

International Secretaries

Perhaps as you read this you are feeling a mixture of excitement, fear and being overwhelmed. You are now the International secretary of your CU and you are not quite sure what it involves or what this year holds! God has placed you in this role with a desire to reach all nations on campus. But remember you are not alone. You are surrounded by other leaders, the CU, churches, and God.

The next few pages will help you think about this year; how to give your CU a bigger picture of God's gospel for all peoples everywhere, as well as practical help to plan events for internationals on your doorstep.

Stephanie is an international student studying at your university for four years to get a degree in business. Her English is not very good, and she doesn't know anyone. As soon as she steps off the plane onto Irish soil, with its rain and cold winds blustering around and strange signs, she instantly feels excited but homesick at the same time. She comes to the university and finds her room and stays in there for the first week but comes out occasionally for freshers events and then when the semester starts for lectures. And that's it. She spends the whole year either in class or in her room or with other Asian students who also find this university experience quite lonely. She gets a degree and goes back home and lives her life. But while in Ireland she never encounters a Christian or a local Irish person that is personally hospitable and welcoming to her.

This story is repeated every year all across Ireland and the UK. But your Christian Union has an amazing opportunity to change this. It begins as we warm our hearts to who God is and to his heart for all nations and all peoples. Here are some key areas for you to think over.

Over 30,000
internationals come every
year to study to Ireland on
our campuses.

Global God with a global Gospel

Take some time to look at and pray through this vital passage:

Acts 8:26-40

1. What does Luke tell us about the Ethiopian? Who is he and where has he been?
2. How would this Ethiopian eunuch be regarded amongst the Jewish people? (cf Deut 23.1)

Digging deeper

1. What passage is the eunuch reading and what is it about?
2. To understand the verses the eunuch read, read them in the context of Isaiah 56.3-6. How do you think Philip might have explained this to the eunuch?
3. What good news does the gospel bring?
4. How does this change the life of the eunuch?
5. How does this passage give us confidence for international mission today?



Our global God sends out global people

Acts 8 demonstrates the global reach of the gospel for all peoples. Our God, at heart, is outgoing in his love for all he has created (Ps 145.9). This is no surprise for it is his nature: the Trinity is Father, Son and Spirit loving one another.

In John 17 we get to overhear a beautiful conversation between the Son and his Father through the Spirit, and it gives us a glimpse of how our God's love flows out from a missionary God:

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. John 17.15-19

Jesus is telling his Father that he wants his people not to be taken *out* of the world, but, sanctified by truth, to be sent *into* the world. In doing so, we are simply following the pattern of the Father who in love sent Jesus into the world.

We are drawn into the loving community of the Trinity through Jesus' death on the cross. But this is not so that we can float safely through life in our Christian bubbles. We are sent like Jesus to carry on his loving, reconciling mission to all peoples, which means being sent into the world.

Here are some passages to meditate on about our sending, overflowing God. Think about how this changes the way you think about God and also how this changes your way of thinking about evangelism:

» **Psalm 67.3-4** - May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.

» **Matthew 28.19** - Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

» **Galatians 3.8** - The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'

» **Revelation 7.9** - After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

What is your role?


Perhaps you thought your role was just about organising events for international students on your campus. Or maybe you thought it was about welcoming the Christian internationals that will join the CU. You may spend some of your time doing these things, but don't think too small.

You have the opportunity to help CU members see that God can't be kept in a box; that his gospel and loving purposes are for his whole world. This bigger biblical picture is more glorifying to God than if, for example, your CU teaching only ever implies the gospel is for our personal benefit. That may be true, but it's too narrow and misses the scope and depth of God's character and extent of his love!

Two things to remember:

- » God wants all the nations to hear about Jesus through the gospel.
- » He sends his people (you) to share the gospel to all nations

Of course, this will happen if the students at CU have understood and realised that reaching out to international students and caring for them is not something that is added up to the CU's mission but that if That's where you come in!



This means your CU members should be actively involved in reaching international students on your doorstep. Of course, this will happen if the students at CU have understood and realised that reaching out to international students and caring for them is not something that is added up to the CU's mission but that it is the core of who we want to be as Christian students. That's where you come in! With the help of the International Students ministry (ISM) team, you can build awareness in your CU, by inviting other students or committee members to the ISM workshops, or you can ask the ISM to come and do a workshop with all the CU.

It can also play out in praying for students in CUs like yours in Malawi and Latvia and Athens, or mobilising CU members for international mission teams.

Talk with the committee about how your CU teaching program can reflect the God who loves all peoples. A starting point might be to inform speakers in your regular teaching program than your CU is quite multicultural and so applying the Bible more broadly than just to individualised Westerners would be great!

Encouraging CU and committee to build relationships across cultures

University is a fantastic opportunity for meeting new and different people, especially international students! Think back to Stephanie, the Asian student who came to Ireland not knowing anyone. How could your CU and committee reach out to her in the different situations they are already in?

How might you take the first step to get to know them and have opportunities to share the gospel?

- » The hallmate/housemate: You are the only Christian in your residence, and you have international students living next to you.
- » The course mate: On your course you have an international student sitting a few rows behind you on their own.
- » The coffee-drinker: In the coffee shop, you see an international student sitting near you on their own.

Real friends


In all this, *authentic friendship is key*. Don't approach people with an agenda, but as human beings to enjoy their company. Pray that God would give you a love and compassion for them, as he did for you. Being real friends with the international students in your course/halls will speak volumes and as you share your life in their company. You will find that opportunities to share the joy and hope you have in Christ will arise as you pray for your friends and spend time together.

Communication and prayer

The role of the International Secretary is to communicate well within the committee and CU about what is happening with international students and also take opportunities to share about what it is to be a Christian around the globe. Do you know how living your faith plays out in the different countries where the internationals you have at CU come from? This could be very interesting to understand better their perspective as an international student.

Indeed, these people are on God's heart, but sadly ours are cold, selfish, and sinful. We pray for what we care about, and most often that's about us and what is in our comfort zone! Don't be surprised therefore that there will often be a hurdle to jump if you're to help fellow CU members grasp these needs and pray.

So, use the creativity God has given you to bring these needs alive. Don't resort to gimmicks, but talk with the Prayer Co-ordinator about how you can feed into what they're doing with the CU.



Ideas may include:

- » 3-minute videos from CUI, UCCF or mission agencies
- » Give everyone or every small group a different mission magazine at random or rip out pages from them. Give them only one minute to scan it. Then ask people to pray for God to be glorified in the situation they're reading about.
- » Testimony from an international student or a CU member who did a summer mission trip. Remember interviewing with three good questions is often much better (and safer!) than handing over the microphone and getting a travel documentary!
- » A one-page PowerPoint each week with a few facts about the church (or lack of it) in a different country and what they would like prayer for. Try the Operation World website (see at the end in the "Resources" section).

Organising and leading an International Team

One of the key roles you have is making sure you don't do everything! If you have a couple of students interested in caring for internationals, ask them if they would be part of an "International team" with you. You will need a team that has a passion to reach out to international students and make God's global church a priority. Try to find people who are willing to do some organisation and leading events, and who are influencers amongst their CU peers. Think of ways to inspire the team and encourage them.

Here are some ideas:

- » Testimonies from international students
- » Provide training (or invite the ISM team) for reaching international students and how to initiate conversations
- » Gather your team together and pray regularly for the campus, international friends you have, and for the world
- » Give people in your team jobs and areas they can focus on and encourage them to be creative in that
- » Team up with any international societies on campus
- » Keep the gospel of Jesus Christ central, reminding each other of the gospel and pray gospel-shaped prayers

Providing events for internationals to go to

Once the CU and you have made friends with international students, the next step is inviting them to events the CU put on. These can be specifically international events, and this can be a great way of meeting new people and sharing the gospel. But planning is vital.

What events can you plan?


Remember that although events are important, don't become event-driven. Friendships matter most. Encourage CU members to read a gospel with their international friends, most of whom will be far more open to doing so than Irish students!

However, events are very useful catalysts for friendships and demonstrate to the campus and to visiting students that we have something to say to their worldview.

The key with any event is to start thinking and planning in advance! The year passes incredibly quickly, and you may miss some key opportunities.

Tie events into the calendar

A good way to start is to think about the timetable of the year:

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- » Fresher Weeks Welcome: Lunches, tours around the city, link with other international societies, international buddy system, Globe Café, walks.
 - » Christmas – Carol service, nativity, presents, Christmas story.
 - » Easter – Easter egg hunt, drama, Easter story.
 - » Special Days – Firework night, St Patrick's Day.
 - » Holidays – International students don't all go home – how can we link them with church or CU families?

How to organise events

Key things to think about when organising an international event:

- » Publicity – How will you advertise?
- » Place – Where will you hold the event and is it easy to get to?
- » Cultural sensitivity – some food may be offensive to other cultures (e.g., pork), what clothes you wear (girls wearing low tops can be offensive), girls speaking with guys/guys speaking with girls.

The whole CU is key

Remember that our goal is not to create two parallel CUs – one for Irish students and one for internationals. Try to help the committee think through how the CU can be most welcoming to outsiders and visitors, irrespective of where they've come from.

Mobilise CU members for summer missions

In the summer there is a mission called Dublin International Outreach (DIO). If you want a bit of a change of scenery, there are missions happening all across Europe and the UK (Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester). It would be amazing if the students who are part of your "International team" could go together to one of them. Summer teams are a fantastic way to see God at work in different parts of the world, to see what in your faith is biblical and what is merely Irish, and to stretch your own faith. It would also impact the whole of the CU if increasing numbers of you did international missions and were fired up to share the gospel to the nations. Imagine how that could change the attitudes to international students within CU!

Ways to mobilise CU members:

- » Interview someone who went out the previous summer
- » Talk with your Staff Worker about the mission organised in Dublin and how to be a part of it
- » Collect information on all CU members going out over the summer and write up a one-page prayer summary for the rest of the CU to pray for them
- » Join one of the International Student café summer teams in Dublin or the UK

One last thing...

Being an International Secretary is really fun. Although there will be times that are frustrating and challenging, there are times where you meet amazing students from different cultures. You have opportunities to open the gospel with them and make some amazing friends. You have a great opportunity to rely on God and prove he is faithful to you throughout the year too!

Keep motivating the CU to look beyond just reaching the local Irish student, keep your heart warmed to the gospel and keep looking to Christ.

Further reading and resources

- » *Let the nations be Glad*, John Piper (IVP)
- » Friends International website & resources <https://www.friendsinternational.uk/>
- » *Missionary God* video from www.uccf.org.uk/media/world-mission/
- » Operation World: www.operationworld.org
- » Mission societies and their staff <https://www.ufm.org.uk/> for example
- » Friends International App

To get in touch with the International Students Ministry (ISM) team in Ireland, please contact Hollie at hollie.tagle@friendsinternational.uk.

You can also read a bit of her story here: <https://www.cui.ie/staff-profiles>