

Finding and Meeting International Students

International students are relationship-oriented and desire to be with others like them. Just like the rest of us, they are looking for security, acceptance, love, self-respect, empathy and support. They all share a common desire for deep and lasting friendships. There are as many ways to initiate relationships with internationals as there are nationalities. Here are a few suggestions for your campus ministry as you consider this important program:

- *Pray* for the Spirit's leading and for receptive attitudes.
- *Contact* the foreign student advisor on campus several weeks before the term begins and individually or as a group; *offer to help* with the orientation program.
- *Welcome* internationals when they arrive at the beginning of the year. *Meet them* at the airport, bus or train terminal. One Christian student group has members work in shifts to meet incoming flights at the airport to offer assistance. Another group puts up a sign at the airport several weeks before the term begins with a telephone number offering assistance to newly arriving students.
- *Befriend* internationals by sitting next to them in lectures, lounges or dining halls, or focus on a particular housing area or nationality. Once you have established a single friendship, the entire cultural group often becomes receptive.
- *Share* meal time with them. Ask if you may sit with them at the meal table.
- *Attend* international clubs on campus to learn about other cultures and meet students. The student activities office should have a list of existing clubs. *Participate* in cultural clubs' activities on campus. Ask questions and get to know the leaders.
- *Be in* the specific places on campus where different nationalities consistently congregate. These are good places to initiate conversations and distribute publicity announcements.
- *Visit* beginning English classes and entry level classes in the sciences since they are often filled with many internationals. Obtain advance permission from the professor for this. Give him/her your reason for wanting to sit in on the class. You may also be given permission to make announcements and present information about activities and services your group is offering for internationals.
- *Staff* a campus information and outreach table where internationals can sign up for various relational activities like conversation partners and recreational and cultural events organized by your group.
- *Offer* your services to the ESL school to serve as a conversation partner with internationals.
- *Advertise* special, campus-wide social events at the beginning of the term for internationals with the aim of getting to know them and following up with personal friendships.

The initial timing of our ministry of friendship is critical. Early friendship and early hospitality are important. The most difficult time for any student, and the time when your help is needed most, is at the time of arrival and immediately after. Internationals' experiences during their first few weeks in the United States will greatly influence their adjustment to and feelings about campus life and American culture. An ongoing relationship is essential.

To successfully convey the Gospel, we must care for our international guests as **people** first. We must become committed friends, going beyond superficiality, serving them as fellow human beings, equal in

worth, though different in personal characteristics, Christian or non-Christian. Only then do we gain their trust. We must listen to them carefully, allowing them freedom of expression, respecting their expertise.

Prepare for a long-term commitment.