

**International Students, Inc.**  
***Reaching the World from Home—The History of ISI***

*ISI is the oldest and largest foreign student missionary movement in America. As with other movements, God began with an individual who had a growing vision and calling.*

### **The Right Time**

At the end of World War II there was a push to establish para-church groups that responded to special needs yet unmet by the church. Some of these groups included InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), Youth for Christ, The Navigators, Campus Crusade for Christ, World Vision, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

During this same time, Bob Finley, founder of ISI, became increasingly aware of and burdened for the growing number of international students studying in the United States. While some individuals and perhaps a handful of churches across the country recognized the opportunity to reach the world from home, there was not a concerted movement to evangelize and disciple foreign students until Dr. Finley began ISI.

### **The Calling**

The vision-seed for a ministry to international students was planted during a discussion between Finley and another missionary during a train ride in 1948. After this time, Bob Finley went to minister in China.

The seed was watered during Finley's first year in China while watching the growth of Chinese communism propagated not by Russians in China, but by Chinese student who returned from studying in Russia.

In 1949 the vision-seed was again watered through a discussion with Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators.

When Dawson Trotman later visited Finley in 1951, Trotman asked what had been done about the vision for a ministry to foreign students. Finley replied, "Nothing."

This was the turning point for Bob Finley. The vision-seed was finally germinated. Finley wrote to Billy Graham, for whom he was now working, for Mr. Graham's counsel and possible consent to return and establish an international student ministry in the United States. Although Graham advised Finley to remain in Japan, Finley resigned and returned to the U.S. to implement the unique and strategic vision for ISI.

### **Early Years**

In 1951 Finley recruited Max Kershaw and Carroll Lindman. Kershaw, based on the University of California – Berkeley campus, began meeting international students arriving on ships in San Francisco harbor. Lindman was based on the campus of the

University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The Navigators loaned Warren Myers and Bill Michel to assist in the development of the new ministry, which was then known as FOCUS (Fellowship of Overseas College and University Students).

Finley's foreign mission ministry in the United States became officially established as International Students, Inc., in 1953. ISI's headquarters moved to Washington, D.C. and occupied two rooms of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Films – Graham was now supportive and a member of the Board of Advisors. There were 33,000 foreign students from 128 nations enrolled in U.S. colleges in 1953, and four ISI area ministries.

### **Leaders with Continued Vision**

In January, 1968, Bob Finley passed leadership of ISI to Hal Guffey.

In 1972 Hal Guffey moved the headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Star Ranch in Colorado Springs, Colorado. One of Hal's major accomplishments during his 20 years as president was leading the development of ISI's friendship evangelism approach to ministry. During this time more churches became involved with ISI and hundreds of internationals found Christ and were prepared to return home as effective witnesses for the Lord.

In September 1988, Hal passed the leadership baton to Gordon Loux, who brought more than 25 years of management experience in the Christian community to his new position. Gordon had helped former presidential aide, Charles Colson, begin Prison Fellowship. He is also a founder, board member, and past chairman of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). During his five-year term as president, Gordon led the ministry to focus only on international students. He moved ISI from being a loosely-knit association of ministers to an organization interdependent in the utilization of its resources.

In 1994 ISI named Dr. Tom Phillips as the new president. Tom came to ISI from a role as Director of Counseling and Follow-Up with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, with whom he had served for 20 years. During his seven years with ISI, Tom emphasized that it would be young people who carry the message of revival to the world, and international students who carry it to their own countries. He asked God to assemble a team of holy men and women touched by God's hand to reach out together to international students. Under his leadership God increased the visibility of ISI and further developed the vision for working with churches and volunteers. Partnerships developed with scores of other church and para-church groups who also minister to international students. Tom also oversaw the selling of Star Ranch and the move of ISI's Home Office to a corporate office setting.

### **Today's Leader**

ISI's current president, Dr. Douglas Shaw, picked up the leadership mantle in December of 2001. After growing up and receiving his initial education in Calcutta, Doug came to the U.S. over 33 years ago as an international student and earned both an MA and a Ph.D. at California Graduate School of Theology. He has served several churches in California in either interim/consultative roles or as senior pastor, having been ordained since 1974. He is the author of many articles and more than a dozen books and training manuals. In addition to these, Dr. Shaw has served with several para-church ministries, including Living Bibles International, Christ for All Nations, the Joshua Project/Mission America, and Every Home for Christ. He has a heart for and extensive experience in missions.

Dr. Shaw states that:

*I feel that it is our privilege as Christians to befriend these students with the love of Christ, just as Jesus would if he were here and, as God provides the opportunity, we need to introduce the message of salvation through Christ to them.*

*Some of them may accept Christ and become Christian and others may not, but it is important to plant a seed and to leave a Godly, Christ-like influence with them. When they go back home, some of them will be Christians and will live out of their faith, and others, even if they are not Christians, we would hope would continue to be open to the Christian message and have a positive attitude toward our country.*

As the new millennium begins, the number of international students in the U.S. has increased to over 700,000 and ISI's staff continues to grow. Exciting ministry opportunities – such as the *China '97, '98, and '99* conferences and the distribution of the *Jesus* video in large numbers are raising the numbers of students who know Christ through ISI and the joint efforts of international student ministries.

All this, as well as an increasing vision for prayer throughout the world, give us assurance that our goal of seeing every international student have an opportunity to say “yes” to the Gospel can actually happen.