

Report: A Tale of Two ISFMs



Steve Saint was the kickoff speaker at this year's ISFM in Orlando.

Orlando, Florida, USA, September 15–17

Gathering two weeks and 10,000 miles apart, the ISFM met twice this year, first in Asia (see former ISFM president Chong Kim's report below), then in Orlando, Florida (USA), just prior to CrossGlobal Link and EMS. The Orlando theme "Best Practices in Frontier Mission" reflected the annual ISFM dance between mission praxis and ongoing theoretical development. From the first moments of Steve Saint's illustrative keynote to the final interactions of audience and plenary speakers, participants at the Orlando meetings wrestled with "fruitful practices" from multiple perspectives.

Anchoring our discussions were the presentations of the Fruitful Practice Research team, which not only took us behind the scenes into their Muslim world research, but introduced us to "knowledge stewardship," a set of attitudes, proven skills and approaches that could increase the cross pollination of "best practices" across the frontier mission movement. Drawing on years of experience in mainly tribal animist contexts, Saint claimed our primary "Missions Dilemma" was the continuing failure to see the necessity of indigenous perspective and enterprise. This was bookended by Gilles Gravelle's final plenary on "The Changing Role of Cross-Cultural Workers in Bible Translation," which chronicled, among other things, the seismic shift in Bible translation from cross-cultural to mother tongue translators. We hope to bring you Gilles' contribution in our next issue. Three sessions focused on methods and approaches to Nomadic ministry (Malcolm Hunter), the Buddhist-Shinto Japanese (John Ridgway) and the Hindu world (Parimal Roy). John Constantine, a Lebanese pastor, told many stories from his long experience in the Arab world. Rick Brown's session "Contextualization without Syncretism" challenged popular notions on this controversial subject, claiming on biblical and theoretical grounds that not only is contextualization an essential part of *Missio Dei*, but, properly understood and critically undertaken, it's not really possible to "over-contextualize." The final workshop led by H. L. Richard delved into issues of diversity among those practicing an "insider" paradigm in frontier ministry. The ISFM also got a fresh look at the complex role of short-term missions from published expert

Robert Priest. His call for a more balanced assessment of this popular movement led to much interaction from the floor in the final roundtable session.

The conference also recognized the contributions to the ISFM of Ralph D. Winter, who died in May. The ISFM executive committee presented a plaque honoring Winter's role in the founding of the ISFM to his wife, Barbara, as his son-in-law, Brad Gill, moderator of this year's ISFM, looked on. The ISFM is but one of the many institutions Winter founded that is moving into the future with the DNA of his vision and passion for frontier mission.

—Brad Gill, President, *Int'l Society for Frontier Missiology*

Southeast Asia, September 2–5

In early September 2009 a strategic joint meeting was held in Southeast Asia between the Asian Frontier Mission Initiative (AFMI) and the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM). Predominantly from Asia, more than 50 participants (representing 12 different countries and 20 different organizations and networks) gathered around the theme: "Global Cooperation, Asian Initiative, and the Insider Paradigm." The first full day of the joint conference was organized by the AFMI and the second full day by the ISFM.

Some 20 presentations and/or discussion groups focused on such topics and issues as "Catalyzing Insider Movements among the Unreached"; "The Growing Church in China and its Possible Contribution Towards Asian Mission"; "Facilitating Insider Movements: Challenges Facing the Outsider"; "Creator or Creature?": Describing Allah in a Contextualized Malay-Indonesian version of the Taurat"; "Empowering Creativity" "New Faith, Renewed Identity: How Muslims are Finding the Goodness of the Good News"; and more. We also heard the testimonies of two Muslim followers of Jesus. Noticeably absent from the presentations and discussions was the Hindu World, a situation we hope will be corrected in the future.

A New Society is Born

One exciting outcome of the joint meeting was the formation of the Asia Society for Frontier Mission (ASFM), the first regional embodiment of the Society for Frontier Missiology outside of the United States. Historically, what was initially the U.S. Society for Frontier Missiology had by default become the "International" Society, but this new Asian sister initiative will now bring non-Western thinking on frontier missiology to a larger audience than ever before. Among other things it hopes to accomplish, the ASFM aspires to publish, in the near future, the works of Asian reflective practitioners in the context of frontier missiology. The first ASFM conference is tentatively scheduled to take place in late October, 2010 in Southeast Asia. **IJFM**

—Chong Kim, *Steering Committee Member, AFMI*