talk or presentation).

For the occasion the Graduate Union was transformed into a 'Café' setting with mood lighting, candles, and a music corner for the bands. Between sets of blue-grass and jazz piano and violin, guests mingled and chatted casually—and a few played a couple of rounds of 'Jenga'. Some also got into some more serious conversations, and at one table one of the CGS-ers spent most of the evening explaining the Gospel to an international student.

It is difficult to know how to measure 'success' for an event such as this, but the turn-out and the positive feedback suggest that it did indeed meet a need. Several of the guests had no previous contact with CGS, and came only because of publicity they had seen—suggesting this may also be a way of raising the visibility of CGS on the campus. In addition, sign-up so far for the upcoming Weekend Away is higher than last year, so perhaps the extra relationship-building during the Café helped to generate more enthusiasm for another opportunity to come together. CGS hopes to continue putting on Cafés throughout the year, and will have its next one on January 16<sup>th</sup>.

**David Sandifer**

# “How I found hope for life in our Lord Jesus Christ”

My name is Humberto and I am a sinner. This is my testimony of how I found hope for life in our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Before:

I was born and raised in a non-believing family in Mexico. My dad was a former Mormon while my mom was a nominal Catholic. In my extended family there are people from different religions (Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses) who approached us several times with very confusing messages, so my parents made the decision to keep me and my siblings away from all that mess and we grew up without any type of faith, except in ourselves and in what we could achieve with our own hard work, effort and dedication.

Coming from a working class background, academic success was very important in my family, so I worked very hard in school in order not to disappoint my parents. I started to experience academic success very early on and I enjoyed the praise I received from people around me including my parents. The taste of success was very good.

As years went on, academic success became my one and only life objective. I didn't see it as a means to something, but as a goal in itself. I became addicted to it. In that way I became very isolated and didn't make any friends or relationships during my teenage and college years because I thought they were going to distract me from my goals, not to mention that I believed nobody was “good enough” to be my friend. I was sick with pride and some people pointed it out to me, but I just dismissed them.

After a while, my obsession with success became so strong that my

own family started to suffer. I didn't care about them at all and hurt them several times. For instance, I was so busy in college that I never visited my dad when he was very ill at hospital and I didn't attend my parent's wedding anniversary because I couldn't stand being with their “ordinary” friends. I was intoxicated with pride.

My first job after university was in a factory where I had to interact

“my obsession with success became so strong that my own family started to suffer”

with blue collar workers on a daily basis. I was shocked at the end of my first day because I couldn't stand being with “ordinary” people. I was very disappointed and ended up quitting in order to work in a place where people were all university graduates, some of them with postgraduate degrees in Europe and the US. Although I liked the job, I quit after only one year in order to study for a master's degree in London. Through my master's course I proved to myself that I was better than many and that made me feel very proud when I returned to work in Mexico.

However, after a couple of years in a very well paid job in the Mexican government, I felt that my life was missing something. At 27 years of age I had nothing to strive for as I had already fulfilled all expectations. I asked myself “Now what?”

Everything seemed meaningless to me.

I missed my good time as a student in London and thought that coming back to study in the UK would bring some meaning to my life. My pride told me to try something “better” than London, and so I arrived in Cambridge to start my PhD. Very quickly I realized that a PhD was very different from a master's. Instead of making me happy and proud, my PhD was making me feel very miserable and mediocre because I failed a course and had problems writing my first year thesis. The night before the first year results were released, I didn't sleep thinking what would happen to my life if they decided to kick me out of Cambridge.

They didn't kick me out. I survived by the skin of my teeth. Instead of being happy, I thought the decision was completely undeserved—especially as a friend of mine who had worked much harder than I was kicked out of the PhD. It was as if somebody had shown mercy on me, which hurt my pride very badly. All of a sudden, the PhD lost all of its value as a source of pride and meaning to me. Then, for the first time in my life I acknowledged that my life was empty, perhaps emptier than ever before because I had sought for meaning in the wrong place.

## How:

I was very depressed at the start of my second year in Cambridge when a Christian Singaporean housemate

invited me to the International Student Welcome, a series of welcome activities for new international post-graduate students in Cambridge organized by friendly Christian Students. Very reluctantly I accepted his invitation and attended a picnic to the University Botanic Garden.

There I met a young friendly Christian lady who had just arrived in Cambridge to start her PhD. Unlike me, she was not full of pride, but had a humble attitude despite her multiple academic achievements and personal virtues.

We got along surprisingly well and we quickly developed a very good rapport despite being very different. We started to meet regularly in order to practise Spanish conversation and as we got to know each other better, for the first time in my life, I started to develop an admiration for somebody other than myself. My admiration for her increased exponentially and I started to think about her more often, until one day I realized that I had fallen in love with her. I had never been in love before and I was confused. On the one hand, it hurt my pride to know that I was vulnerable to such a feeling like anybody else, but on the other, I felt very proud of having found someone as full of virtues as her. It was a very happy period because I thought she was the meaning of life and I felt like walking on clouds.

However, when I revealed my feelings to her, she immediately turned me down because she had a boyfriend in her home country—I knew that—and they had agreed to get married after she finished her PhD—I didn't know that. My heart

broke. She apologized to me and said it would be unfair and cruel for me if we continued to see each other, and so we agreed never to meet again. I felt crushed. It was so painful that I wept and cried for weeks. I had never wept so much since I was a small child. I wept in my room in Cambridge, on the bus to Heathrow, on the plane to Mexico—I went home the next day after she turned me down—and in my

room in Mexico. I had just lost the last source of meaning in my life. Again, I had sought for meaning in the wrong place. I had reached the bottom. My pride, the fundamental block of my life, was completely destroyed.

While in Mexico I wanted to know more about the kind of committed, long-distance, marriage-oriented relationship that Christian lady was into and so I did a lot of research on the Internet. I was immediately attracted to the beauty of the Christian principles behind that type of relationships. Back in Cambridge I approached sev-

eral Christian friends to know more about Christianity. Thank God, my Christian Singaporean housemate didn't leave me alone once he realized I was exploring Christianity. He stuck with me for several days from early morning till very late at night. He kept talking to me about Jesus and encouraging me to pray with him. He noticed that I couldn't accept Jesus because of my pride and pointed it out to me. He was very accurate. "All it takes to become a Christian is to accept Jesus as your saviour by pray-

ing to Him"—he told me. And so I prayed for the first time and he prayed for me. It felt extraordinary, as if I had been relieved from a heavy burden.

**Since:**

Ever since I allowed Jesus to take control over my life, things have been different. I have found it easier to relate to people and have made very good friends in the Christian community in Cambridge. I have also prayed for guidance and discernment in my PhD work and the Lord has helped me a lot.

I went back to Mexico for 9 months shortly after my conversion in order to do fieldwork for my PhD. Although I was sad to leave my newly made Christian friends and mentors in Cambridge, the Lord sent me to a small but wonderful church in the city of Aguascalientes where I could continue my walk with Him. There I found fellowship and friendship that I didn't know could possibly exist in my own country. Then, when I went back to my family, my new relationship with Jesus allowed me to start a more loving and honest relationship with my parents and siblings. It was extraordinary, very liberating, and far better than it had ever been.

I think the fundamental message from the Gospel that I'm still trying to assimilate into my life is that whatever I do, from doing a PhD to conducting a relationship with someone, should be done out of a genuine desire to glorify our Lord rather than out of pride or self-fulfilment. It is quite a challenge, but now I look forward to living my new life in Jesus. I'm no longer in the driver's seat, but our Lord Jesus is.

**"I had just lost the last source of meaning in my life"**

**"I'm no longer in the driver's seat, but our Lord Jesus is"**

## “You can do all things through Christ”

We give thanks to God in Cranfield University as He is at work on campus touching lives and reaching out to the lost. Last June we started a Christianity Explored course in response to the interest in Christianity shown by

English Made Easy edition, organised as an informal Bible study going through the book of Mark in eight weeks leading one to Christ. We started to prepare ourselves for the course through prayers and lots of discussion about the



some Chinese students who arrived in February to do a research programme in different areas of aerospace engineering. All of these students are being trained to be the leaders in China's aerospace industry working towards producing China's own large aircrafts in the near future.

A number of these new students came to our weekly Bible studies and in one occasion even in an all night vigil. Unfortunately they found it difficult to follow the conversation due to language difficulties and the lack of bible knowledge. After about two months the fellowship started to look for a way to run an evangelistic course for all the interested students. In the search for suitable materials we found the Christianity Explored

weekly topics of the course. “You can do all things through Christ” ...that comes in mind since actually nobody in our fellowship had ever taught in an evangelistic

**“Some students came and left halfway through but eventually three of them, all from China completed the course and accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour HALLELUJA”**

course before but the Holy Spirit was leading us step by step, topic by topic, question by question.

Then, after advertising the course came the first day/session of the

course... and only one student turned up despite the fact that many had promised to come. But the following weeks others started to attend and we discovered Christ week by week with great excitement and considerable linguistic effort in trying to explain the Christian jargon you do not usually think or ask about.

Some students came and left halfway through but eventually three of them, all from China, completed the course and accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour – HALLELUJA. To this day I keep in touch with them and I can say that our friendship is special having Explored the Gospel of Jesus Christ and discovered the truth in Him together...

This academic year our fellowship has already planned for the arrival of new Chinese students as well as others on campus who might have never heard about Christ. We are already excited about this even though we only start in January (please pray for us).

God has wonderfully helped us and carried us through this whole experience and against all odds (lack of experience, budget and time) three souls are now in His light for which I praise Him. Let this testimony be an encouragement for you my brother/sister to take the bold step and share the Gospel in your university even if all things speak against it. God's is the only voice you need to follow.

**Tamas Nagy**

## Looking to the future

I began discussing with colleagues the possibility of appointing a postgraduate worker at least seven years ago. Remi's appointment was a long time coming but I hope you'll agree it has been worth the wait. To see how postgraduate ministry around the UK has grown in just 2 years is such an encouragement. To read stories like that of Humberto (in this letter) warms the heart. I give thanks to God for using Remi as a catalyst for much of the recent development.

With the numbers of postgraduate international students continuing to grow there is still great scope for further developments in this ministry. There are many universities without a Christian postgraduate group; there are many international students who have no Christian friend; and the opportunities for

gospel ministry among them are many and various. Remi still has much to do and she is very dependent on your partnership. Extensive travelling away from home is not easy and she values your prayers that God would sustain her and guide her so that she makes the best use of her time.

Remi would also like to have more time available to take up the many opportunities. At present we only have funds to pay her for just over 3 days a week. We'd like to increase this to 5 days a week. New gifts for Remi's financial support would help us to do this and I'd like to invite you to join her team of financial partners. A regular standing order helps us to budget more effectively but all gifts are most welcome. Could you give £15pcm or £30pcm to ensure more Christian postgraduate students are encouraged to

live for Christ and more not yet believing postgraduate students given the opportunity to find Him?

In 2 Corinthians 9:6 we read: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." If you'd like to sow generously in this ministry Remi can provide you with regular giving forms. You can also give online at [www.friendsinternational.org.uk](http://www.friendsinternational.org.uk) or send cheques to Friends International (address below) marking your gift "For Remi Tobler". Remi's doing a fine job and I hope and pray you will want to invest generously in her work so she will be able to do even more in the months and years to come.

**Richard Weston**  
National Director



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*Transforming hearts & minds in  
the postgraduate student  
community*

## Supporting us

We value your continuing prayers and financial support. If you are able, would you please consider giving to this work. You can do so by visiting [www.friendsinternational.org.uk](http://www.friendsinternational.org.uk). You also can send cheques to Friends International address on the left. Please mark your gift "For Remi Tobler". Thank you.

## For your information

### National Christian Postgraduate Ministry Coordinator



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## Resources for Postgrads: Spotlight on

[www.zactrust.org](http://www.zactrust.org)



### Engaging hearts and minds for Christ

For many in the West today, Christianity is no longer considered to be a serious option for thinking people. The Zacharias Trust was founded in 1997 as the European office of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM). Our mandate is to engage people's hearts and minds for Christ in an increasingly secular Europe. We exist to reach those who have questions and objections about the Christian faith, and to equip Christians to give a reason for the hope that is within them. We aim to present the truth of the gospel in three ways:

**Evangelism** – This is the primary focus of our ministry. In particular, we aim to reach the thinking sceptic and the cultural influencer. Our speakers address audiences of university students, business people, politicians, those in the arts, people in the media and plenty more besides, seeking to reach those who shape the ideas of a culture with the credibility and the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Apologetics** – We wholeheartedly believe that apologetics and evan-

gelism belong firmly together and that part of giving a reason for the hope that we have involves dealing with people's heartfelt questions, objections and concerns about Christianity. Through speaking events, online resources, books and articles, we seek to address the questions and issues arising today.

**Training** – We firmly believe that apologetics is not an irrelevant, academic offshoot of Christianity, but something that every member of every church can and should be involved in. For that reason, as well as doing apologetics on the front line ourselves, we put on training events, speak at conferences and visit

- churches and Christian groups
- throughout Europe in order to help to
- equip Christians to think and to
- speak clearly about their faith.
- As postgraduate students, you are in
- a unique position to influence those
- within the academy with the truth of
- the gospel of Christ. We would love
- to support you as you seek to be a
- relevant, well-informed and compas-
- sionate witness for Christ in the
- postgraduate world. We are holding
- a training day in Oxford on 7<sup>th</sup> Feb-
- ruary 2009, costing just £20 for
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students (including lunch!) on the title *Uncertain Times, Certain Hope? Confidence in a Time of Doubt*. Alister McGrath, John Lennox, Michael Green and Michael Ramsden will address topics such as new atheism, the impact of the economic crisis and having confidence in the gospel. There will be another training day in London in May (date tbc).

You also might be interested in our 2009 Summer School, *War of the Worldviews*, which will be held in Queen's College Oxford. It is an intensive week of talks, seminars and discussion where we will explore the Christian response to many of the major challenges we face today.

If you would like further details about the work of the Zacharias Trust, including our training opportunities, resources or to book one of our speakers for an event, then please do get in touch with us (details below).

Our hope is that we can help to serve you, as you seek to serve Him.

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The last page of *Grads-2-Grads* focuses on a subject matter of interest or other resource available for postgraduate students. [www.cpgrad.org.uk](http://www.cpgrad.org.uk)

### For your diary

National Conference for Christian Postgraduates and Postdoctoral Researchers

Dates: 19-21 June 2009 (Friday-Sunday) Venue: Dovedale House, Ilam, Derbyshire Title: Transforming the mind and transforming the world Website: [www.christianpostgrad.org.uk/](http://www.christianpostgrad.org.uk/)

