

Still REACHING INTERNATIONALS

Missions is as close as the International students sitting at the next lunch table. From its beginnings, InterVarsity® has embraced the biblical concern for the "alien and sojourner" and seen the strategic importance of reaching "the uttermost parts of the earth" with the Gospel through International students.

The number of International students in the US keeps growing. Campuses are increasingly multiethnic. So in recent years, Internationals who are Christians play a larger part in our campus outreach.

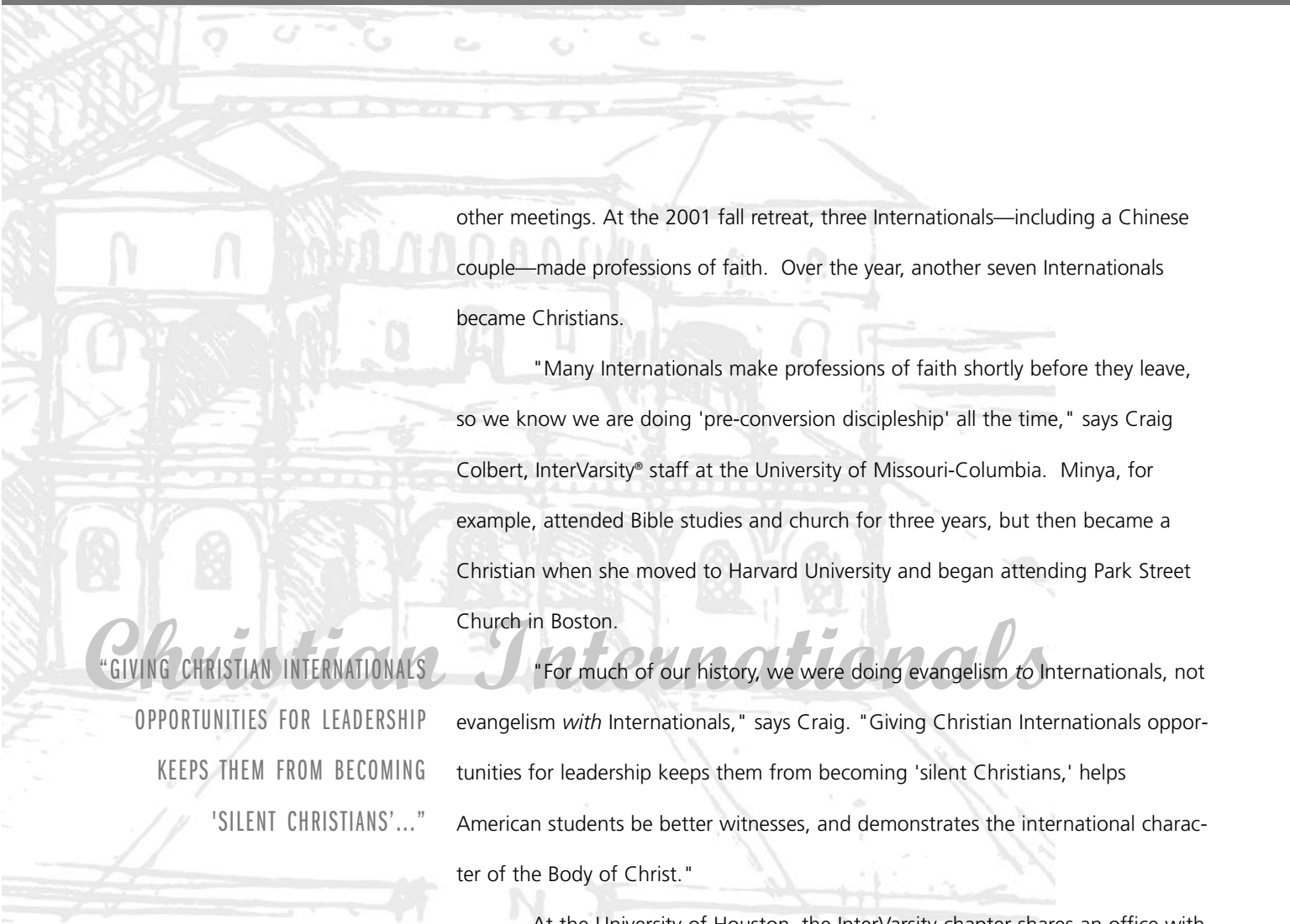
"I liken International students to Boaz in the book of Ruth," says Joe Whitchurch, InterVarsity staff at Purdue University. "As the son of an outsider, Boaz was sensitive to the vulnerability of another outsider, Ruth. Internationals in our chapters give the group credibility, create a welcoming atmosphere, and help with mentoring new believers."



At Purdue, half of the graduate school is International students. One third of the grad group is made up of Internationals and, for the past five years, at least one Christian International student has been on the chapter executive team. With so many Internationals on campus, the grad group interacts with non-Christian Internationals all the time. From the friendships that develop, it is easy to invite Internationals to International Dinners, Investigative Bible Studies in the Gospels, or to take friends home for the holidays.

At other schools, Christian Internationals organize their own "international witnessing communities." These groups break down the stereotypes of "white Western Christianity" commonly held by students from other countries. In the Blue Ridge Region, Internationals organize evangelistic retreats and invite their friends from the Internationals Bible studies on campus. "The speaker is always an International Christian," says Katie Rawson, Area Director for the International Student Ministries staff in that region. Internationals also lead the Bible studies and





other meetings. At the 2001 fall retreat, three Internationals—including a Chinese couple—made professions of faith. Over the year, another seven Internationals became Christians.

"Many Internationals make professions of faith shortly before they leave, so we know we are doing 'pre-conversion discipleship' all the time," says Craig Colbert, InterVarsity® staff at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Minya, for example, attended Bible studies and church for three years, but then became a Christian when she moved to Harvard University and began attending Park Street Church in Boston.

Christian Internationals
"GIVING CHRISTIAN INTERNATIONALS
OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP
KEEPS THEM FROM BECOMING
'SILENT CHRISTIANS'..."

"For much of our history, we were doing evangelism *to* Internationals, not evangelism *with* Internationals," says Craig. "Giving Christian Internationals opportunities for leadership keeps them from becoming 'silent Christians,' helps American students be better witnesses, and demonstrates the international character of the Body of Christ."

At the University of Houston, the InterVarsity chapter shares an office with the Muslim Students Association. This proximity has led to numerous conversations and friendships. The men from both groups play basketball together; the women get together separately. The friendships have extended to succeeding student generations.

Two years ago, the groups began discussions about their beliefs. During these gatherings, the students eat together and talk of other things besides religion; then each group presents something of their faith for 15 minutes. Then they separated; women in one group, men in another, for a time of questions and answers. "We were amazed," says the staff worker, "at the many misconceptions that Muslim students have about Jesus and about Christianity. These forums give us a friendly atmosphere to present the Gospel clearly."

It was no surprise, then, that Muslim students approached InterVarsity® immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The Muslim students could trust the InterVarsity students. Since that September, two more discussion forums have been held, and some of the Muslim students attended an InterVarsity chapter meeting on the essential beliefs of the Gospel.

On other campuses, it was the InterVarsity students who took the initiative to contact Muslim students. "We talked about ways that students could approach and have conversations with Muslim students after September 11," says Ann Boyd, InterVarsity staff at DePaul University in Chicago. "We also talked about how we can stand up for people of Middle Eastern descent when we are in conversations with people who are angry and ranting and seeming to cast blame on a whole race of people."

"I think the best thing I have seen God do on campus the week after September 11 is in my personal relationship with the president of the Muslim Student Association," says Jonathan Parker, InterVarsity staff at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX. "On the morning of the tragedy, I called him. Later that day we met briefly and he invited me to an open forum they were planning for Friday." Jonathan adds, "A good relationship is absolutely essential before any kind of real spiritual dialog can begin."

Real spiritual conversations are happening on campuses across the country. And many students from "the ends of the earth" are coming to faith.

Real spiritual dialog

"A GOOD RELATIONSHIP IS
ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL BEFORE ANY
KIND OF REAL SPIRITUAL DIALOG
CAN BEGIN."