

# The Story: Postgraduate Christian Ministry around the UK

[www.friendsinternational.org.uk/postgraduates](http://www.friendsinternational.org.uk/postgraduates)

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## A Note from Remi

I hope this Newsletter finds you well The past months has been filled with personal and ministry adventures, I was a "roving college guest for the CICCU Mission" have been meeting one-to-one studying the bible with a Chinese visiting scholar who became a Christian just before Christmas. How exciting to study the Word with a new Christian! And her Mum came to visit her and she became a Christian as well! God is so good! I also spent some time with a post grad student from Columbia, encouraging her not to walk away from her relationship with Jesus. Please keep these women in your prayers. I have also been spending several days away from home visiting the postgraduate groups at some universities across the country. The trips have been an eye opener to me on how differently things work in other universities. The college setup of Oxbridge makes building and growing a fellowship a bit easier compared to other universities. One-year MPhil students are a blessing to a fellowship but also a challenge for building a leadership team, having some three-year PhD students makes such a difference. As I go on these visits, I am reminded that there is a lot of work to be done in the UK with regards to postgraduate ministry. In this newsletter edition, you will read a bit about CHAS (Christian Humanities and Arts and Social Science Students, the history of Nottingham Graduate Fellowship and what the National Graduate Conference is about. There is also news from some of the postgraduate groups across the country, statistical information on the proportion of postgraduate students in some UK universities and on the Jubilee Centre, a Christian foundation for social issues.

Thank you for your continued prayer and financial support and for your partnership in this ministry. Blessings on you and yours. Remi.

## The case for CHAS

CHAS, Christian Humanities and Arts and Social Science Students, is an informal group with a serious purpose. It came into being in the academic year of 2004-5, as a response to a number of unmet needs among Christian postgraduate arts and social sciences academics.

The first need was a common complaint that I kept hearing that year from Christian arts postgrads, and that I keenly felt in my own life. Sometimes it would find expression as "The work I do is so obscure and pointless. Why am I wasting my time on something no-one will ever want to read?" On occasion it would be inflected more in terms of "Why am I spending my time churning out secular responses

I don't believe in to secular problems I don't share, unable to address what I think is really important as a Christian?" Sometimes, the thought was simply "Surely I can be more use to God's kingdom involved in full time paid bible teaching ministry than mothballed in some library." The questions were being asked, but no-one, at least no-one I was aware of, could provide rigorous responses, whether positive or negative.

The second need was to build community among Christian arts and social science students. We do not benefit from the lab culture that helps create community in some of the sciences, and my own experience of

postgraduate study was one of prolonged periods of isolation in libraries or in my room. Fellowship at church with God's family is a very dear and great blessing, but I felt there was still a need to meet with other Christians who understood the opportunities, pressures and frustrations of postgraduate arts and humanities study, and

were approaching these pressures from within a Christian world view.

The third, and most immediately acute need, was to help some Christians

whose faith was being torpedoed by the arsenal of critical theoretical positions on truth and meaning that remain virtually unchallenged in our corner of the secular academy. While some friends were just troubled by a manifest dissonance between what they (thought they) believed and the assumptions they were expected to hold as academics, for others this threatened to become a compartmentalization and privatization or, in extreme cases, an abandonment, of Christian faith, or its re-inscription in terms amenable to the secular mind, but not to the bible.

CHAS meets semi-regularly, with an agenda that is largely shaped by the interests and concerns of members of the group. Members can volunteer papers on areas of study that they would value thinking through with other believers (e.g. the place of providence in the discourse of historical study) or broader issues (e.g. characteristic sins of academia). On occasion we have read articles prior to meetings, which we then discussed, and have included book reviews and times of prayer. The group aims to build community, share wisdom, provide a forum for thinking through problems within and around Christian postgraduate academia, and above all to help us to glorify Christ in the substance, context and manner of our work. Any contribution that serves that end is most welcome.

One advantage of the group being relatively small and social in nature is that it is very easy to become involved. All Christian postgraduate arts and humanities students are encouraged to drop in to one of the meetings, make friends with others, and see if the group has anything to offer them, or they the group. Take a look at <http://groups.google.com/group/CamCHAS>. We would love to see you!

Chris Watkin



## History of the Nottingham Graduate Christian Fellowship

The world of student-led ministry is one of changes. Students graduate and move on, especially postgrads, many of whom are around for only one year. This can make for ups and downs in postgrad fellowships, both in numbers and in apparent fruitfulness. I recently found it encouraging to look back to the early days of the Nottingham University Graduate Christian Fellowship (GCF), remind-

**“ international postgrads are the best people to reach international postgrads’ ”**

ing myself of how God acted, bringing people together, challenging them, and how seeds were sown which have born fruit. His people prayed and God sent some very gifted people all at the same time – clearly no coincidence.

So how did it start? There had been an international postgrad fellowship for some years, meeting in the home of the Friends International (formerly known as ISCS) Staff Worker and in postgrad homes, but it was informal, and somewhat dependent on the Staff Worker for leadership. Early in 2000 Ard Louis and Bartow Wylie, and the Cambridge Christian Graduate Society, organised a day conference for people involved in graduate fellowships. Tjeri, a US postgrad, and I went along and thought ‘we need to do something – international postgrads are the best people to reach international postgrads’. Back in Nottingham Allen, a Ghanaian PhD student,

was keen that there should be a student led group. Then we learned that the Anglican chaplains were concerned that many postgrad Christians were alone in their faith, not part of any fellowship. So that started discussion and a prayer group..... and God brought together an amazing group of international postgrads such that in September 2000 we launched the GCF. It was exciting. What a mix of people! Among them were Allen, with his desire to learn to teach the Bible and his leadership gift, Maithrie from Sri Lanka and Dave from Australia with their vision that postgrads and postdocs should live for Christ within their academic studies and regain ‘thinking’ for Christ, Jennifer from Uganda, warm, wise and prayerful, Marco the East German, full of questions, and Ian, the Anglican chaplain and his family with their warm hospitality. And these were Phd students so they weren’t about to disappear!

GCF had 4 aims, for postgrads to be supported and grow in faith, to share the Gospel with other postgrads, to get people approaching their research in a Biblical way, and to provide community. Under the initial leadership the group grew and became affiliated to the Student Union. In Allen’s second year as President sub-groups were meeting in 3 different locations on a weekly basis. Both Christians and non-Christians were participating... and the joint social activities – with food, praise, costumes and laughter from many nations, felt like a taste of Revelation 7! People grew in their faith and people were introduced to Jesus by their friends... like the man from Belarus who went home with a totally different idea about Jesus and church. People prayed for each other, during difficult times.



We often don’t know what happens when people leave but about a year ago I heard encouraging news from San Carlos. A Brazilian couple who were involved with GCF went home and set up a graduate fellowship/outreach in their home, based on what they had experienced in GCF and at the Globe Café.

Thinking of all this, challenges me to get praying again.....

Debbie Dickson

# National Christian Postgraduate Conference UK

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## Transforming the Mind: Excellence in Christ?

[www.christianpostgrad.org.uk/](http://www.christianpostgrad.org.uk/)

What does it mean to be a Christian postgrad and an academic? The conference, to be held from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> June 2007, is an annual event which aims to explore what it means for Christians studying at or working in university to have a “transformed” mind. The conference emerged in 2003 out of the desire to equip and enable Christian academics to develop transformed minds during their postgraduate years. It seeks to promote holistic lives that are not dichotomised into Christian vs Academic, and to challenge postgraduate students about their calling and involvement in the world.

The theme of this year’s conference – Excellence in Christ – addresses what excellence means for a Christian academic;



it tries to understand how “Excellence” can be subverted and subversive when we are in Christ. Vinoth Ramachandra will unpack what it means to “not conform”, “be transformed” and be a “living sacrifice” in the context of a world that demands a

peculiar brand of success and excellence from those who enter as players into the academic arena.

The weekend will include biblical expositions and talks related to the broad subject areas, as well as worship and discussion groups. There is time for exploring both the countryside around you and your own calling as an academic journeying with God. The conference is held in Dovedale, Derbyshire in a beautiful house surrounded by fields, bleats, sheep, and the sheepish (there are also the sleepish). The conference is the only one of its kind: it is inter-university, inter-denominational, inter-disciplinary, and inter-national.

Cost: **£60** full board (£10 discount for bookings before 1st May; bookings close on 1st June.) Some REDUCED-FEE places are available for those in financial hardship: see the website for further details. Come on your own, or, better still bring a group from your university...For more information please see: <http://www.christianpostgrad.org.uk/> or contact

Dr Maithrie White or Dr Mike Clifford

## For Your Information



### Did You Know!

- Manchester University has 9,149 postgraduate students and 4,500 are international Students
- Nottingham University has 6,000 PGs students and 3,000 are international students.
- Sussex University has over 3,000 postgraduate students and over 1,000 are international students
- Brighton University has over 4,000 postgraduate students and a good number are international students.
- University of Cambridge has 7,000 postgraduate students and 3,500 are international Students

**Please Pray for all these PG groups, especially for Manchester as they seek God on starting a PG group there. Thank you.**

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## News From Across The Country!

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### Imperial College London Something about our history:

The SPCF, until recently called the Senior Christian Fellowship, was started in its present form about 30 years ago, when a few members of academic staff met to pray for and support a mission to undergraduates being organised by UCCF. When the mission was over we decided to continue to meet for prayer, bible study and fellowship. Non-academic staff were welcomed, along with PGs and post-docs, and we held outreach events occasionally. We never tried to attract PGs away from the CU, but over the

years some PGs have joined us. Recently their numbers have increased, and they now form about half the group.



Quite a lot of our regular attendees are from overseas.

The SPCF at Imperial meets on Monday at 1-2pm during term. For details contact Prof Geoff New [g.new@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:g.new@imperial.ac.uk) Next term we are planning to finish our series on the "I am"s of John's gospel, and then to study Esther and Ruth. We also plan to use one meeting for a picnic in Hyde Park.

### Nottingham University Graduate Christian Fellowship

We are a relatively small group of Postgraduates that meet every Friday evening for a Bible study and fellowship. Meetings last approximately 2 hours, starting with a light meal. We often invite guest speakers to give topical seminars on issues that are relevant in particular to post grads today. (For example a recent topic was 'From Academia to the Wider World' in which we explored the challenges that post grads face as they go out into the world of work.) We aim to provide support for Christians at the University and welcome new members (being a post grad is not essential to join!!!). We hold various social events throughout the year which have proven to be great way of getting to know each other better

as are our Tuesday evening meals (a recent venture) which are open to all and are a good opportunity to bring friends along. Please pray for us, that we would continually seek God's guidance and have the enthusiasm to reach out to non-Christians at the University in the new term. Pray also that some new committed members would join and that we will grow in faith together. For more information please contact

James Philips [ahxjpp@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:ahxjpp@nottingham.ac.uk) Or Ruth Ellis [stxree1@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:stxree1@nottingham.ac.uk) [www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/~gcf/](http://www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/~gcf/)



### Sussex University

The CU postgrad/staff group at Sussex was started two and a half years ago first as a list of email addresses and then as a small group that meets most weeks for lunch. Not much has changed since then - except that Christian postgraduates have been made to feel less isolated, friendships have been formed, prayers have been offered, and food has been eaten. While the group in its present form is valuable to those who attend the



lunches, we are conscious that there are many more Christian postgraduates and staff members in the University and that there are opportunities to support each other more actively in

reaching out to unbelievers. Please thank God for the blessing of sharing fellowship together and pray that we would be captivated by God's vision for graduates at the University.

For more information Please contact Anthony Smith at [a.j.smith@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:a.j.smith@sussex.ac.uk) [www.uscu.org.uk/content/view/62/25/](http://www.uscu.org.uk/content/view/62/25/)

## More News From Across the Country

### University of Cambridge

The Cambridge Christian Graduate Society (CGS) exists to make Jesus Christ known to the graduate community in Cambridge. In the past years, our emphasis on outreach is reflected in the yearly International Student Welcome Programme (<http://www.societies.cam.ac.uk/cgs/isw/events.html>) aimed at helping non-christian international graduate students integrate into the Cambridge society. This



is modeled on friendship evangelism and is fuelled by the many existing graduate Christians who are onboard with the CGS vision. Through the academic year, CGS also organ-

ises a series of social events, with increasing evangelistic content, to which we invite the new International graduate students as a continuation of our friendly welcome. Over the years, many non-British graduate students have come to know and accept Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, before returning to their home countries to serve in various ways. Please pray that God will continue to use us mightily in this ministry.

This year in addition to the various "outward looking" events, we are also hoping to cultivate a community of thinking Christians in conversation with each other and with the larger University, not only through the existing weekly bible studies, but also through termly Grad forums and workshops where eminent speakers of various fields would come to talk about how their faith relates to their work. This is an new and exciting direction we are heading towards, so we pray and commit all such plans into God's sovereign hands - so that all will be for the glory of God's name. For more information please contact: Yirong Sim [ys239@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ys239@cam.ac.uk) or Xinyi Su [xs204@cam.ac.uk](mailto:xs204@cam.ac.uk)

### University of Oxford

The Oxford GCU is working hard to extend the presence and influence of postgraduate ministry in the University. At the core of our current activity are our Monday night forums held in the cosy upper room of an historic downtown pub. By providing challenging speakers and a safe and comfortable environment, we are working to cultivate

a community of thinking Christians in conversation with each other and with the larger University. Other ventures



include various book and Bible studies and the soon to be issued Graduate Christian Journal, tentatively named "Exerceo". Please pray for

these initiatives and especially for the current and future leadership that will require continued unity and sensitivity to God's lead. For more information please contact: Steve Buhrman [buhrman@oxfordgcu.org](mailto:buhrman@oxfordgcu.org). [www.oxfordgcu.org](http://www.oxfordgcu.org)

### University of Exeter

The Christian Union Postgraduate group at the University of Exeter was started in the 2005/06 academic year by Jonathan Lee, a PhD student in Music Composition and carried on by Guy Troup, a MSc student in Sports Science. They began a weekly Bible study meeting which continues on at present. Each week a different member of the group takes a turn leading the study. We have covered sections of Ezekiel, John, Mark, I Thessalonians and Ephesians and plan to look at a number of the minor prophets this coming summer term.

The opportunities for friendly and engaging discussion are always encouraging, as is the way people in the study group challenge and help each other to search out what it really means to live for Christ. How we relate to the people in our disciplines and in our churches, how we are being made into Christ's likeness and share Him and the salvation he gives us: these are the things we strive to understand and see happen in our lives, as individuals and as a group. Of course there are social occasions! Trips to Dartmoor and meals together have also been excellent opportunities for building up friendships and relaxing together. Incoming postgraduates for the 2007/08 year are already coming into contact, and we are looking forward to what God has in store!

by Gillian Ramsey, PhD student, Classics  
[ramsey.gillian@gmail.com](mailto:ramsey.gillian@gmail.com)

## Resources for Postgrads: Spotlight on The Jubilee Centre

[www.jubilee-centre.org](http://www.jubilee-centre.org)

The Jubilee Centre was established in 1983 to conduct research into biblical social ethics and into contemporary applications of biblical principles. Various initiatives such as the Keep Sunday Special Campaign



([www.keepsundayspecial.net](http://www.keepsundayspecial.net)) and Relationships Foundation ([www.relationshipsfoundation.org](http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org)) have grown out of our work over the years. Today we continue a programme of research and education. Our goal is to resource Christians to think about and influence society according to biblical principles. The way we live, and the way of life we advocate in the public square, is a critical component of our Christian witness. In addition to various smaller projects, we have two major ones underway:

*Sustainable Living.* Our research has been addressing global warming and the relational crisis that is its cause; sustainable living is by no means a narrowly environmental issue. For example, the manner and distance we travel and our habits of consumption tell us a lot about the way we think about family, community, inter-generational and international relationships. We formed a steering group with representatives from Tearfund, World vision, the John Ray Initiative and the Faraday Institute. A book entitled *Christianity, climate change and sustainable living* by Nick Spencer and Robert White will be published with SPCK in

late August of this year.

*Sexual Ethics.* Our goal in this work is to re-examine biblical teaching on sexual ethics such as Leviticus 20. There is an outstanding report on our website by Jonathan Burnside entitled 'Consent versus community: what basis for sexual offences' which contrasts a biblical approach to sexual offences with that of modern legislation. The organising principle of the latter is 'consenting adults', a highly individualistic conception, while the former is primarily concerned to protect the institution of the family and the welfare of the wider community.

In addition, a book being written by Rev Dr Dale Kuehne of St Anselm's College, New Hampshire, USA provisionally entitled *Standing at the threshold* will contrast a post-modern approach to sexuality with that of Christianity. It will be published in 2008. Online resources such as Bible studies will further supplement these products.

In addition to publishing books and reports, we hold events such as our Winter School, a four day conference exploring aspects of biblical social ethics. The Winter School is held in early January here in Cambridge. Winter School 2008 will explore a holistic approach to sustainable living.

*Please stay in relationship with us.* We publish a regular quarterly update called *Engage* as well as *Cambridge Papers*. These are distributed free of charge. Visit our website ([www.jubilee-centre.org](http://www.jubilee-centre.org)) to see these and other resources and to join our mailing list.

Jason Fletcher ( Director)

**Each edition of "The Story (PG)" will focus on a subject grouping or other resource available for post-graduate students.**

**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 FI address below. Please mark your gift "For Remi Toiler" Thank you.

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### NEXT EDITION:

- Interviews with the "golden oldies"
- The Sri-Lankan influence on PG Ministry
- The Round Church. Cambridge Heritage Centre