



ISM IRELAND PROJECT

Annual Update, 2020-21

An Unprecedented Year...

BY HOLLIE TAGLE, ISM IRELAND TEAM LEADER

International Student Ministry (ISM) has looked and felt very differently over the past year. As an ISM community (like many others) we have had to learn how to use online platforms such as Zoom, strive to foster fellowship online and seek to connect with international students that we've possibly never met with in person. **The challenges have been countless, however the opportunities have been undeniable.** I am so thankful for the dedication, creativity and love embodied across our ISM family of staff, churches, Christian Unions (CUs), supporters and volunteers in Ireland. From online baking events, Thanksgiving Meals to 'order and collect', online international cafés, training workshops, bible studies and socially distanced walks, there has been much to be thankful for.

Please read on for more updates, stories and news about how God continues to work among international students here in Ireland!



This issue:

Update from ISM Team Leader
PAGES 2-3

News from Greater Belfast
PAGE 4

Friendship & Faith Series
PAGE 5

ISM Growth in Dublin
PAGE 6

iCafé Relaunch in Cork
PAGE 7

Looking Forward
PAGE 8



ISM Ireland General Update

BY HOLLIE TAGLE, ISM IRELAND TEAM LEADER

"There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God." Ps 86:8-10

The truth and the certainty of these words ring out so clearly even in the midst of a global pandemic, social distancing and ever-changing restrictions. For He alone is God and He truly does wondrous things and we rejoice in all that God has enabled us to do over this past year. From seemingly small steps forward such as developing our ISM Ireland Facebook page and improving communication with our volunteers and supporters, to recruiting a new Staff Worker for ISM in Dublin and taking our annual conferences online (such as Christian Union's Ireland's Equip conference and more recently Friend's International's Annual Conference), we are witnesses to how God has been and continues to be at work.

One area of ministry that has grown throughout this time has been in the area of training and volunteer support. Our **Friendship & Faith Series** was born out of a summer training series in response to having to cancel Dublin International Outreach. It has been incredibly exciting to watch this series grow in quality of content and reach across Ireland. We've been particularly encouraged by increasing connections with more CUs and churches in the Republic of Ireland. We pray that God would continue to open doors to grow these relationships and support the wider ISM community both in the North and South, in churches and Christian Unions. (Read more about on page 5).

We've also been working on increasing our resources and materials for ISM use within both FI and CUI. One that I'm particularly excited about is '3D Mark' - a resource focused on Mark's gospel which highlights various lenses of understanding (such as honour/shame, fear/power, guilt/innocence) which illuminates our study of Scripture and helps us become more effective in both our evangelism and discipleship. We hope this resource will be available for use by summer 2021.

"The challenges have been countless, however the opportunities have been undeniable."





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Covid-19 has impacted not only the number of international students across Ireland but also opportunities to connect with them. Online meetings and activities have proven relatively popular, however at the end of a long day taking classes online, it can be a big ask for international students to spend their evenings on screen as well. When possible, socially distanced activities (in person) such as walks, scavenger hunts and meal collections have been really effective ways of engaging with students. We have been excited by the re-starting of a number of international cafés in both Dublin and Cork, and inspired by the work of many CU groups across Ireland and their commitment to ISM. Though it has been difficult to connect with new international students this year, it has been exciting to reconnect with returnee students who are back in their home countries. Many have reconnected with groups they met while studying here in Ireland and because most events, iCafés and bible studies are online, they have been able to participate in a way that wouldn't have been possible under 'normal' circumstances.

Another (arguably) unlikely area of growth has been in recruitment, both within CUI and Friends International. From an ISM perspective we are deeply grateful for the appointment of Heledd Job as our new ISM Staff Worker in Dublin (read more from Heledd on page 6) and pray that her appointment will be the first of many more across the island. We have also begun the process of establishing a Dublin Development Group to support and work alongside Heledd within the city. Small beginnings perhaps, however incredibly significant.

We're delighted that after a review, CUI and FI have reaffirmed their commitment to the ISM Ireland Project. Looking ahead to the incoming year, our priority continues to see international students' lives transformed by the gospel - serving them in word and deed. We'll also carry on with recruitment as we strive to grow our ISM team, not only in terms of staff but also, Reach volunteers, CU and Church connections and supporters. We hope to develop a growing ISM resource library (printed, training videos, digital ISM toolbox etc) which will include resources such as 3D Mark, the ISM Handbook for Churches and much much more.

We are deeply grateful for your continued support of the ISM Ireland Project and pray that over the next year we would continue to see international students lives transformed by Christ.



News From Greater Belfast

BY KIM BECKER (ISM STAFF WORKER)

Belfast international student ministry (ISM) began 2020 with much hope and anticipation! We had a successful January iWelcome meal, welcoming both new and continuing students; shortly thereafter many across Belfast and Jordanstown celebrated the Chinese New Year. By February we were cautious but continued to run weekly outreach ministries and seeker Bible studies. This included relaunching the Belfast iCafe Bible study, which attracted a dozen or so students for several weeks. The Ulster University Jordanstown iCafe was also growing friendships and introduced a short Food for Thought for the first time. Then in March, the national lockdown halted all our weekly activities. Although most ministries had just two or three more events scheduled, the ending was abrupt for all and sad for many, as some students had to return home quite suddenly without a proper goodbye or end to their time in Belfast. After the initial shock and steep learning curve, almost every ministry was able to move online; the blessing in the disappointment was that we were able to run an additional 10 weeks of ministry. Moving online afforded us other opportunities, like staying in touch and reconnecting with students who had returned home. By May, creatively meeting online became familiar and fun! We were still able to engage positively in community through online prayer meetings, Bible studies, game nights, and even the Greater Belfast End of Year Celebration, organised by the Development Group. Over the summer we were cautious, yet optimistic, about our plans for iWelcome. In response to continued social-distancing measures, we organised more outdoor social events, like walking tours and picnics, beginning in August.



In an attempt to connect with the hundreds of pre-sessional language course students (from INTO Queen's) a new English conversation group, called iTalk, was launched. It hasn't been as popular as we expected, but it brought together volunteers from several churches in south Belfast, and continued to run online during the autumn semester. Even though attendance numbers are down by about 80%, I am so grateful for and encouraged by **the number of faithful volunteers from churches and Christian Unions who show up each week ready to befriend and engage with students.** While the numbers are smaller, the participants are consistent which has allowed volunteers to really build friendships with students; it also reflects how much students appreciate the community. One surprising benefit to moving online and outside, is reaching more students than usual with Muslim backgrounds, from places like Dubai, Oman, Saudia Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt, who wouldn't normally attend an event hosted in a church.



Please **PRAY** for friendships with international students to grow in order that we can share more with them about Jesus; pray the Holy Spirit is at work in their hearts and minds. Please continue to pray for International students who may be struggling with loneliness, or with feelings of isolation or anxiety, due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, and for creativity, perseverance and faith for all the churches and CUs navigating ministry in these difficult times.



Friendship & Faith Series

Our Friendship & Faith Series is designed to offer biblical, practical and relevant training and support to the ISM community across Ireland. Since summer 2020, we have run workshops from 'How to Love and Reach Your Muslim Neighbour', 'How to run an iCafé online' to 'Story', a workshop on how to share your faith with your non-Christian friends. We have explored the impact culture has on our friendships and evangelism as well as practical ideas for outreach using markers in the calendar year such as Christmas.

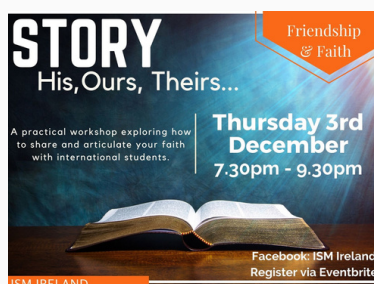
Do keep up to date with what is happening via our ISM Ireland Facebook Page or email hollie.tagle@friendsinternational.uk

PAMELA ATKINSON, ICAFÉ VOLUNTEER BELFAST SHARES...

"When ISM Ireland invited me to attend the Autumn 2020 Friendship and Faith training series via zoom I accepted. The training consisted of three sessions that were held on three different days at monthly intervals. Through the first workshop, "Every Nation, Tribe and Tongue" led by Paul Coulter, I was challenged by the knowledge that my culture effects both consciously and subconsciously my interactions with international students. Paul described with examples the influence a person's culture has on their behaviour, feelings, values and beliefs. He then compared the main world cultures. Western culture has a strong identity with guilt/innocence, Eastern with shame/honour and a third power/fear which is predominant in Totalitarian and Tribal Societies. Finally, Paul emphasised how **Christ both inhabits and transcends culture calling everyone to himself through his Gospel**. He finished by quoting Revelation 7:9, where people from "every tribe and nation" will be in heaven.

The second "Jingle All the ISM way" was a practical workshop where we put ideas together and discussed how we could connect with international students at Christmas, both face to face and online. This was put into practice when ICafé hosted a craft session online (QUB CU volunteers delivered craft kits to the international students beforehand). We met up via zoom; some made a Robin decoration while others made an origami Santa. Most of the International Students accepted an invitation to stay on for a Bible Study which is really encouraging. The final session of the semester, "Story: His, Ours, Theirs", explored how to share and articulate your Christian faith with an International Student. I found the training valuable as it provided the background theory essential to improve my engagement with International Students."

An App designed especially for international students is now available through FI. Through this app, students can connect with local ISM events, activities and staff/volunteers and we hope to utilise this more and more across Ireland.





Our ISM Team is growing!

DUBLIN UPDATE

After many years of praying and recruitment we are delighted to welcome Heledd Job to our ISM Ireland team. Heledd will serve as our ISM Staff Worker in Dublin from September 2021 and we pray that her appointment will be the first of many in the South. Please do be praying for Heledd as she prepares to move to Ireland in the summer and take up her new post with us.



"I'm Heledd, originally from North Wales but currently living in the North of Italy. I've spent most of the time since I graduated being involved in student ministry with IFES in Wales, Portugal, Slovakia and now in Italy. It's been such a privilege during that time to be able to come alongside students from many different cultures as they seek to build communities where others are welcomed, befriended and have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel of grace. As someone who's spent the last 10 years as a foreigner, I've seen and felt the difference a warm community that displays the welcome of the gospel can make. So I'm really looking forward to joining with students and churches in Dublin in September to offer that same welcome to many others. I would love you to pray that I finish well here in Italy, making the most of the opportunities over the coming months to love and serve my team and the students here well. Please also pray that as I transition and move in the summer that I would continue to find my peace and stability in my Shepherd and in his good and kind presence."

Key Prayer Points for Dublin

- Pray for the international students there who have been increasingly isolated during the pandemic.
- Pray for the Churches in Dublin as they seek to minister within the ongoing Pandemic. Pray that they may know unity in Christ, opportunities for fellowship and support and courageous creativity in their evangelism and discipleship.
- Pray for the CUs as they think through ways to continue to connect with students in general and international students in particular.
- Pray for the establishment of the Dublin Development Group, that God would provide the necessary people and seek to grow ISM across the city.



We are also so thankful for Lylia Francais, who has been serving as part of CUI's Relay programme in Dublin with an ISM focus over the past year. She has shown such resilience and vision throughout a very difficult time and been a catalyst for ISM in the city. Praise God and pray on for UCD CU's new iCafé and Adelaide Road Presbyterian's café, as they seek to connect with international students and run evangelistic bible studies.



iCafé Relaunch in Cork!

BY HANNAH IRWIN (CUI STAFF WORKER, CORK)

With the lockdowns and college closures of March 2020, the University College Cork iCafé petered to an anti-climatic end. When September came, and post-grads and exchange students from all across the world were arriving at UCC and Cork Institute of Technology, the question presenting itself was, “How are we going to reach these students with the gospel?” Well, friends, God moved, and he provided the labourers for our plentiful vineyard! We gathered a group of fourteen people from across the churches and CUs of the city to re-launch the iCafe in an online format. We held a series of six events, each with time in discussion groups to build community, and with different activities each week, from baking to film discussions! I would love to be able to tell you that everything went super well, but in reality, over the course of the six weeks we only had about half a dozen students come along. One Chinese Christian student who is very involved in UCC CU this year has told us that she doesn’t think, at least for Chinese students, that being invited to an online event where you don’t already know people isn’t very appealing, so this may be why we saw little “success” on that front!



That is why, this term, we are trying to find ways to make connections and real friendships first, and events or small groups where people can encounter the gospel. As there are around 200 Chinese students at UCC this year, one idea that Zejing has suggested is encouraging Western Christian students to offer to help Chinese students learn English and to learn Chinese from them in return. Seeing as there are at least 17 students at UCC learning to be Chinese teachers, this offer will probably work very well! That way Christian students can build personal connections with the Chinese students in their city, and we hope and pray that God will use those connections for His glory!

Key Prayer Points for Cork

- Please pray for Rumbi and Colleen, who are leading the inter-CU team, and those on the international ministry team.
- Pray for the endeavour to reach Chinese students through language exchange, and that plenty of Christian students will catch the vision for this and be keen to participate, and for wisdom to know how to reach students from other nations as well.
- Pray that God will bring international students in Cork to know Him!
- Pray for increasing opportunities to partner with local churches in ISM across Cork.
- Pray for Hannah as she serves in her role with CUI.

'How are we going to reach these students with the gospel?'



Looking Forward...

BY PETE EDWARDS (REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR WITH FRIENDS INTERNATIONAL)

The ISM Ireland Project with its formal partnership between Friends International and Christian Unions Ireland is now in its fifth year and was recently reviewed. We are really pleased to be able to say that both organisations are encouraged by the start that has been made and are committed to working together to reach out to more international students across the island of Ireland. As we look to the future, recruitment to facilitate ISM in CUs and churches in Cork, Galway and Coleraine is high up the agenda and we also recognise the need for second workers in Dublin and Belfast. We would very much value your partnership as we seek to grow this ministry.

Please do contact us for prayer news and/or to get involved with ministry happening local to you. Please also consider giving financially towards this ministry. Hollie, Kim and Heledd continue to need financial mission partners and we also have a ISMIP fund that we hope to use as seed-funding for new positions. Thank you for your interest and involvement in this strategic ministry.



GIVE



If you would like to become a financial supporter of our work in Ireland in general or one of our workers in particular, please do so via

www.friendsinternational.uk/donate or

<https://www.cui.ie/give>

Please designate your gifts for ISM Ireland.

PRAY



Please do partner with us in prayer for ISM across Ireland. If you would like to receive regular prayer updates please get in touch with hollie.tagle@friendsinternational.uk

JOIN



Keep an eye out for our latest job vacancies and opportunities to join our team! Or volunteer in one of the many ISM ministries across Ireland.

‘It has been really hard on me being an international student in a totally new country, under new rules and environment, and also being a first year University student, add to that the pandemic and the lockdown.

These alone were huge challenges, but considering that I love being challenged and I believe in God, I had faith that it’s going to be better one day. Moreover, not only my faith in God and my willingness in taking challenges that encouraged me to move along this path, but also the people around me and the organisations like (Friends International) that supported me throughout the path and provided me with opportunities to go out, meet new students and make new friends during these hard times.’—

Abdel Hani, Dubai, UUB Physio Therapy



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