

# ITS CONNECTIONS

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



## A Better Campus For A Brighter Future

*A look at ITS' newly renovated spaces*

When ITS relocated to West Covina in 2019, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), ITS' accrediting body, scheduled a visit to inspect the new property. The purpose of this visit was to make sure the West Covina campus was up to standard and was sufficiently capable of being an academic space for the institution. While the space increased by 70% from its previous location in El Monte and had potential for enrollment growth, ATS determined the property itself needed renovation before it could open to students. The building experienced significant neglect over the years and required substantial renovations to make it suitable for the seminary, its students, and faculty.

Shortly following the inspection report, ITS met with the San Gabriel Presbytery and the West Covina Fellowship to work on the building renovation project. Jim Conner, the current Board Chairman of the ITS Board of Trustees and Founder of Transforming Poverty, volunteered his time to take the lead in this project. Jim hired several ITS students and trained them to do construction to a western standard.

The impact of being a part of these renovation projects is nothing short of significant. Jim is passionate about holistic, transformative development. He has invested time in non-profit work with students for 12 years, training them to develop their own sustainable business models that can work within the context of their own local communities.

One of the students who partook in the renovation project is Fitsum Tsige, a current ThM student and former ITS Student Body President.

For 6 weeks in the summer of 2019, he primarily worked on painting and demolition but was asked to assist in other areas of the project as needed.

**"This was an exciting opportunity for many of us. This project financially supported our ministries while providing us with vocational training. Aside from practically training us on the job, Pastor Jim would set aside time once a week to teach us about business skills."**

Jim explains his philosophy of training students rather than outsourcing others to assist in the renovation projects. "Construction is a universal business. It is something that is done no matter where you go. And so my goal with these students is to train them to construct to a western standard so when they return to their own countries, they can start their own businesses and train others." Fitsum explained that some students started the project with prior experience while others were new to construction. But together under Pastor Jim's steady leadership, all were able to successfully renovate several rooms in a short period of time. Fitsum recounts the laughter he and others had as they worked together. This was a rewarding experience for them as they were given an opportunity to learn necessary skills. Fitsum explains, "More so, we were renovating our own school so it felt like we were a family renovating our home. It was an important project to us and we wanted to do well."

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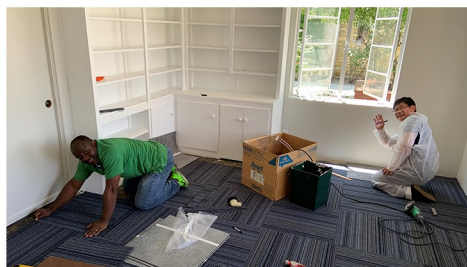




*A series of photos (below) depict the process of renovating different spaces on campus. Jim Conner (left), poses next to George Amimo and Mecious Nkhoma.*

When asked about addressing student needs on campus, Fitsum suggests, “In the future, it would be wonderful if the library area could expand to accommodate bigger study and reading spaces for students. This will encourage students to spend more time at the library.” Fitsum also encourages the addition of a student/faculty lounge area for those who wish to relax in between classes. He hopes that the administration will take these ideas into consideration as they plan for the future.

“I understand there are projects that take precedence. But what can we do with what we have now to make our campus better for our students in the future? Be resourceful with our space. We tend to focus on having good faculty and students. We have great professors and our students are doing well. But the space and the place in which we learn are equally as important. We want our campus to be enjoyed by everyone who walks down its halls.”



Since the start of the project in June 2019, renovations have been done on the president’s office, administrative spaces, faculty offices, library, six classrooms, and bathrooms. Solar panels and campus-wide wifi have been installed, and the heating and air-conditioning units have been repaired. 2020 Student Body President, Mecious Nkhoma, and Student Dorm Manager, George Amimo, are currently assisting Jim with the remainder of the renovations.

Most renovations are expected to be completed by June 2021. While many of the rooms are completed or near completion, bigger spaces like the Fellowship Hall, church sanctuary, and building exterior still need work. A proposal has been drafted for these major projects and is in the process of review. “We already have eager tenants ready to share the campus on weekends and evenings when the majority of the campus is not in use by the Seminary. With Covid-19, our circumstances and timelines have changed. However, our goal remains the same-- to complete the renovations so that when we do reopen, we will be ready to receive tenants,” states Jim. The renovations will also greatly benefit ITS faculty and students as they will have better facilities and upgraded classrooms when they return. ITS is currently working on plans to reopen its campus for the Fall 2021-2022 academic year.

## Greetings, Friends.

As spring in Southern California returns with flowers in full bloom and green leaves filling the trees, I call to mind one of my favorite bible verses from Lamentations: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Seasons come and seasons go but God’s mercy and love endures forever. As each year passes the mission of ITS continues to expand through various partnerships we’ve nurtured over the years. Our partnership with Bangkok Bible Seminary (BBS) is one of the most enduring and thriving examples of our mission expansion. BBS has been a hub of theological education and mission in Southeast Asia, training pastors and leaders from Thailand and its surrounding nations. I had the privilege of teaching a class in their joint DMin program with ITS earlier this year. I was greatly challenged and encouraged by their serious academic engagement and deep ministry reflections. Like our country, Thailand must navigate the pandemic, political tension, and ongoing influx of migrants. Thai Christians are faithfully responding to God’s call to minister to the neglected by bearing public witness to the Gospel.

A ministry called Transforming Poverty has partnered with ITS in the West Covina campus renovation project. Rev. Jim Conner, current ITS Board Chair and founder of the ministry, is passionate about empowering our students to be the leaders of their community and engage in economic and spiritual transformation. He has taught students vocational skills such as construction and helped develop sustainable business models for their ministry. Thanks to their hard labor, our campus is ready for in-person worship and classes now! We plan to open our campus to the community and the public this fall.

When students are not learning vocational skills or theology, they are encouraged to garden and cultivate fruits and vegetables in the backyards of the ITS dormitories. This is another way for our students to engage in creative and environmentally sustainable activities. They’ve been enjoying fresh vegetables harvested from their garden. We hope to expand the garden to benefit more students.

These projects and collaborations are born out of the Seminary’s deep commitment to holistic theological education. As the community and church navigate multifaceted challenges and opportunities, our ministry has to be creative, entrepreneurial, and holistic. Thinking outside the box is promoted and celebrated at ITS. We hope our students will lead the way in their community with the insights and ideas they gain from the Seminary. I remain grateful for your partnership in our exciting work.

Blessings in Christ,  
James





# An Enduring Connection

## BBS and ITS Partnership Remains Strong as Pandemic Rages

Three decades ago Dr. Manoch Jangmook joined International Theological Seminary (ITS) to pursue a Master of Divinity course. His main dream was to gain more knowledge of Scripture and Theology after graduating from Bangkok Bible Seminary (BBS) in Thailand. Since Dr. Jangmook could not afford to pay for his studies, ITS offered him a scholarship for his three-year study after which he would go back and serve God in his home country.

**“The studies at ITS are intended for students to apply what has been learned for ministry back in the respective nations. I learned discipleship through life with the faculty who were close and cared for students,”**

says Dr. Jangmook. ITS, in its very nature, is a melting pot of cultures with students from four different continents comprising of over 20 countries. The training not only introduced Dr. Jangmook to other cultures in a practical way, but also taught him how to integrate into and serve in them.

Dr. Jangmook graduated in 1993 with an MDiv and ThM by enrolling in courses every summer. He returned to Thailand and took up the position of Academic Dean of the Bachelor of Theology program at BBS. He reveals, “The first order of business was to finalize an academic catalog for our bachelor’s degree and invite ITS to start a DMin program at BBS.”

At the turn of the century Jangmook was back at ITS to pursue his doctorate and graduated with a DMin in 2003. His dissertation was titled “Curriculum Review of Bangkok Bible Seminary in the Context of Program Administration for the Thai Church.”

Dr. Jangmook now serves as the president of BBS. Under his leadership, BBS has grown from having just two degree programs with less than 100 students to the current eight programs with a student enrolment of 950. The two institutions are continuing with a three-fold partnership through sharing faculty as lecturers at BBS; sending students to further their studies at ITS in the ThM program; and through prayer and financial support from BBS and ITS alumni in Thailand for the continuous equipping of the next generation of Christian leaders.

BBS currently donates \$1,000 to ITS annually and each of ITS’s Thailand alumni donates \$100. Based on this partnership, DMin students from BBS who would like to further their study at ITS, have the advantage of being able to transfer credits. “God has started His good work at ITS and He will be faithful in leading the institution through to success. I pray that our international alumni, who are now leaders in their nations to think of ITS, think of the memories, opportunities, scholarships that we received through ITS and support ITS in providing opportunities for the next generation as well,” says Dr. Jangmook.



*Dr. James Lee and Dr. Manoch Jangmook (right) take a photo at an ICETE conference in Panama City, Panama in 2018.*

One such student who is benefitting from the BBS-ITS partnership is Wichai Tumtaweetikul who worked at a local market in his home country, Thailand, for over 20 years before joining Christian ministry. He started his studies at BBS before transferring to ITS this academic year during the winter quarter. Wichai resides in Vancouver, Canada with his family as he pursues his doctorate in ministry studies. He confesses that ITS is playing a significantly crucial role in his educational path.

“ITS is a good-sized school where I enjoy full attention from professors and close interactions with both faculty and fellow students,” Wichai states. He adds that ITS offers a good selection of courses from which students can choose for their concentration. He lauds the year-round quarter system as effective and efficient. This system allows students to graduate within a relatively shorter time, thus saving both time and costs for the students. He points out, “The courses offered for the DMin program are very relevant and attractive, such as mentorship, evangelism in a postmodern world, and spiritual formation.” Wichai adds that these courses are taught practically in a way meant to build up the foundation for students to be ready to confront the current challenges facing the contemporary world.

“ITS professors have had real-life experiences of serving many years in cross-cultural ministries. The faculty body is also made up of people from multiple ethnicities and from across different continents, which makes them able to provide varying worldviews; these greatly broaden and benefit student perspectives,” he explains. To prospective students, Wichai says ITS remains the seminary of choice due to its rich diversity. This merit is complemented with the attention students get from the faculty. He reiterates that professors do not only teach from a theoretical perspective, but rather from their own experiences in cross-cultural ministries.

He values the decision by the seminary to offer online instruction as lockdowns and travel restrictions from the pandemic halted in-person instruction. Wichai advises, “After the lock-down from the COVID-19, ITS should still continue to offer classes both online as well as in-person since this will enable more students benefit from the seminary even if they are not able to make it to the United States of America.”



# A Taste of Student Life



ITS currently owns 2 student houses in West Covina. These single-family residences are located within walking distance from the seminary. Students from countries around the world live in community together while they pursue their ITS studies. This community has been especially meaningful to students who were unable to travel back to see their families due to the global pandemic. Here students study and do life together while learning about each other's cultures, traditions and foods.



This past Christmas, ITS provided the students with extra funds to purchase ingredients for a joint Christmas luncheon. Students were able to cook delicious meals from their respective countries and share them with one another. According to current student, Esther Mbango from Cameroon, their Christmas meal consisted of FuFu, an African yam dish, as well as fried plantains, African skewered chicken and beef, spicy fish, Nsima (a traditional cornmeal dish) and a specialty fried rice mixed with vegetables like tomatoes, bell peppers, sweet corn, garlic, ginger and onions. Student Dorm Manager, George Amimo, expressed his thanksgiving following the Christmas holiday. He wrote,

**"On behalf of all students living in the campus dorm, I want to again take this God-given opportunity to thank you all for the prayers, moral and financial support you have given us throughout and especially during this Christmas day. Your support made us enjoy real African Christmas in our home at 1128. God bless you all."**



In addition to a Christmas meal, both dorms were recently given resources (through ITS and its donors) to start vegetable gardens in their backyard. The vegetables they harvest from their garden are now used in their daily meals. Esther lived in a city in Cameroon and she said, "We never got to garden there. When I saw the garden space in the backyard of this (ITS) house, I was so excited!" She said that she and some of the other ladies prepared the space and have planted green beans, tomatoes, lettuce, kale, peas, carrots, broccoli, bell pepper, thyme and onion. Esther said that she goes outside to check on the vegetables every day. "Living here is a great experience. We learn to cook different dishes and about various cultures, food and language", said Esther. In fact, students living there still make the dumplings that former student, Ruth, from China, had taught them to make. Esther said, "In this house, it is easy to learn to love sharing and it builds a character of kindness."

Ngun of Myanmar also relishes gardening and weeds and waters the garden. She loves kale salads and also fries the kale with garlic, onion and tomatoes. She also enjoys making a specialty dish from Myanmar called Pickle, which is mashed potatoes with tomatoes and chiles, in addition to other dishes. Ngun said, "The students here all have different likes and dislikes. We all have different backgrounds and get along really well and have built close friendships." Ngun plans to graduate this year with Masters degrees in Theology and New Testament Theology, and then plans to pursue a PhD. The rich diversity of cultures, perspectives, and even food, have drawn this community together in a powerful way. Ngun said, "ITS is like a home, a family – not an institution. They really care about us and take good care of the students."

## ITS CONNECTIONS

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