

Happy Valentine's Day!

We hope you've had a great start to the year 2008! We trust your Christmas was a blessed time of remembering the greatest love of all, sent to earth in the form of a tiny babe, lying in the manger.

Valentine's Day is another opportunity to reflect on true love--

"There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

Jesus, who is speaking to His disciples here, goes on to say, "You are my friends if you do what I command. ... You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other."

We know that Jesus was addressing not only the twelve chosen disciples of that day, but all who would be overcome by His love and drawn to follow Him in each generation thereafter. We pursue this lasting fruit in our own lives—the fruit that His Spirit produces in us—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). We know that He also wants to produce a spiritual harvest through us—lives touched so by His love that they cannot resist coming to Him, drawing deeply from the love He offers and having their lives transformed from the inside out (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

At times, the burden of what the Lord has called us to do seems overwhelming, but then we remember these words in Matthew 11:

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.**29** Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**30** For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

It is easy, sometimes, to forget that He never meant for us to carry our burdens alone. When we become overwhelmed with responsibilities and circumstances in life, we realize that we haven't been relying upon Him and His strength as we should. Our prayer for ourselves and for you is that we each drink deeply from the fountain of Living Water, as Jesus called Himself in Luke 4, that we would let Him fill us up with His love to overflowing, that we might find great joy in doing all that He has called us to do, whether the menial tasks of daily life, or the eternally significant work of leading our children in His ways or showing outsiders how He lovingly implores them to receive Him and become children of God (John 1:12-14).

ICF Renamed

Our student group has now taken the official name International Student Fellowship (ISF). We are still in the process of gaining official recognition on campus, and this change was one of the steps necessary. The stated purpose of the organization is clear about our Christian basis, but taking "Christian" out of the name is a legal step for making the campus organization open to anyone, regardless of country of origin or religious background.

At a weekend retreat recently, we met with several of our core students about how to make ISF Fridays inviting and beneficial for their non-Christian friends. They agreed that with a clearly Christian program, having the meal beforehand and options for discussion groups afterward were enough to make them comfortable inviting those outside our faith. Currently, there are three options—English Conversation Group, Bible Discovery Group (for seekers) and Biblical Discussion (for believers). The students want to add another group for those whose English is more advanced, but who aren't ready to explore the Scriptures in this setting. We agreed to add a Life Skills group which will have more in-depth content that isn't overtly spiritual, but which meets students' needs and gives them an opportunity to hear Christians' perspectives on important issues.