



Praise and Prayer:

- * Praise to God for providing a sound system and keyboard for our services.
- * Praise God for the legalization of Mountainview International Church.
- * Pray for God to make our team of one heart and mind with a renewed vision for the new year.
- * Pray for us as we start many new relationships again this year.

- In August we spent a week at the annual Staff Conference of our organization, Christian Associates International (CAI). Since Staff Conference last year, we have been looking forward to going to Holland for this year's Conference.
- It's somewhat difficult to explain what makes Staff Conference something we look forward to so much. It's definitely not a vacation: we have a lot of meetings with other church planters and CAI leadership, Kelly usually heads up a band that leads worship once or twice a day, and we sit through plenty of large-group seminars.
- I think one of the basic reasons we enjoy the Conference is the same reason anyone else goes to a conference related to a particular job - it's good to be with people who do the same job as you. We spend the week with around 150 other church planters, most of whom are in major Western European cities, and are at varying stages of a church plant. We bounce ideas off each other, share "cultural adjustment" stories, and just understand each other without having to do a lot of background explanation.
- Another reason Kelly and I really enjoy Staff Conference is because it is good to spend time with people who are in different life-stages than us. Our team in Madrid is young and most of the people in our church are in two early life-stages - either single/married and still floating, or with young kids. At the Staff Conference we get to sit at the feet of people our parent's age, or even older :) And these aren't just any other people, they're people who have done what we are doing and who care about us. We really love the opportunity to soak-up wisdom and learn from their experiences.
- We also greatly appreciate the opportunity to worship with more than 40 people, the number that are usually at our services in Madrid. This year there were over 150 adults, 100 teenagers, and 70 children. Worshipping with that many other Christians is a wonderful experience.
- After providing a lot of leadership during the year, it is also good to listen and learn from the leadership in our organization who have lots of challenging and encouraging things to share with us. And of course, we appreciate the opportunity to laugh, to be prayed for, and to hang-out.
- I think when it comes down to it, a large part of the reason we look forward to Staff Conference is because we love CAI. There is a consistency to the atmosphere whenever anyone from the organization is together. One thing is the value for diversity - with people from lots of different denominations, Americans and Europeans, different ages. They, *we*, emphasize being able to learn from each other. Another thing is their emphasis on really caring about each other, being real, and being challenged to grow. As we receive grace from God, we offer grace to each other. The Conference this year focused on reviewing CAI's values, things such as being Kingdom-focused, Biblically-based and worshipful, grace-oriented, developmental and gift-based, facilitative in leadership, entrepreneurial, and authentic and transparent. We not only got to learn about these values, and ask ourselves whether we see these same values in ourselves and our churches, but also to see them in action with each other at the Conference.
- Overall the week served as a chance to reflect over the last year and plan for the new one -- a chance to be still, to ask questions, to be real and allow emotional healing to come, a place to worship and pray. We thank God for allowing us to be a part of it!

Kelly + April Crull