

# The Story: Postgraduate Christian Ministry around the UK

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

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## Introducing “The Story” Postgraduate Ministry Newsletter

Welcome to this first of what we hope will be many editions of “The Story”, highlighting postgraduate Christian ministry around the UK. Although a lot of good work has been happening around the country, perhaps more than many realise, there has been little or no interaction between postgraduate ministries on a national (or sometimes even local) level. Thus those who feel called to reach out to postgraduate students often end up reinventing the wheel, or are unaware of resources that could be available to them. We thank God for bringing Remi Tobler to help link up and encourage the existing initiatives, and to stimulate new ones. Remi has put together this first edition of “the story” in order to give you a taste of what God has been doing and is doing among postgraduate students in the UK.

As a member of her newly formed advisory board, I am deeply grateful to Remi for taking a step of faith to come to the UK and initiate this work in spite of the fact that she still needs to raise the bulk of her support. Our initial goal is to raise the first 40% so that she can legally be hired by Friends International as a member of staff. Would you, if you are able, consider giving to this work?

**Ard Louis** is a native of the Netherlands but grew up in Gabon. He was for many years on the council of reference of the Cambridge Christian Graduate Society and led their introduction to Christianity course. Recently he moved to the “other place” and joined the advisory council for the Oxford Graduate Christian Union. He is a lecturer in Theoretical Physics. [ard.louis@physics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ard.louis@physics.ox.ac.uk)

## Postgraduate Ministry in Cambridge

### A long-term view of a graduate student Bible study group

I arrived in Cambridge from Australia in 1990, newly married to John who, after a couple of years as a post-doc in Canberra, was returning to a research fellowship at Trinity College. A few international PhD students (from Zambia, Australia and Hong Kong) from our church were starting up a post-grad Bible Study in Trinity (at the time, only the second graduate group in the whole university!) and invited us to join. After meeting for one term in a college room, the group moved to our home where we could start each meeting with a simple meal together. To cut a long story short, that Bible study group, now one of a number of run by the Cambridge University Christian Graduate Society (CGS), is still going strong after 16 years. Of course, Cambridge being the place it is, we’ve seen many generations of students come and go, but it has been a constant source of blessing and encouragement to us.

What’s so special about having a Bible study group specifically for graduate students? Three things stand out.

First, the life of a grad student can be pretty lonely, with unique pressures and worries, particularly for international students. Meeting each week with fellow grads has been a real blessing for many, with a chance to identify with each

others’ problems, whether conflicts with a supervisor or the tedium of writing a thesis, and to pray for each other accordingly.

Secondly, the group has provided terrific opportunities for evangelism. Many students wouldn’t feel comfortable going along to a church-organized Bible study, but find a meeting organized by a student society a lot less threatening. Over the years we have seen many students come to faith, after being impressed and challenged both by observing Christians seriously discussing the Bible together and seeking to apply it to their lives, and by the practical care and love that they see between members of the group.

Finally, being part of a student society, also has the benefit that Christian students from non-evangelical backgrounds have felt comfortable coming along to the group. We have had the joy of seeing growth in their faith and knowledge of God’s Word – and their desire to share that faith with others.

John and I have felt very privileged to be a part of this ministry over the years and we pray that we can continue our involvement for years to

come. We realize, however, that it is quite a while since we were graduate students ourselves and as the age gap between us and the students widens, we see how vital



it is that it is Christian post-graduates themselves, like the three who started up our group, who reach out to their fellow post-grads. We are very excited that Remi has come to the UK to promote such post-grad ministries in other universities.

### Diane Lister

Diane is a Post-doctoral Research Associate in the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. She is married to John Lister who is now Professor of Fluid Dynamics at Trinity College, Cambridge. Diane and John are members of Eden Baptist Church.

## Cambridge Christian Graduate Society

[www.cam.ac.uk/societies/cgs](http://www.cam.ac.uk/societies/cgs)

Greetings from the Cambridge University Christian Graduate Society (CGS)! As the current president of CGS, I'd like to share with you a snapshot of what we do here in Cambridge and ask for your prayers.

The aim of CGS is to make Jesus Christ known among the postgraduate community here at Cambridge and, in reliance on the Holy Spirit, we try to do this in three general ways: discipleship and community for Christian postgraduates, outreach to non-Christian postgraduates, and encouraging and equipping Christian postgraduates to take part in such outreach. We host Bible

**“The aim of CGS is to make Jesus Christ known postgraduate community here at Cambridge”**

studies in various locations throughout the city every week, a bi-weekly prayer meeting, a “Christianity Explored”-type course, and several events throughout term to which Christian graduates can invite their colleagues and friends and at which there will be a talk from a Christian perspective. We also host training evenings to help give graduates confidence in things like leading a Bible study, doing a one-to-one study with a friend, or understanding cross-cultural communication. Just rattling off this list makes me amazed that we can manage so much, for it certainly is not by our own power or resources!

CGS has no formal membership as such, and all of our events are open to all graduate members of the university and are aimed to be accessible to as many as possible. The leadership upholds the UCCF doctrinal basis, but we are non-denominational and include amongst our mix both Protestants and Catholics. Events are coordinated by a committee drawn from a variety of churches. Postgraduates take part in various ways, whether by periodically inviting a friend along to an international food evening or the weekend away, or attending a weekly Bible study, or helping to organize a movie night, or just coming to pray for postgraduates every other week...or all of the

above...if you're lucky!

We have a particular heart for international students: they face challenges as postgraduates not faced by nationals, and there are so many internationals here in Cambridge who have never heard the gospel before and are curious about Christianity. For the last few years, we have run the International Student Welcome, a programme of events at the start of the academic year with the purpose of welcoming and showing love to the international students arriving in Cambridge and trying to settle into their work and make friends. Just a few months ago, we joyfully witnessed the baptism of a visiting scholar from Japan who had a hungry heart upon arriving in Cambridge, came to the International Student Welcome party, and attended our seekers' course (as well as many other events for seekers throughout the city!). Now we pray for her as she faces the task of understanding what it means to be a Christian in Japan, and particularly in her home university. Before that was the amazingly sudden conversion of a Chinese student who responded to the message of grace that she heard in one of our Bible studies in discussions with a friend met via CGS. Others hear and reject or do not respond visibly, but a place like Cambridge is a place people keep coming back to—to do research, come to conferences, visit while working in London—and you never know when the Lord will bring you together again.

The opportunities for encouraging and building up fellow Christians, getting connected to the worldwide body of the church, and sharing how Christ has transformed our lives with our colleagues are many and, at times, a bit daunting. We are all too aware of our own limited resources, and it is sometimes a challenge to remember that the Lord is not bound by those limitations in his work. Please pray that we would be faithful with what he has given us. Pray also for our postgraduate Bible study leaders, who faithfully host studies week in and week out, that they would abound in love and in knowledge and be refreshed in their spirits by the Holy Spirit. Pray for the Christian postgraduates, whether they are a part of CGS or not, that they would grow more like Christ, experience more of God's love during this trying time, and that they would see more and more how God is at work around them in their departments and colleges and then jump right into it and take part as God enables them. And finally, please pray for those students who are hearing of Christ for the first time: pray that they would hear, believe, and be transformed!

May God's grace abound in you,

**Diane Vincent**

President Cambridge University Christian Graduate Society

Diane Vincent is a PhD student in English literature from California



## An Interview with the Remi Tobler the Postgraduate Staff Worker By: Ruth Bancewicz (Christians In Science Development Officer)



Remi Tobler grew up in Nigeria, and moved to Cambridge at the age of seventeen, where she studied psychology. After this she moved to Canada, where she worked for Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (Canada) for sixteen years; IVCF is the North American equivalent of UCCF.

She was a staffworker with undergraduate students at York University, Toronto. During this time she completed a masters in education, at McMaster University. After ten years of ministry, she was invited to work at the University of Toronto with postgrads, by the Canadian equivalent of the Christian Medical Fellowship. She recently moved to Cambridge to work in the regional and national postgraduate student ministry with Friends International.

### “What did your work at the University of Toronto involve?”

“At the University of Toronto, I worked alongside postgraduate medicine and law students, providing mentoring and discipleship - I also connected them with local professionals and Christian faculty members, as an additional source of support and professional mentoring. I encouraged the students to organise a speaker series, inviting Christians professionals to share their experiences. This was an encouragement to the students, showing that Christians are active at all levels of their subject, and helping them to think through ways to integrate their faith and work. The students found it so valuable to be able to talk to the speakers and discuss issues that arise in their field. When we brought a well known speaker in, people from the whole campus came, up to 150 -200 people at lunch and evening talks, with plenty of time for tough questions!

There were weekly bible study and prayer groups on campus – and I was involved in

training and equipping students to lead these. I also organised bible studies which links students with more senior professionals, for those making the transition into work. Once a month, the students had dinner at a physician or lawyer’s house, and were able to ask questions of the host about how they work out their faith in their profession – these evenings were a lot of fun. The work began initially with Christian students, and then I was able to encourage the students to reach out to their peers, befriending and witnessing to them, with several becoming Christians, which was exciting! The speaker series also helped with outreach into campus, raising the profile of the group.”

### “What challenges did the students face?”

“The main challenges for the medical students were ethical, where they had to make a stand, and risk being labelled by the professors or their colleagues. For the law students, there were also ethical and political challenges if they wanted to practise in the main firms and keep their integrity, there was some cost involved but many managed to rise to the challenge.”

### “What did you like about your job?”

“Some of the highlights of my time in Toronto was encouraging students to go on short term mission projects, and seeing them come back transformed. It was also exciting to attend the graduation of a student recently, and see him so strong in his faith – these moments make the whole thing feel worthwhile!”

### “What is your vision for the work in the UK?”

“To me the education system is key to long-term changes, both nationally and internationally. My hope is to encourage Christian postgrad students to be more active within their departments as Christians – meeting other Christians in the department, and reaching out together – because the Christian postgrads are in the first sphere of influence to their colleagues. My other vision is to help inspire the faculty members who are Christians, to be a support to each other, by

praying together, praying for each other, praying for their department, and reaching out to other faculty members, and to be a Christian inspiration to the Christian students and all students alike. If students learn to be confident with their faith at the beginning of their careers, it will be easier for them later on.

I would also like to network students with academics so that they can be encouraged, and provide resources to help them in their discipline, to think Christianly about their subject. There are many groups working in this area in the UK, as well as churches, and it is important to keep talking and working together. All this must be rooted in the church, so that the churches will encourage their members to live out their faith in academia in the UK, and bring their colleagues back into the church, forming a dynamic network.”

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

### “How is your work funded?”

“It is funded through regular donations from various people and institutions with an interest in postgraduate student ministry. “

### “How can people get involved?”

“Through prayers and financial support. I need to raise approximately £ 2,600 a month. This includes salary, national insurance, pension contributions, training and travel, office and administrative expenses.”

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 on the last page. Please mark your gift “For Remi Toiler”

Thank you.

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

On the second Monday night of term, over 150 postgraduate students crammed in to the upper rooms of the Mitre pub on Oxford's beautiful High Street to hear Prof. Alister McGrath discuss (or rather demolish) *"The God Delusion"*, the latest proffering from his prolific Oxford colleague Richard Dawkins.

After a spirited question & answer session, students stayed on till late, mulling over the many issues that Alister had raised. For non-Christian students the challenge was obvious. For Christian students this evening helped build confidence



that we can: ... *demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* (I Cor 10:5), rather than buying into the spirit of the age. What a way to start your postgraduate studies! This talk and discussion was one of a weekly series organised by the Oxford Graduate Christian Union (GCU) [www.oxfordgcu.org](http://www.oxfordgcu.org).

I first came across the Oxford GCU in 2000, when it was, once again, reinventing itself with a new generation of keen Christian postgraduates. Together with Hemara Earl, then a Friends International (FI) staff worker and Joe Martin, a longstanding Friends International volunteer, they came to a day conference, "Ministering to Postgraduate Students in the UK" <http://www-theor.ch.cam.ac.uk/people/ardlouis/postgrad/> that we'd organised with Bartow Wylie of Friends International and Kairos (Cambridge). Since then, I've been occasionally visiting with their exec members when work took me to Oxford, so it is a great pleasure to now be here and to get involved in more of their activities.

The roots of the present GCU in fact go back further and lie in a sabbatical visit to Oxford by Dr Vinoth Rama-chandra, now secretary of dialogue and social engagement for the international Fellowship of Evangelical students IFES in South Asia.

Vinoth and Joe Martin started the Oxford Forum (as it was then called) in 1993/94, in order to help students think Christianly about their fields of study, and to counter the common compartmentalisation of faith (for Sunday) and work (for other days).

This year's committee consists of Steve Burhman from the USA, Sindiso Mnisi from South Africa and Wendy Quay from Australia. Steve, a theologian and a former American football player, spent the summer working as a

night club bouncer, Sindiso is a brilliant Rhodes Scholar and Wendy was a practising lawyer, so between them this loquacious group can handle almost anything!

Like its sister group in Cambridge, the Oxford GCU has always had a very strong international student component. Interestingly, although from the outside both universities may appear quite similar, the two groups have distinctly different styles, with the Cambridge CGS focussing on multiple small group Bible studies and the Oxford GCU running more speaker driven events that focus on the integration of faith and learning. Each has been successful in its own way, showing that there is no fixed blueprint for postgraduate student ministry. As we will see in future editions of "the Story", there are several other models that work well at other Universities.

**Ard Louis**

Ard Louis is a lecturer in Theoretical Physics at Oxford University. E-mail: [ard.louis@physics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ard.louis@physics.ox.ac.uk)



## Resources for Postgrads:

### Spotlight on Christians in Science

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

CiS has been around for over 60 years, helping scientists, students and many others to think through issues in science and faith, encouraging them to live out their faith at work, and speaking out about issues that affect us all. Its roots are in UCCF, as one of its 'graduates fellowship' groups - many of which are now fully fledged 'professional groups', supporting Christians in over 20 professions. CiS has almost 700 members and 200 student members, about a quarter of whom are postgrads.

As a postgrad, you can come to our conferences that are held at least twice a year, covering topics relevant to anyone working in or studying science. Our network of local groups are an excellent way to get to know people working in your field and organise events that you can invite your colleagues to.



Two years ago CiS decided to employ a part time development officer to help local groups, and students, speak on CiS around the country, and do all the other things busy academics don't have time to do! When she took on the job, Ruth Bancewicz had recently finished a PhD in genetics, working on zebrafish at an MRC unit in Edinburgh. She's now based in Cambridge, and also works part time at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion (that runs excellent cheap short courses! Check out [www.faraday-institute.org](http://www.faraday-institute.org) ) She's available to answer all your

questions and would love to hear any ideas that you have for ways we can serve postgrads more effectively. And if there isn't a CiS local group near you, Ruth could link you up with others in your area and help you to start one!

Check out the website for masses of resources. All members also receive a newsletter five times a year, and the journal 'Science and Christian Belief'. We love students so much that you get one year's membership for free, and it's only £5/year after that. Contact [ruthb@cis.org.uk](mailto:ruthb@cis.org.uk) or go to [www.cis.org.uk](http://www.cis.org.uk) for details.

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

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#### NEXT EDITION:

- History of the Nottingham Graduate Christian Fellowship [www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/~gcf/](http://www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/~gcf/)
- "Jubilee Centre Winter School January 2-5 2007. Cambridge. [www.jubilee-centre.org](http://www.jubilee-centre.org)
- National Postgrad Conference  
[www.christianpostgrad.org.uk](http://www.christianpostgrad.org.uk) next Conference:  
22-24 June 2007, Dovedale House, Derbyshire