

# modern-day foot washing

Laura Guy reports on a new initiative at a London medical school



**C**hristian medical students at Imperial College have been stewarding on sports nights in the medics' bar since October 2010. This has been an opportunity to serve the medical school, raise the profile of CMF and - most importantly - scatter the seed of the gospel in previously barren land. On 1 January 2011, the Daily Mail published a full-page article about the drinking habits of Imperial medics,<sup>1</sup> causing embarrassment for the medical school. The CMF stewards were mentioned, and for a while there was (incorrect!) suspicion that we were behind the tip-off. Thankfully, the storm has passed, and we have been allowed to continue our ministry in the bar.

The idea for sports night stewarding arose during a meal at the CMF National Students' Conference. A couple of us were discussing the tension between wanting to be more involved in medical school life, but also wanting to maintain our Christian integrity (which can be difficult in a drinking circle). We don't particularly like the 'holy huddle' culture many

Christians can appear to live in, as it can be exclusive and cliquy, and puts people off Christians. After all, Jesus made a point of spending time with the non-religious, often more than with the religious people of his day. Sports night was a way to engage with an important part of medical school culture from a different perspective. We knew that there was a need that wasn't met and no one else particularly wanted to do it, and there's certainly a Christian call to serve, so we thought why not do so in this context?

The drinking culture seemed exclusive to those who weren't up for getting smashed. Not many of our group are teetotal, but in a drinking circle it's often not acceptable to say 'I've had enough thanks' - it's all-or-nothing. I remember thinking when I was a fresher that it seemed a shame that people didn't feel able to have fun without drinking - though maybe that sounds naïve. It seems to be a form of escapism - perhaps from our apparently liberal, but in reality quite judgemental society.



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I doubt that Imperial medics drink any more excessively than medical students up and down the country. My biggest concern is for freshers who get sucked into it, sometimes against their will, for the sake of being part of the crowd. I know people who would rather not join in, but 'have to' to avoid being rejected for refusing to be a team player. There should always be the freedom to say no. On the other hand, the majority have a great time and most people recall medical school years as some of the best of their lives.

During a typical evening at the bar, we ensure that students stay away from no-access areas of the building (which is on a hospital site), arrange for students who are taken ill to get home safely, and clean up after the sports teams have left. We perform half-hourly building checks, which we use as an opportunity to pray for the building, the students, and the medical school. The team tries to meet at least 15 minutes before the event starts to pray together.

My favourite thing about sports night is that we get to do a bit of what Jesus did. He came into the world to clean up other people's mess - sin - knowing that we wouldn't all thank him for it. Clearly there's a huge difference between being crucified and cleaning up a bit of sick, but there's a parallel idea there. Maybe it's more akin to him washing the disciples' feet (then an unpleasant and culturally embarrassing thing to do). It's important to stress that we're not doing it because we're 'good people' - rather, we're forgiven people. The point of our faith is the recognition that we're not inherently 'good', and that we've chosen to accept forgiveness. When you know

**We would value readers' prayers** for a continued good relationship with the Student Union, especially now that a new SU President has been elected; for wisdom and boldness in using these opportunities as fully as possible to get the good news out to our colleagues; for protection against attack or opposition; and most of all for our 'light to shine before others, that they may see [our] good deeds and glorify [our] Father in heaven'.<sup>2</sup>

you're loved it's easier to love others. We hope and pray that our peers see some of that reflected in this ministry, and come to know God's love for themselves. Our presence in the bar has also been appreciated by Christians in sports teams, who are often under pressure to drink excessively. They tell us that it's reassuring to have other Christians in the bar holding them accountable and encouraging them in their witness to their team mates. The *Daily Mail* article made the Christians sound a bit flimsy, which probably represents popular opinion...but I don't think there's much flimsiness about cleaning up sick with a smile.

Apart from the suspicion that we were behind the *Daily Mail* article tip-off - which led to some minor hostility from some sports night regulars - the ministry has opened the door for more CMF presence in the bar. Having established a good working relationship with the bar managers, we were able to run a three-week *Christianity Explored* course in the bar, which was well-attended and will hopefully be repeated in October this year. ■

#### REFERENCES

1. [bit.ly/iRpHll](http://bit.ly/iRpHll)
2. Matthew 5:16