

# ISFM 2004 Student Track: Insider Movements Kiss of Zeal and Knowledge: A Student Participant's View

by Suzanne Harlan

*Editor's Note: From September 23–25, 2004 the ISFM met in conjunction with the EFMA/IFMA/EMS in St. Louis, Missouri. On day two of the conference, participants in the ISFM Student track held a “marathon” meeting, during which they interacted with such distinguished speakers as Bob Blincoe, David Cashin, David Garrison, Brad Gill, Paul Hiebert, Kevin Higgins, Todd Johnson, Chong Kim, Tim Lewis, Rebecca Lewis, D. D. Pani, John Ridgway, Ralph Winter, and Dudley Woodberry—plus others who prefer not to be named. As you’ll discover, this was no ordinary gathering.*

**I**t was the kiss of zeal and knowledge: the meeting of those who had been with those who were going; the hushed and excited tones of a treasure-hunting party hunched over their map and scanning the horizon at the unfurling of dawn.

Tucked away in a lonely tower of the St. Louis Airport Marriott, thirteen students gathered in a poorly heated hotel conference room. Uncomfortably true-to-form, it was the kind they name after presidents and line with metal-backed chairs—certainly no backdrop for the imagination. But as the students shook the sleep out of their 7 am eyes, they saw before them the first of a litany of missions greats: scholars, scouts, strategists, sages, prophets and poets. By the conspiracy of providence, timing and genius these men were all at the same conference at the same time, and had been persuaded to pencil into their day: “Deliver stirring address to missions successors.”

As the day went on, thirteen students grew to a circle of thirty. At times these novices were joined by so many veterans—drawn away from their own conference by the rawness, depth and brilliance that charged through that Andrew Jackson room—that the circle of metal-backed chairs was filled, the carpet covered with cross-legged bodies, and all standing room occupied. The poorly heated room became quite cozy, and we sat enraptured.

The scholars rustled through the pages of their minds, and lovingly traced out for us the watermarks they’d found in history, anthropology and science of God’s intimate orchestration of humanity’s redemption. They encouraged us to

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use academic discoveries to fight evil in the realms where we've let it thrive, and more holistically advance God's kingdom.

The scouts recounted what they'd seen God doing at the edges of the world. The story of Jesus was taking on clothes it had never worn before. His unchangeable words and His vibrant Spirit were transforming families and communities to an extent and in ways that are surprising for the imaginatively faith-filled and shocking for the dully disbelieving.

The strategists explained that life is war, and that as sons of the light we are called to advance the kingdom of light with our blood, sweat and tears. If we are to take that light to the edges, we will need discernment about what God is doing and may be about to do, and creative ideas of how to be a part of it.

The sages warned us that we won't find the way on our own. We will need to cling to a band of brothers and sisters with whom we can go anywhere and do anything. But we shouldn't just go wherever we want and do whatever we want—we must heed the experience and advice of those who have peered into or set foot on our promised land of the edges.

The prophets told us that our generation is uniquely and gloriously suited to the task of spreading Jesus' story and kingdom in this world of disparate, yet intimately connected, peoples. We are a generation that celebrates diversity and delights in seeing clearly and interacting genuinely with people who are different from us. Such qualities will equip us with the sharp, yet gentle awareness necessary to communicate and live Jesus across cultures. We, unlike our modernist forefathers, are okay with not seeing the world as a paint-by-numbers kit, but are open to uncertainty and ambiguity, and are willing to deal with difficult ques-

tions—the ones you meet when you cross an ocean or a worldview. And our generation has the information, resources and creativity at our fingertips to weave fitting answers for those questions.

The poets sang reminiscent songs of their youth, when they were poised on what seemed like the pinnacle of spreading God's word through the whole earth. The glint in their eyes told that they wouldn't have chosen any other life, but the battle scars they bared mellowed the tone of their song: Their families had been attacked and wounded, and they had walked lonely, resisted and criticized roads. They told us to do what we love. Advancing God's kingdom doesn't mean resigning oneself to a traditional or two-dimensional missionary role. Engaging the edges of the world will require influencers of every mold, and those fitting no mold: the church-planter, the artist, the academician, the scientist, the doctor, the teacher, and the computer wizard.

Sometime around sunset, the novices' zeal broke out into spontaneous prayer, while the veterans agreed in watchful silence. We then resumed our roles as learners. Hours later, as midnight crept nearer, and our sixteen-hour reverie was broken by insistent Time and sheer exhaustion, several bands of brothers filed out of Jackson's room, leaving it coldly uninspiring no longer.

The St. Louis band discussed how they could help their small Christian school understand God's work beyond their picturesque brick walls by inviting missionary speakers to interact with their classmates. The Wheaton band drove their van back towards Chicago, amazed at what had just happened. Wheaton student Rachel explains, "We went down there as a bunch of tired, busy students taking time out for

something that we thought could be beneficial. We all saw ourselves as having potentially different 'callings' . . . In the space of 24 hours, God transformed us into a team of people with the same vision for each other and for our campus in seeking our role to proclaim God's name among unreached peoples. We don't even know how it happened."

The Minneapolis-St. Paul band discussed visions of bringing Jesus into a Muslim community in their area. And as for my Pasadena band of brothers and sisters, at the sight of our matching blue USCWM shirts I shake my head, amazed and grateful at such excellent company. We've only recently come together from a couple of corners of the globe under the dreams and guidance of some seasoned missions veterans. We're trying to beat straighter educational and team-building paths to the edges of God's kingdom for ourselves and other young scholars, scouts, strategists, sages, prophets and poets like us. As we walk in the prints of the brave bands before us, we fixedly gaze beyond where their efforts end to where our knowledge-tempered zealous lips might kiss the promise of the unfurling, all-pervading glory of God. **IJFM**

The next national ISFM gathering will be held in Denver next September. To find out more about that upcoming event, the U.S. Center for World Mission Youth Division, or other opportunities to dialog with or join young people involved in missions, please contact:

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