

## INTERVARSITY FOLLOWING CHRIST 2008 REPORT



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### Students and Faculty Transformed, Campuses Renewed, and World Changers Developed

InterVarsity's Graduate & Faculty Ministries (GFM) encourages and equips graduate students and faculty to live as Christ's disciples, following him as they seek to be a redeeming influence among the people, ideas, and structures of the university and professions.

At the *Following Christ 2008* conference, nearly 1000 graduate students, faculty, and professionals gathered to challenge and encourage one another in living as Christ's followers in the world. The conference theme of human flourishing kept us focused on practical, real-world implications of the Gospel. With close attention to Scripture, accomplished experts from the full range of professional and academic disciplines, and rich networks of peers and mentors, *Following Christ 2008* represented a feast for the mind, heart, and soul.

"I had no idea what God was doing in the academy. Coming to FC08 was like cresting the summit of a hill and seeing the Church with banners unfurled, marching into battle, when I had thought I was wandering deep in enemy territory alone. Here was scholarship of the highest quality combined with faith of the deepest commitment and sincerity." — FC08 delegate survey respondent

### Making Connections

The call to remain faithful and spiritually alert in the university and professions can be a difficult if not daunting one, and the value of encouragement and spiritual community can be inestimable. *Following Christ 2008* formed and fostered networks, friendships,

and communities that will have an enduring influence—professionally, academically, and spiritually.

"One of the [business] mentors was sought out by a student who just happened to be applying to his company. He was able to tell her who her boss would be, what the company culture is like, and prayed with her about it. They were both marveling about God's plan bringing them together. What were the chances that they'd both be at *Following Christ*?"  
— a GFM campus staff member

### Going Deeper with Conference Tracks

On each day of the conference, delegates gathered in tracks to learn from noted presenters and from one another. Before delving into their disciplines, track groups began with manuscript study in the book of Colossians. They also:

- ▶ addressed pressing issues specific to their academic or professional disciplines;
- ▶ developed networks with Christians in their fields;
- ▶ discovered research, publishing, and professional opportunities with fellow delegates;
- ▶ clarified their passions and callings;
- ▶ discussed practical applications for what they learned together.

"I had an incredible time at the conference. The people I met and the conversations I shared were such an encouragement of God's work and desires in the academy. I felt challenged to pursue God and his community through my graduate studies in neuroscience."  
— A new Emerging Scholars Network member

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### Experiencing God in Worship and Word

Plenary sessions were a feast of musical worship, multimedia presentations, dance, Biblical exposition, challenging presentations, and prayer. Bishop N. T. Wright's three expositions of Colossians—on wisdom, glory, and virtue—were a conference highlight for many delegates. Plenary speakers hailed from a diverse array of fields—history, English, business, theology, science, media— and they covered a wide range of topics and perspectives. Yet each speaker illustrated the ways in which God uses those he calls in very specific ways to bring glory to the Kingdom. To listen to the plenary session audio, visit [fc08.info/fc08-audio](http://fc08.info/fc08-audio).

### Benefitting from Day Ahead Events

The Day Ahead program provided extra opportunities for learning, reflection, and networking. These events targeted specific communities within the conference delegation, including:

- ▶ emerging scholars considering academic careers
- ▶ academic and professional women
- ▶ international students and scholars
- ▶ professional students and practitioners

The smaller format of the Day Ahead events enabled delegates to interact with noteworthy speakers in a more intimate setting and to form connections with fellow attendees prior to the start of the main conference.

"The [emerging scholars] Day Ahead turned out to be extremely valuable for junior faculty on the tenure track. I was reminded by the panelists' exhortations to stay physically healthy, keep the Sabbath, find a strong mentor, and maintain healthy relationships with family and friends, in addition to, of course, hitting the ground running and eliminating any distractions along the path to tenure." – guest contributor, Emerging Scholars' Network blog

"It was wonderful to see professional development integrated into InterVarsity's traditional discipleship ministry." – FC08 delegate survey respondent

### Announcing the Bosscher-Hammond Prize

The Bosscher-Hammond Prize Competition encourages the integration of faith, learning, and practice — one of InterVarsity's core values — and demonstrates how the academic disciplines and professions can contribute to human flourishing. Eighty-nine entrants competed for \$6,000 in prize money, with seven finalists presenting their projects at the conference.

#### The winning projects were:

- ▶ A team from Baylor University, led by engineering professor Walter Bradley, proposed a plan to develop more uses for the coconut. Noting that coconuts are abundant in many of the poorer regions of the world, the Baylor team believes that the application of engineering, distribution, manufacturing, and business resources can develop markets that will improve the financial yield from the shell, the husk and the inner parts of the coconut.

"It is exciting to think that this abundant renewable resource has been provided by God to help the poorest of the poor, if we can just see the value that God has put into this fruit and figure out how to get that value out," their proposal said. "We set out to discover the technology that would allow us to start a triple bottom line company called Whole Tree, Inc. around coconuts, one that would make a profit, make a difference in the lives of people most in need, and be good stewards of our planet."  
— Professor Walter Bradley, Department of Engineering, Baylor University

- ▶ Stephanie Gehring's goal is to write orthodox theology in the form of poetry. "As an artist and a Christian, it is part of my practice of belief not to ask questions as though they have no answers," she wrote in her application. "The balance between clarity and mystery is one I'm struggling to find." Stephanie recently received an M.F.A. degree from Cornell University.



Francis Collins, former director of the Human Genome Project, addresses delegates during a plenary session at FC08

- ▶ A public health initiative in the state of Arkansas focused on working with both white and black churches in an effort to improve information and motivation about healthier living practices. Two important principles in Karen Hye-cheon Kim's proposal were, "God cares about your health and we cannot be healthy by our own strength." Karen works for the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, and has also won government grants for her initiative.

"Participating in the Bosscher-Hammond Prize Competition has changed the way I look at my research. I am so grateful for the opportunity."  
– FC08 delegate survey respondent

## Building Witnessing Communities

The *Following Christ* conference is deeply integrated with InterVarsity's broad-based, on-going ministry in building witnessing communities of graduate students and faculty nationwide. The real fruit of FC08 will be borne out in the lives, workplaces, and communities to which delegates returned on January 1. As scholars and professionals pursue their business, hone their craft, and deepen their faith, we pray that they have found inspiration and challenge, a vision as well as practical tools, from having gathered with a remarkable cohort at *Following Christ 2008*.



## FOLLOWING CHRIST 2008 BY THE NUMBERS

- ▶ 955 in attendance
- ▶ 179 different universities represented, plus countless organizations in the public and private sectors
- ▶ Delegates from 43 states, four Canadian provinces, and several foreign countries
- ▶ 249½ total hours of conference programming offered in less than four days
- ▶ 31% non-white delegation
- ▶ 89% will recommend attending a future *Following Christ* conference to friends and colleagues
- ▶ Thanks to the generosity of our financial partners, we were able to grant an estimated \$60,000 in scholarships to delegates who attended *Following Christ 2008*.
- ▶ Visit [www.followingchrist.org](http://www.followingchrist.org) to access audio and video.

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### And the delegates said...

"The most important impact FC08 had on me was to make me decide to take my doubts seriously by exploring answers to my questions, to take a less hostile stance toward Christianity, to turn my face toward God while I work out my doubts."

"My favorite aspect of the Following Christ conference was the opportunity for Christians from different disciplines to interact with one another and walk away with a wider knowledge of God's work in the world."

"There was always someone to answer a question or assist you or even to just chat with you, get to know you, and pray with you."

"The conference really encouraged me to try to use my research in a way that it can have a positive effect on others — and in particular the poor."

"I regret that I did not push friends harder to come to the conference. I hope you don't wait another six years to have another!"

"A truly culture-making, Christ-worshipping event. Music, art, conversation, organization — it all worked!"

"I got so much more from the fellowship with other people present than I ever expected!"

"I was challenged to take the vocation of the academy as serious, joyful work for God and His Kingdom."

"It was very encouraging to see people passionate about their fields of study AND their faith in Christ."

### Partnering Organizations

*Following Christ 2008* partnered with a numerous organizations, which contributed to the conference by offering receptions, exhibits, and resources to delegates.

American Scientific Affiliation  
C. S. Lewis Foundation  
Christian Educators Association International  
Christian Legal Society  
Christian Medical & Dental Associations  
Gospel for Asia  
International Fellowship of Evangelical Students  
International Institute for Christian Studies  
International Justice Mission  
LCC International University  
North Park Theological Seminary  
North Park University  
Priority Associates  
Regent University School of Divinity  
Regent University School of Communications  
Seattle Pacific University School of Business  
and Economics  
Teach for America  
Trinity School for Ministry  
Veritas Forum  
Voice of the Martyrs

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