

## **Facts for Consideration**

- A. There are over 547,000 international students studying in the U.S.
- B. There are over 5,000 international students and their immediate family members living in Tampa Bay.
- C. Most university international student offices want mentors, friends and activities for their students.
- D. Twenty percent of all international students who return to their homeland will receive positions in their government.
- E. Seven out of ten of the most populated countries of the world are closed to traditional missions.
- F. Almost 80% of international students at universities never enter an American home.
- G. International students are away from their family and culture and are open to investigating the claims of Christ, which they often cannot do in their homeland.
- H. International students can re-enter their country without any visa concerns.
- I. International students return to their homeland and relate to their culture and people in significant ways that an American cannot even begin to accomplish.
- J. The average overseas missionary needs support of more than \$50,000 per year.
- K. It takes two years or more for an American missionary to learn to speak and read many foreign languages well enough to communicate the gospel.
- L. Overseas American missionaries often have a hard time communicating the gospel due to cultural and linguistic barriers.
- M. Overseas American missionaries have a significant dropout rate.
- N. Many traditional missionaries are restricted from entering areas of the world that contain unreached people groups.

## **Identifying A Biblical Strategic Plan for Ministry To International Students**

- 1. **Establish Ministry Beliefs:**
  - A. Internationals who study in America are lost and in need of salvation.
  - B. Church members are in a position to reach international students while they study in America.
  - C. God has called believers to reach internationals for Christ.
  - D. God desires believers to show the love of Christ to the world.
  - E. American church members are gifted for ministry to international students and their international friends.
  - F. God calls church members to use their resources evangelistically and socially toward non-believers and for the edification of believers.
  - G. Believers are called to share the gospel with all nationalities of people.
  
- 2. **Clarify Ministry Values:**
  - A. Believers should realize the priority of reaching internationals now!
  - B. Believers should appreciate that God has strategically placed them in a position to reach international students.

- C. Believers should desire to use their resources to reach international students.
- D. Believers should acknowledge their call to minister to international students.
- E. Believers should seek feasible ways to express their faith to international students.
- F. Believers must disregard ethnic bias and seek ways to reconcile all people to God and to themselves.
- G. Believers need to personally and corporately appreciate and speak well of international students and their families living here in America.
- H. Believers must realize that sharing the love of Christ involves becoming open to the exchange of cultural and spiritual beliefs.
- I. The personal beliefs of each individual must be respected and the love of Christ must be offered without strings.

3. **Form Ministry Objectives:**

- A. To engage with international students so that they experience the love of Christ through the lives of Christians and encounter a clear and consistent presentation of the gospel.
- B. To form a group of believers who desire this ministry and have the gifts to fulfill this ministry.
- C. To develop a network of believers who can accomplish this work.
- D. To establish committees and teams who can develop a network of people who will assist in accomplishing this ministry (i.e. occasional or one-time volunteers: doctors, dentists, other professionals, etc.).
- E. To present the gospel to every international involved in this ministry.
- F. To immediately begin discipleship of all international students when they profess Christ as Savior.
- G. To prepare and assist international students who receive Christ in the return to their country by promoting and linking them with a local church.
- H. To see change in the lives of believers who engage with international students.
- I. To develop a ministry of praying for international students.
- J. To win international students who will reach their own nation for Christ.

4. **Determine Ministry Goals:**

- A. Establish a detailed budget.
- B. Set a date to establish a ministry to international students.
- C. Form a ministry team to oversee this work.
- D. Build and identify a group and list of gifted people for this ministry.
- E. Secure a building to conduct student group meetings (classes & gatherings).
- F. Establish training classes and a person to oversee and teach/facilitate them.
- G. Expose the whole church to international student ministry.

5. **Formulate Appropriate Methodologies:**

- A. Link the board/team to the local FI worker.
- B. Divide the board/team into various responsibilities.
- C. Board/team to set regular meetings for themselves and work force.
- D. Set dates that projects and various proposals are to be accomplished.

- E. Send reports from the team to missions pastor and pastoral staff.
- F. Set dates a leader from the ministry can meet & update the senior pastor.
- G. Discover the 'types' of materials that will be needed.
- H. Set dates for host training and meetings.
- I. Inform the church of the details of this ministry:  
Introduction of the ministry to boards, classes, small groups and other ministries until the whole church has been exposed to the ministry. The pastor should be prepared to briefly promote the work from the platform. Perhaps a brief churchwide presentation of the team working on this project. Distribute literature to the congregation in the lobby and through various ministry meetings; including church bulletin, bulletin boards and newsletters.
- J. Share all events, meetings, etc, with www. Internationals.org for wide publicity.
- K. Sponsor *Friends of Internationals* meetings at the local college.
- L. Provide foreign reading literature for your people.
- M. Ministry possibilities include: retreats, books, bibles, banquets, notebooks, gifts, events, training classes/meetings, parties- year end and beginning, Christmas events, graduation, newsletter, college paper ad, build host friendship days by offering oil changes and auto care to car owners. General events can be planned to assist host families and to build greater exposure to unreached internationals and church members who have specific talents and gifts.

## Conclusion

The world has come to America and with it comes a substantial opportunity for local churches to directly minister to international students while they study here in our country. Every metropolitan community probably has a college through which they can participate in sharing the love of Christ through engagement with international students. With the continuing and mounting difficulty of coordinating Christian evangelistic and social efforts overseas, international students offer a rich and unprecedented opening for churches to directly engage in ministry to the world.

Far too often the church has sent missionaries into the world to make disciples of all nations without ever truly participating in any activity beyond donating finances and prayer. Both activities have been and still are significant in the propagation of the gospel throughout the world but now the mission field has come to America. In addition, while many countries remain closed to freedom of speech and thus missionary activity, the United States has become a temporary home to students and scholars from "closed" nations. For example, every year, China, the most populated closed country to missionary activity abroad, sends over 45,000 of its most strategic people to our shores for education. While here these students want to study our culture and discover what makes America so great a nation. They want to engage in discussion and dialog and also build friendships with Americans.

Local church members have all the resources to minister to international students. They have Biblical knowledge, a common language, a receptive audience, money, friendly campus international student service offices, and a large inquisitive, searching and needy international student population. Almost 200 foreign countries could be

impacted with the gospel of Christ at universities by using a minimal amount of available church member's time and by appropriating a small proportional budget to facilitate that ministry.

The broad diversity found in local churches offers a rich avenue for ministry to internationals. Retirees have time and maturity, which fits perfectly for a flexible ministry to internationals. College age students and professionals relate well to international students and can engage in respectful religious dialogue. Also, families and singles can fill the void in a lonely international student's life by offering the familiar surroundings of the family life they have left behind. Thus, almost every church member can effectively respond to the call to world missions without ever leaving their home community.

The world could be evangelized through ministry to international students. It is possible that each church could become a congregation that has disciples in every region of the world through campus ministry. These disciples could greatly affect their countries evangelistically and morally. For example, most graduate schools have large numbers of Chinese students, many who work in medicine. It is possible therefore that your church ministry could affect the abortion policy of China by reaching their future medical workers.

Although missionaries abroad are doing a phenomenal job, they often do not reach the strategic leaders in their country of ministry. Therefore a loving ministry to students here may generate good will toward evangelical ministries overseas. Also, and not to be underestimated in their influence, are those students who do not return to their homeland but stay in the U.S. These students will become leaders in ethnic circles that many American Christians will never enter and thus can affect an ethnic portion of our own population.

Ministry to international students cannot happen in a vacuum but must be thoroughly analyzed, constructed and implemented. Each local church must evaluate its abilities to minister and decidedly link up with other churches to fulfill the mission of comprehensively providing for the spiritual and social needs of these students. Furthermore, local churches must have an understanding of how this ministry will fit into the broader picture of worldwide ministry. There must be an understanding of ministry to the student now and also to their social and spiritual well being upon completion of their schooling. Methods must be selectively used in the comprehensive plan.

The response to this ministry must not be measured in terms of decisions or conversions but in the broader scope of fulfilling the call of the church to make disciples worldwide and in their own fellowships. Church members who make themselves available to this field of service will find an increase in personal and corporate spiritual growth. Christians can expect to reform their ethnic bias, political appreciations, understanding of other cultures and places and also make adjustments and corrections in their spiritual lives. In addition, Christians will learn to hone their Biblical and theological understandings and also develop their apologetical skills. As Christians conform to the will of God each local church can expect to be dramatically affected in the appreciation members have for one another and for the work of God in individual lives. The local church may also experience a heightened sensitivity to the cause of Christ in world missions. It seems very logical to say that some individuals may begin to sense the call of God in their lives toward full time ministry.