

## **The Basis for Our Ministry of Friendship**

By bringing more than 750,000 international students to our land from more than 200 countries and political areas, God has placed in our midst a tremendous privilege, responsibility and opportunity to fulfill His Great Commission. Add their spouses and families, plus those on government and business exchange programs, and that opportunity becomes even more dramatic—more than one million people! These are the world's most gifted and intelligent. Rich in culture and fluent in several languages, they come with a desire to learn, to succeed educationally and to contribute to society.

Statistics from the Institute of International Education show us several major trends among internationals. In rank order, with the highest number at the top, international students come to the United States primarily from the following countries:

- India
- China
- Japan
- South Korea
- Taiwan

Fields of study pursued by international students, with the most popular at the top are:

- Business and Management
- Engineering
- Mathematics and computer sciences
- Other
- Social Sciences
- Physical and Life Sciences

Thrust into a foreign land, these students must make personal adjustments. Our first response to them must be one of genuine friendship that expresses itself in service—to love and care for them as persons. In the light of that friendship, we also may have opportunity to enrich our deeds with words of Christian witness.

Our ministry of friendship enriches us. Not only do we have the opportunity to appreciate and to gain first-hand information about the geography, politics, history, customs, culture and religions of countries of the world, but we also have opportunity to serve fellow human beings who are experiencing loneliness, culture shock or physical needs. Without leaving our own land we are given the chance to be world ambassadors for the Lord Jesus Christ. By exposing internationals to us, the Holy Spirit shapes the attitudes of those destined to be prominent leaders who may decide the fate of Christian work in their countries. These international students are or will become prominent educators, parents, journalists, politicians, engineers, scientists and jurists. Can you begin to understand the implications our relationships with them will have for our world? We rejoice together as we see how warm Christian love shatters the barriers of diverse languages, cultures, races and religions.

ASK ANY CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION or missionary organization how much it spends each year on transporting its workers to far away places. International students studying in the United States come here at no expense to the Christian Church.

ASK ANY MISSIONARY how long it took him to learn another language and be able to communicate effectively. International students must pass English fluency tests to study in U.S. universities.

ASK ANY MEMBER of LCMS WORLD MISSION how many countries deny entry to Christian missionaries. Many international students come from those countries and are easily contacted as they study here.

ASK ANY MISSIONARY how hard it is to be accepted by people in a closely-knit community who have their own friends and families, surroundings, religious cultures and backgrounds. International students have left behind all that makes life secure and are often lost and lonely and are seeking friends and surrogate families.

ASK ANY MISSIONARY and he or she will assure you that even when a person is interested in Jesus Christ, there is still a terrific resistance to change and commitment to our Lord which is created by family, surroundings, friends, religious culture and background. International students are seeing new things every day and constantly have to adapt to change and are receptive to it.

ASK ANY MISSIONARY organization how useful it would be if the authorities in the countries where they are working were more favorably disposed toward them. International students may, in the future, be setting the guidelines for missionary activity in their countries.

It is our desire and prayer that this guide will help you develop a personal and group ministry with international students and through them, ultimately to all peoples of the world.