

The Olsen Outlook

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Greetings from Sunny (but often stormy of late) Nebraska!

As we look back at our last Olsen Outlook, we can hardly believe that we failed to mention our conferences at the end of May. We had so much to tell you about and ask you to pray for with the student work that we forgot ourselves. :)

Emily, Ryan and Michael stayed all together with two different families for five nights in Lincoln while we attended the annual InterFACE Staff Retreat and ACMI '08 Conference in Washington D.C. ACMI is the Association of Christians Ministering to Internationals. We were so encouraged by both events and by how God answered our prayers for our children (especially Michael) while we were away.

As Bob & Lynn Culver gathered our InterFACE staff together, they had prayer on their hearts. Each staff member or couple had answered questions ahead of time about how we incorporate the Word of God into our prayer lives, some favorite scriptures for or about prayer, books we recommend on prayer, how to pray for world leaders, etc.

Bob chose several people to share 5 minute teachings on prayer, but put together a newsletter-like page for each of us using our answers and included our pictures and contact information. They left a blank box for current prayer requests, which we took time to fill in and pray over together during the retreat. How refreshing! We feel this was an excellent way to get to know and bond with our fellow InterFACE staff.

ACMI was a little picture of heaven as we worshiped with people from numerous national and ethnic backgrounds. We heard testimonies from students or former students whose lives had been touched with the Gospel by people reaching out of their American comfort zone. One of these men holds a prestigious position at the Mexican Embassy. Another is a pastor and was one of our plenary speakers. Each one affirmed the work we are doing and spurred us on.

In addition to well-chosen plenary speakers and topics (including our own Grete Shelling, who spoke as a professional Christian counselor on avoiding burnout), the conference gave us a lot of information and material to digest and apply in our work.

The workshops and seminars were excellent! InterFACE's Bill Pery, a well-known author, held a workshop on a storytelling method of bible study. We were so pleased to have our co-laborers Ron & Judy Spaulding there, too, who became ACMI members this year at our encouragement. We are confident that the insights we each gained will serve to make us a more effective team. Nanette majored in workshops on reaching Muslims and discipleship and Judy focused on ESL, while Ron and Kurt attended workshops on a variety of ministry subjects.

It was fabulous to see how many people from different organizations and churches have caught the vision for reaching the nations that have come to us--yet the workers are still few...

"He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the **workers are few...**

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out **workers** into his harvest field' " (Luke 10:2)

Looking Back to Move Forward

Reflection upon this past year of ministry has led us to a place of evaluation and prayer. We did this together as a Strategic Planning Team with the Spauldings and others, and included some of the students. Beyond that, we are evaluating our next steps as a couple. We believe we have invested well in helping the Spauldings get ISF started at UNL. (You may remember that they serve with International Students, Inc.) We have kept the name "InterFACE" very low key in the process, so as not to confuse the students.

In some ways, we feel we have let our personal calling remain too low key as we leant ourselves fully to ISF. The Friday meetings and other events have been very labor intensive and have required a lot of evenings away from home for Kurt or both of us.

The pace of meetings and events hasn't allowed us the time and energy to pursue ministry among Muslims at the universities here or to use our own home and family for a center of hospitality for ministry as we have desired. We also want to take more time to invest our lives in one-on-one discipleship. This is key to our vision of making disciples of all nations. We'll remain connected to the Spauldings and ISF, but also want to explore new ways of serving and sowing broadly that the Lord is laying on our hearts.

One idea we have is to connect incoming believing internationals to local churches through existing home groups and bible studies. If we can train the existing group leaders to welcome and integrate these students, we believe we will see the body of Christ locally doing much more outreach and evangelism to internationals through these believing friends and their acquaintances.



Paula (black shirt) and others at the last IRO meeting at NWU