

Next edition...

we'll explore how to initiate conversations about Jesus and finally we'll look at empowering new believers to work out the implications of faith in their context. Buckle up (make sure your Resonate subscription is up to date) and read with two lenses – one learning about what happens overseas and the other applying the cross-cultural lessons for mission in your backyard.

SHARING *Your Faith*

Part I

Is Anyone Out There?

CREATING CONNECTIONS *for* MISSION

Last year, Resonate readers enjoyed a three part series called, 'A Dummies Guide to...'

a) Discerning a call to cross-cultural mission, b) Becoming a cross-cultural worker and c) Sticking it out. The articles were great reads, full of tips and ideas for a personal journey in mission.² Here we begin the next series about what cross-cultural workers actually do. First, Susan Campbell looks at making connections with people.

We know that preaching on street corners and delivering tracts are outdated strategies for sharing the Gospel, so how about these ideas for the next generation?

1. TWEET “DOES ANYONE OUT THERE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT JESUS?”
2. GIFT HILLSONG’S GREATEST HITS FROM ITUNES TO ALL YOUR COLLEAGUES.

Yeah right? As if! We all know that it rarely works like that. We know that it’s about relationship, relationship, relationship.

We know about Jesus intentionally choosing a group of followers with whom to share his life and mission. We know about Paul making connections with the Athenians by drawing attention to their altar to an unknown God before he made his God known. We know the catchcry about ‘meeting people where they are at’. And we have some (often avoided) sense that we should share our faith with those who are our nearest and dearest.

Yet there are times in our lives when our relationships have to start from scratch. We’ve moved to Brissie or enrolled in a Masters or started scoping at Boost or joined a frisbee team. Or, we scan through our contacts screen and realise that most of our friends are Christians and it’s time to move out of the bubble. We begin the exciting (for some) and exhausting (for others) path to making new connections.

This is the experience for cross-cultural workers who live among least-reached people groups around the world. They respond to God’s invitation to join Him among people who don’t know Him, pull up stumps in Australia and start from scratch somewhere else. They move into a community where, for a while, they don’t know its culture, its language or any of its people.

A tough gig! Where do they even begin to make connections? A few Global Interaction team members share their experiences.

Lulu teaches English to uni students in a bustling city in Central Asia. When she started, she’d hoped that she’d have plenty of opportunities in the classroom to get to know students, share their lives and faith journeys but it hasn’t been so easy. The limitations around religious freedom are stringent. The students are reserved in the classroom, hesitant to speak and focused on their grades. Undeterred, Lulu invited students to her home for food and fun. This year she’s had all of her 220 students over, twice, hosting a dozen or so students at a time! (And I was patting myself on the back for inviting a friend to the carols night!) The students love to eat together, talk in a casual setting and get to know their teacher in a personal way. Lulu says, “Because of the closer connections, individuals often share situations in which I have been able to offer help, such as counselling, prayer and support.”

DAN is a 30 something dad who lives in a small rural town in the Silk Road Area. Most young men in the town are involved in binge drinking, fighting, promiscuity and drugs which lead to broken homes, jail time and poor role-modelling for the kids. In addition the local people are suspicious of foreigners and building relationships with people is tough.

However, by noticing the advertising on billboards, jerseys on kids’ backs and many fields scattered around the town, Dan quickly learned that the blokes of the town love their footy (the round ball variety). Ah-ha, an opportunity for connection!

As well as joining a local team, Dan initiated a community sports festival to coincide with the hype surrounding the FIFA World Cup. He presented a proposal to local authorities and was given an enthusiastic thumbs-up from the Vice-Mayor. He worked with locals to organise the event, including welding and painting goalposts and marking out field lines with sawdust. 300 locals turned up! Following the success of the festival, Dan is exploring opportunities for coaching clinics, football camps and integrating life-coaching material.

He says, “Sport is a great way to connect with young men but to also promote good health, friendship and community. I hope that through my modelling and conversations I will see deep friendships formed and lives changed.”

Catherine first moved to Cambodia and one of her language teachers invited her to join some of the other teachers playing table tennis on a Saturday morning. Not the ideal day off - the mammoth effort of speaking Khmer the whole time, interacting with her teachers and playing a game she hadn’t played for a decade - it would be easier to stay home. She says, “The easier and more comfortable thing for me to do is to stand quietly in the back ground and hope that someone reaches out”. However, the desire to build relationships, she went along and stayed for lunch. And went back the next week. And the next. The regular interaction enabled the start of some rich friendships; “I ended up sharing a house with the teacher for a year and we continue to do life together.” Catherine believes that adopting the posture of a learner does amazing things for making connections; “I listen to their stories, I share my stories, I let them ask me lots of questions and I remember that those who come into my life are those God loves and longs to know.”

That’s the crux of it, isn’t it? Believing that we have a part to play in God’s mission of making God’s love known. That exciting and grace-soaked task is surely more than enough to motivate and inspire us to make the effort – to go to the party, send the dinner invitation, join the footy team, attend the school reunion... A critical task for cross-cultural workers is to be praying for the Spirit to open their eyes to the opportunities and possibilities around them. It takes a little bit of trial and error and a whole lot of listening. And also for us – paying attention, noticing the prompting of the Spirit in us and just getting out there and having a go. Catherine says, “Is it easy? No, not always but an incredibly rich, transforming, life-giving privilege. I wouldn’t want to do anything else!”

² If you missed seeing them, read back issues at www.globalinteraction.org.au/resonate