



International Student Ministry Handbook

*Resources For Developing
Cross-Cultural
Friendships With
Internationals*

John Eaves
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Ver. 5..2

Introduction

Ministering to internationals in our community is a paradox in many ways. On the one hand, loving the world that has come to us can be as simple as opening heart and home as a tangible expression of Christ's love. Yet the closer our friendship becomes, the more clearly we observe the cultural differences that exist between us. We realize that sharing the Gospel and resulting world view and value system can at times feel like trying to put a square peg in a round hole.

The *International Student Ministry Handbook* is a small attempt to decipher this paradox of difference. By providing you with the necessary tools to more effectively connect with international friends living in your community, you will not need to wonder if you are doing the right thing or not, nor be at a loss when differences arise. The practical insights in this handbook are the sort that can be applied in a number of contexts whenever you seek to befriend people from differing cultural backgrounds.

Never succumb to the temptation of believing that "people are people, wherever you go." Cultural differences are very real, but they do not have to be a frightening thing. Rather, by taking time to identify these differences and learn from the experiences of those who have gone before, you will be better prepared to express the love of Christ through your words and actions. May God grant you a heart courageous enough risk, and humble enough to learn.

John Eaves
May 2001

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InterFACE ministries is a national Christian organization servicing the international student community, and equipping the Church for reaching the world that has come to us. For more information on training and publications: John Eaves, InterFACE Ministries, P.O. Box 121336, Nashville, TN 37212
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REACHING THE WORLD THAT HAS COME TO US

A Message Worth Telling

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (II Pet. 3:9)

God desires for every person on earth to meet Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He is quite anxious to get the word out, and is relying on His people to be the carriers of this life-transforming invitation. His strategy has a rather imaginative twist to it. While some of us go to other cultures and places to share the good news of Jesus, God brings individuals from other cultures and places to where His people live.

- ◆ As future leaders and opinion shapers of their societies, the potential impact of a returning international student or scholar proclaiming Christ to family, friends, and colleagues is truly profound. (See story below).
- ◆ Ministering to internationals who are here temporarily is an incredibly cost-effective ministry strategy with no money to raise, no language to learn, and no cultural adjustments to make. Your international friend has already done all of this in coming to your community.
- ◆ Many nations today are far less open to Christianity, and seek to openly restrict or prohibit a Christian witness of any kind. But the Lord is providing a way to reach these people while they are temporarily away from home. This past year, 565,000 international students from over 180 nations were studying in America.

**Two Biblical Strategies For Inviting
The Nations to Meet Jesus Christ**

The world comes to God's people (Acts 2: 5,41)



God's people go to the world (Mt. 28:18,19)

This is why your involvement in befriending internationals in your community is so strategic. Look at the possibilities that await you:

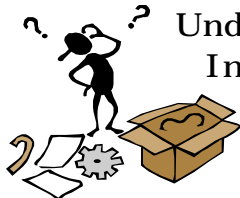
- ◆ International students and scholars are far more open and accessible to the Gospel while living abroad. By living in a different culture, peer pressure and cultural conformity become less of an influence. This makes it possible for overseas visitors to be open to new ideas and new ways of thinking.

One Life Impacting a Nation



In 1981 ...

Kriengsak (Joseph) Chareonwonsak returned to the predominately Buddhist country of Thailand after receiving Christ while studying away from home. God gave him a vision for reaching his own people, even though 160 years of Protestant missionary work had impacted less than one percent of the population. While teaching at a university in Bangkok, Kreingsak started the Hope of Bangkok church. Today, this church has 8,000 members. 137 daughter churches have been planted among the 73 provinces of Thailand, and 18 additional churches planted around the world with significant Thai populations.



Understanding the Needs of International Students

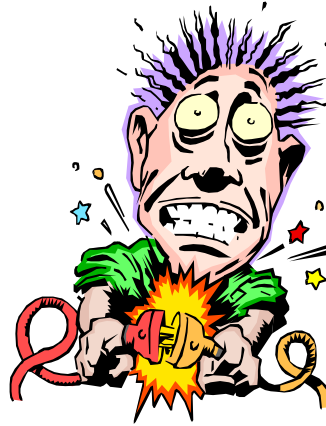
Studying in another culture is an experience that is both exhilarating and demanding.

It is a wonderful honor to be selected as one of the elite few from your country to come here. But there is a price to be paid. Leaving behind everything familiar and dear to you is a difficult task. Those things that ground us to life – family, culture, food, home, are now eliminated from one's daily routine. It is a time of dramatic change.

Today's international student has changed from their predecessor in the last few years. The information age is reaping a global impact. Most international students coming here today have been exposed to the Internet, email, MTV, CNN, American movies and magazines. Many come thinking that they already know about American culture, which is a problem in itself. Another factor is the increasing number of fellow countrymen studying at the same college or university. This sometimes creates an expectation that the international student can maintain a home culture lifestyle by primarily associating with fellow countrymen. Why should this concern us? An international student's experience with you is colored not only by personality, but also by the expectations they bring into the friendship. You might befriend someone who is very motivated to spend time with you and enjoy the full benefits of a cross-cultural friendship. Or, it might be someone who sees this as a temporary experimental diversion, and loses interest once classes begin. We need to be realistic about our expectations. Just as we don't become close friends with every person we meet, there are no guarantees that this relationship will be a smashing success. At the same time, the chances for having a successful and fulfilling friendship are much greater when you better understand the dynamics of cultural adjustment for international students.

The needs of international students change in relation to the length of stay in our

community. By keeping abreast of these changes, you will be able to anticipate changes in your relationship. To better understand this adjustment process, we will explore four steps of cultural transition for an international student who is enrolled in a degree-seeking program.



Phase One: *The Shock*

“Exhilarating but apprehensive” – that is the way many international students describe the way it feels when first coming to our community from abroad.

Those who enter a new culture must learn the rules for living. Language, values, physical conditions, and relationships all change. This period of adjustment is rightly called “culture shock” because of the emotional and relational discomfort one experiences. This period of time, lasting anywhere between six months to a year, is characterized by varying degrees of stress and emotional discomfort. *This is a very important period of time from a ministry point of view. When needs are high, the door is open for developing genuine friendships.* It doesn't matter how many times you have traveled overseas, or how many cultures you have lived in. Every person will go through a process of adjustment when entering a new cultural environment. Four major periods of adjustment may be noted in this “Shock Phase”:

The Stages of Cultural Adjustment in the Shock Phase

Adapted from Lisa Espaneli Chinn by John Eaves, revised 2000



Fascination Stage – We might call this the “honeymoon.” We become infatuated with our new environment, and find the differences more intriguing rather than threatening. This stage may last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks.

- Open to new experiences, meeting new people
- Intrigued with new culture
- Willingness to explore new environment, to “learn the ropes”, get oriented
- Greater risk taking



Flight Stage-- The newness wears off as you begin to experience “cultural episodes” which serve as a reminder that you are not from this culture. Daily demands of living and working begin to get the best of you. You begin to withdraw from situations that involve differences of opinion or misunderstanding. You feel overwhelmed emotionally without knowing exactly why.

- Feeling inadequate, unworthy, lonely, and isolated
- Unexpected and excessive mood swings
- Taking unusual amounts of time for sleeping, grooming, and staying in your room or apartment



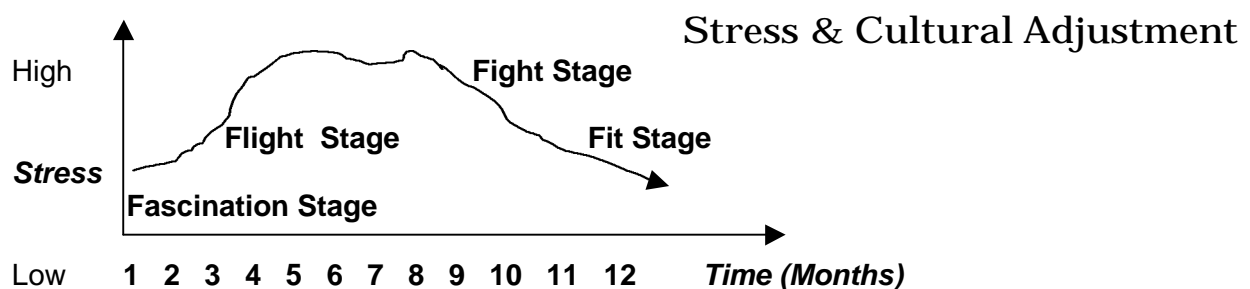
Fight Stage—Frustration and anger get the best of you as you focus on the negative aspects of this new culture rather than the positive ones. You can be distant and critical in your relationships, and opt for associating with people from your own culture as a form of coping.

- Avoidance of local people, and staying more with those from your own culture group
- Minor health problems may arise, usually stress-related
- Constant comparison of life here with life back home



Fit Stage—Most people will reach a point in their stay when they are able to resolve many of their initial frustrations with living in a new culture. As language skills and cultural awareness improve, one begins to feel more productive and at home in this new culture.

- Feeling more productive in academic and social life
- Less annoyance with host culture
- Develops an ability to appreciate the positive and handle the negative aspects of this new culture
- Displays greater sensitivity to the host culture and understanding of what is going on around them
- The Fit Stage marks the beginning of Step Two in the cultural adjustment cycle: “Focusing In”



Top 8 Problems International Students Say They Experience In the “Shock Phase”

A. Church, “Sojourner Adjustment”, *Psychology Bulletin*,
(1982, Vol. 91, p. 540-572)

T. Stafford, *The Friendship Gap: Reaching Out Across Cultures*, (1984, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL)

- *Homesickness*
- *Food differences*
- *Language difficulties*
- *Finding a place to live*
- *Adjustment to new educational system and local customs*
- *Financial problems—delays in receiving funding, or having an adequate amount*
- *Unfriendliness of community and a fear of violence/racism*
- *Difficulty maintaining cultural and religious customs*
- *Mobility – difficulty getting around*

The Anatomy of Cultural Adjustment

What Happens When We Enter A New Culture?

Adapted from Craig Stori, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, (1996, Intercultural Press, p.)

We expect others to be like us, but they aren't



A cultural incident occurs which shocks us (our assumption of all people being alike is proven incorrect)



We withdraw

or →

We react through emotional and physical detachment



We reflect on our response, and seek input from locals



We stay in the company of people from our culture group



We learn the appropriate cultural response



Our confidence and comfort level grows

We delay or impair our successful cultural adjustment



Phase Two: *Focusing in*

Once an international student gets settled into the community, the next step is to tackle the challenges of academic life. For many, this is the first time to study in the American educational system. The experience can be rather traumatic. Many academic systems around the world utilize the lecture method, where the professor is respected and revered, and memorization of facts is the central learning approach. The idea of asking a question, or disagreeing with a professor is unheard of. You can imagine the reaction of internationals when they see American students challenge their professor, arrive late to class, or eat food in the classroom.

During this phase, an international student usually pulls back from involvement with you. You will see or hear little from them as classes, tests, and projects become a driving force in their lives:

- Schoolwork is the primary focus in terms of interest and time commitment
- Speaking and comprehension skills become a critical concern
- Little time is devoted to leisure activities

Please do not give up on your international friend, because the little things you do for them during this time are remembered and appreciated. Encourage them with your phone calls, notes, and prayers during this time.



Phase Three: *Hitting Stride*

It may take a semester or two, but sooner or later your international friend begins to establish a routine that is less rigorous than those first few months of study. As confidence increases, anxiety and fear of failure decreases. They are proving themselves capable of handling the work load, and this is providing a greater sense of self-worth and competency in their field of study. During this time, you may find that your international friend is more open to participating in social activities with you. Take advantage of this season of openness, recognizing that it represents a new period in your friendship to forge deeper trust and openness between you.



Phase Four: *The Transition*

Sooner or later, the time comes to graduate. But changes are already underway months before that day arrives. As the completion of the academic program is in sight, your international friend starts to focus on the next phase of life. For some, it may mean seeking a job here in this country. For others, it involves a plane ride home, or to another part of the world. Just like their arrival to this country, this once again becomes a time to be excited but apprehensive about the future. This future focus makes relationships somewhat awkward, and we often sense a coolness or distance developing between us. It's not about a lack of caring. It is just a natural process of easing the physical separation by creating a psychological distance. You might be one of the lucky ones to see your international friend off at the airport, but others report a sort of silent "slipping away." It may be an email, or a phone call, or a Christmas card, but sooner or later you will most likely see contact reestablished between you. We also

need to remember that students returning home will be going through an experience called “reverse culture shock.” It is just like the culture shock you learned about earlier, but more pronounced. This is because they are not expecting it, and are unaware of how much they have been affected by their living experience in a new culture. As strange as it sounds, we sometimes can have greater spiritual impact when we are at a distance than when we were together. This is why you should keep those lines of communication open even after your international friend has left the community.

What Internationals Can Do to Successfully Transition Through Culture Shock

Make it a priority to meet Americans who can assist in adjusting to this new culture. Resist the temptation to associate only with people from your home country.

Discuss with fellow international students what you are experiencing.

Don't give up trying new things because of some initial setback. Take it gradually, but be persistent.

Cultural adjustment is hard work. Take time to rest and reflect on your experience.

Keep a journal or diary to help release tension and frustration.

Make it a personal goal to improve your language skills. Find a friend you are comfortable with to practice conversational skills.

Participate in social events on and off campus to become more familiar with American culture and lifestyles.

What American Friends Can Do To Help With Culture Adjustment

Share this information regarding the process of cultural adjustment with your international friend. Most incoming international students are not aware of this adjustment process.

Become a “cultural informant” for your international friend. Help explain how things work. For example, explain American idioms (“off the wall”, “smell a rat”) and humor.

Don't come across as the cultural expert. If you are close in age, always work toward developing a relationship of equals.

Allow for reciprocity in the relationship. It is tempting to always be the one on the giving end. Allow your international friend to invite you for tea, cook a meal, or give a gift.

Know the limits of your involvement. Financial, academic, or psychological problems should be directed to the schools' international student advisor.

Your Checklist for Involvement

If you are like most people, you want to experience the excitement of befriending someone from a different culture, but feel a bit apprehensive. This is a normal response. While this assessment is not foolproof, you will probably have a great experience if you can affirm these values and attitudes in your own life.

Can you answer "Yes" to the following questions?

___ I want myself and/or my family to experience the richness of befriending someone from another culture.

___ I am open to befriending people from a different racial group than mine.

___ I feel comfortable inviting an international student to do things together.

___ I want to honor my commitment to keep in touch with my international friend.

___ I want to be comfortable about sharing about Jesus Christ in my life when someone asks me about it.



DEVELOPING CROSS- CULTURAL FRIENDSHIPS



The Chemistry of Cross-Cultural Friendship

Not every person we meet becomes our friend. As difficult as it is to accept, there are no guarantees that the international you are matched with is going to blossom into a friendship. At the same time, you have a lot going in your favor. How many Americans do you think are interested in getting to know the international you have befriended? It is probably a list of one, and that one person is you. This means you start out in the plus column as far as this new relationship goes. The key is to start things out on the right foot by showing that you really are interested in getting to know one another, and to share yourself in such a way that makes your relationship stand out as being different from other Americans on campus who seem uninterested or preoccupied.

A True Story . . . *Building "Chemistry"*

A single American woman who was a nurse befriended a graduate student from India in a university sponsored host program. After their first meeting, the American felt her international student was so intelligent that she wondered if they would ever have anything in common to talk about. She was encouraged to give the relationship a month to develop. The result was they became best friends, and the American was asked to be the maid of honor when her international friend was married three years later.



Meeting International Students: Making the Connection

One of the first questions people ask when expressing an interest in befriending an international student is where to meet them. Most universities or related community organizations have established friendship programs for their international students to introduce them to Americans in the community. The process usually involves you calling the international student office at a university in your community to see who is responsible for coordinating the host program. You will most likely be asked to fill out an application. Some programs require you to attend an orientation before placing you with an international student.

Why do the internationals voluntarily sign up for this program? Imagine yourself having to live in another country for three to five years. You can either choose to isolate yourself from the local population and only associate with people like you, or you choose to enrich your life by coming to better understand the ways of your host country and culture. This is true for international students coming here as well. Some will live in isolation through association with only their culture group. But others will want to engage and understand American culture. In fact, it is probably their only chance to meet Americans and learn about American culture outside the university community.



Where to Begin?

After you are matched with your international friend, it will be your responsibility to make initial contact. This is because you represent the host culture, and it is customary for you to make the first step in meeting face-to-face. Some host programs have a special event, like a picnic, where you meet your international friend. Others simply provide you with the contact information, and you are responsible for calling and making the arrangements to get together. When you do call, your international friend will already know your name and will be expecting to hear from you.



Frequency of Contact

One question that usually comes up is how often you should meet with your international friend? If it is less than once every four to six weeks, then there is not a lot of room for a friendship to mature. If it is more than that, you probably are enjoying a special friendship that will impact you and your international friend for a lifetime. The important thing to remember is that you must intentionally plan time together, and do so with the university calendar in mind. If you do not know or remember what college life is like, here are a few reminders:

1. International students studying in America for the first time say their first semester is the most challenging. They are trying to improve their English comprehension skills and learn this new educational system, so their level of frustration will be high during the first few months. You can be there to reassure them that they will make the necessary adjustments.
2. You have a very small time frame (say, two to three weeks) to connect with your international friend. After this initial entry point into our community, your friend may not have the time or motivation to get acquainted with people in the community.
3. Be aware of exam schedules. Typically, midterms (October and March) and finals (first two weeks of Dec. and first week of May) are off limits.
4. If you have difficulty contacting your international friend, it is probably because you are trying to contact them at the wrong time. Life is just beginning for college students around 10PM. They will most likely be available from 10:30 PM to midnight, or early in the morning (before 8 AM), although calling early poses its own challenges. Another option, if you have a computer, is email. This is by far the most effective means of making contact because your international friend will be online at several points during the day.
5. If you still have problems connecting with your international friend, call the host program coordinator right away. Don't let the relationship slip into inactivity. You should also call the coordinator if you feel that the friendship is just not clicking. It is often more effective to find the source of the problem by using a third party to look into the matter rather than trying to figure it out on your own. If all else fails and you still cannot make contact, you can be rematched with another person.

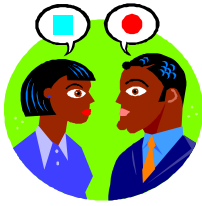


The Limits of Friendship

The responsibilities and expectations of friendship in other cultures can be very demanding, so it is important for you to know the limits in this context. Being aware of your international friend's needs does not automatically mean that you are responsible for meeting them. For example, issues involving immigration (including assistance in sponsoring other family members to come), money, academic assignments, or severe adjustment problems should be referred to the school's foreign student advisor.

Knowing the Limits

An American family was enjoying their friendship with a graduate student who was being sent by his government to study here. One evening, the family was asked by their international friend to sponsor his family coming to America so they could be together. In this case, the "sponsorship" involved paying for plane tickets. The family wisely told the student that they needed to discuss the matter with the university, and contacted the university foreign student advisor. The foreign student advisor helped the student understand that in this culture, friendship does not automatically involve financial commitments like his culture back home. With this new understanding, the student never brought up the subject again, and the friendship continued.



Developing Intercultural Sensitivity

Most people feel like they are good communicators. We seem to hold this attitude in cross-cultural situations as well. This is a dangerous point of view to have, and a sure guarantee to get blindsided with some major misunderstandings. Why? Because we expect people to be just like us, and so we relate to them in much the same way as we would with people from our

own culture. Researchers tell us that one major pitfall when communicating in cross-cultural situations is being unaware of just how much our culture affects the way we perceive others. For Americans, this lack of awareness is particularly acute due to our historic cultural isolation. We did not need to learn about other cultures for our survival, so we didn't.

How does one begin the process of developing sensitivity with people from other cultures? Ted Ward, author of *Living Overseas: A Book of Preparations* suggests three key strategies:

First:

We must be aware of the ways in which cultures can differ. This involves developing a greater self-awareness of our own Anglo-American culture, and a willingness to learn about the culture of our international friend.

Second:

We must realize that our cultural values are not accepted as a worldwide norm. Cultures usually have different starting places in terms of determining what is important and what is not.

Third:

We must enter into cultural exchange as a "give and take" experience. Our most common mistake as Americans is to rush in and "fix it", whatever "it" may be. The result is having other cultures perceive us as being bossy.²

Cross-Cultural Self-Assessment

Adapted by John Eaves from Milton Bennett, "A Developmental Approach to Training Intercultural Sensitivity", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 10(2), Summer, 1986

Our growth and maturity as effective cross-cultural communicators can be observed along the following continuum of change:

1. **Cultural Isolationist** – You are intentionally uninformed about other peoples and cultures. You choose not to interact with people from different racial backgrounds if you can help it, and usually criticize them using broad generalizations.
2. **Cultural Imperialist** – Your lack of knowledge about other cultures leads you to judge them solely on the merits of technology and material prosperity. You are generally unsympathetic to the plight of other peoples, and blame them for creating their own problems.
3. **Cultural Generalizer** – You recognize superficial differences in food and customs, but believe that common sense is all that is needed to understand any people and culture. You love to say "people are people, wherever you go."
4. **Cultural Experimenter** – With an increased knowledge of the customs and expectations of a new culture, you begin to experiment using its language and customs.
5. **Cultural Explorer** – When one begins to relate to a new culture as your own, and you develop a bi-cultural frame of reference. This skill usually requires living for an extended period in that culture.

² Free Press, New York, 1984, p. 70

Values: The Building Blocks To Understanding Culture



Every person is born into a culture, and every culture tends to perceive itself as being the best. Cultural pride has both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, we are highly motivated to preserve and protect our cultural values and behavior. The down side is we tend to judge other cultures by using our own culture as the measuring stick. It is a practice that tends to turn off the person from outside your culture that you are trying to get to know. Do you ever find yourself thinking like this?

- ◆ “There is no need for me to learn about other cultures since we are the wealthiest and most technologically advanced country in the world. ”
- ◆ “People are people, wherever you go. Communicating with someone from another culture is really a matter of common sense. ”

If so, chances are good that you are not going to appreciate all that your international friend can offer you. While every culture has a sense of pride and accomplishment, we should be aware that these very same attitudes act as a barrier to experiencing the richness that other cultures have to offer us.

Contrary to popular belief, people are not the same anywhere you go. Values and behavior may vastly differ. By way of example, let’s contrast a white middle-class American with a middle class person from the Philippines (see next page).

How Values Differ from Culture to Culture

Adapted by John Eaves from *The Values Americans Live By*, L. Robert Kohls, The Washington International Center, 1984

<i>Value</i>	<i>Filipino Response</i>	<i>American Response</i>
Future	Fate, future predetermined and unchanging	Goal-oriented, sense of personal control over destiny
Change	Emphasis on tradition and consistency	Positive, progress and growth oriented
Status	Hierarchy, obedient to authority	Equality, suspicious of authority, status earned
History	Strong influence on decisions. Cyclical life view.	Having limited influence on decision-making (linear)
Age	Age is revered, respected	The energy and enthusiasm of youth
Time	Priority given to developing relationships, slower pace	Valued, measured, emphasis on efficiency and productivity
Privacy	Group-oriented emphasis, of little value	Individual right, perceived as healthy and necessary
Mobility	Stationary, deep roots in the community	Transient society, shallow relational roots
Religion	Integrated, social conformity expected	Compartmentalized (church/state), individual choice
Problem Solving	Self-reliance, innovative, new ways to solve old problems	Dependent on others, seek input and approval from community



The Art Of Listening

Some of the best cross-cultural communicators are those who listen well. If you are the kind of person who is more of a talker than a listener, these suggestions may help you to understand how listening can be a real benefit for friendship building:

Mental Fatigue in Language Learning -- If you have ever studied a foreign language, you know that it takes a tremendous amount of concentration in the early stages of learning. If your international friend is new to this country and still developing conversation skills, watch for nonverbal clues indicating mental fatigue. If your new friend starts to get a glazed look in the eyes after several minutes of conversation with a somewhat distant smile, the chances are good that a mental saturation point has been reached.

Tip: Find another activity that relies less on conversation, like games, sports, sightseeing, or watching TV or a video.

Silence Freak Out -- Silence is difficult for Americans to accept when conversing, because we think something must be wrong. Silent periods may seem awkward to you, but it might be a way of your international friend showing respect, taking a mental break, or transitioning into another topic. Resist the temptation to be the initiator of all conversation. See what happens when you hold back a bit and allow others to ask questions.

Tip: Select topics of mutual interest, and try to select questions that take more than "yes" or "no" to answer. Make sure your surroundings are quiet enough to hear one another. Conversations in the same room with a blaring TV are doomed to failure.

Use questions which indicate an interest in your friends' feelings, such as "How did you feel after that happened?" or "What would have been your response to that if you were back home?"

Personal Space – When talking to your American friends, do you hug them when you meet, touch them on the arm or pat them on the back? If you do, you are a “toucher”. “Touchers” can shut down a conversation in short order because your gestures can be easily misunderstood in conversations with people from a different culture. You don’t have to be cold and aloof, but it is wiser to be on the reserved side when it comes to physical contact with a new acquaintance.

Seeking Chemistry – Some Americans are tempted to bail out of a relationship with someone from another culture when things are not clicking between them. Remember, you are playing by a different set of rules in cross-cultural friendships. The time frame for developing a friendship is different because we have to learn each other’s style of communicating. With a bit more patience, you will reap great rewards.



International Style Hospitality

If you are like most people who are befriending someone from another culture for the first time, you are probably concerned with three questions:

- *Why do they want to meet me?*
- *Will I be able to communicate with them?*
- *What am I supposed to do after we are introduced?*

Why do they want to meet me?

Picture yourself going to another country to study or live. Wouldn't you be curious to know about the people and the culture in which you are living? Cultural curiosity is a major motivating factor for establishing a friendship with someone like you, but this interest has a short life span. After the first few weeks, the interest in befriending Americans in the community is dramatically reduced, so if you want to make the most of the opportunity it has to be sooner rather than later.

You are probably one of the few Americans who have expressed an interest in getting to know your international friend. The vast majority of international students and scholars have little if any opportunity to befriend Americans outside the university community. The natural tendency is to associate with people who are most like us, so it takes a special person with a special heart to be willing to go outside the norm like you are trying to do.

Will we be able to communicate with them?

Every international student enrolled for college or university study must pass an English proficiency exam before being accepted for study here. That being said, language abilities will vary greatly. Your international friend might speak English better than you do, or he or she might need a few weeks to improve comprehension. You might have to get familiar with an accent (the same goes for them understanding you), but in the end you will be able to communicate better and better as time goes on.

What am I supposed to do after we are introduced?

This may sound too good to be true, but your international friend would probably enjoy participating in activities you are already doing. In other words, you should not feel compelled to entertain them every time you get together. Just be yourself, and include others in your plans. How difficult is it to put out another place setting at the dinner table, or calling to see if your friend wants to go shopping with you? This is a time commitment anyone can handle. You will also find that holidays, birthdays, sports or concert events, or something as simple as watching a video are great opportunities to include your international friend.

The Invitation

- You represent the “host culture”, meaning that you should take responsibility for initiating the contact and making the first invitation to get together.
- Remember that phone conversations might be a challenge for both of you at first because you are not benefiting from face-to-face interaction. If you have time, you might want to follow up a verbal invitation with a written note or email.
- When extending an invitation to do something together, make sure to give a brief description of the activity, the time, place, and transportation plans. For meals, it is easy for you to ask if there are any dietary restrictions. Also, specify the appropriate dress for the activity.
- Names – The easiest way is to simply ask their preferred name, then write it phonetically on a note card.

The First Meeting

- Before you meet, do a little homework. Get on the Internet or go to the library to find out information about your friend’s country and culture. You will find that a little preparation will add tremendously to your conversation topics.
- A handshake is an acceptable form of greeting among the same sex. The general rule is to be friendly but not familiar, or you may risk overwhelming your friend’s natural reserve.
- Pets – exercise caution. Don’t assume your loveable dog that loves to lick or bark will be well received. Dogs are used for security rather than pets in many cultures, so there is a natural fear associated with these animals.
- Everyone in your family should get in on this friendship. Senior citizens, typically, are highly respected and greatly appreciated. Encourage your children to join in as well. Cross-cultural friendships like this are intended to be a family affair.
- Flexibility is the key to cross-cultural hospitality. Be willing to adjust to last minute changes, like your guest showing up late or bringing an extra friend along. If you find yourself getting impatient, consider your reaction a warning sign and take a deep breath. When you are operating out of two different sets of experiences and expectations, you should count on the fact that it is going to take some time to get used to each other’s mode of operation.

The Uninvited Guest

A provincial governor from China was visiting the United States and was invited to an American’s home for Christmas dinner. The family had a small Pomeranian dog that was supposed to be safely locked in the bedroom for the evening. However, the dog escaped and proceeded downstairs and under the table. Of all the legs this dog could have chosen to lick, he went for the Chinese governor. The special guest almost left a permanent mark on the ceiling of the dining room as he jumped up from the table with a shriek, scattering food and glassware to the four winds. An international incident was averted when the guest recognized the culprit as being more friendly and curious than dangerous.

Mealtime

- Inviting your international friend for a meal in your home or apartment is a great way to start a new friendship. An invitation like this is a great honor, because your invitation is an indication that you want to invite your international friend into the most important place in your life – where your family and possessions reside. Few international students and scholars are afforded such an opportunity outside the university.
- Ask in advance about any dietary restrictions to avoid any mealtime misunderstandings.
- Generally speaking, most internationals are willing to experiment and try new things when it comes to food. Cook foods you enjoy to eat and to make.⁴ Provide soup spoons for each place setting. It is always better to ask ahead of time if your friend cannot eat certain foods. Here are a few more observations:
 1. Orthodox Jews and Muslims do not usually eat shellfish or pork products.
 2. Some Hindus do not eat meat or eggs.
 3. Dairy products like cheese, milk, or quiche are not really that appealing to many East Asian cultures.
 4. Some ultra-orthodox Muslims will choose not to eat with you rather than running the risk of violating dietary restrictions. Even plates and silverware that have had pork on them at some point in time will exclude them from using them. In such a case, it is probably better to stick to activities rather than meals when you get together.
 5. Safe bets (assuming no restrictions): chicken, vegetables, rice, and fresh fruit.
- On arrival, offer your friend a drink or snack. Give choices rather than saying “Do you want something to drink?”
- Graciously accept any gift from your international friend.
- If you eat “family style” by passing serving dishes around the table, keep in mind that some cultures consider it impolite to take another serving without being asked to.
- You are encouraged to keep your family traditions at meals. For example, if it is your custom to pray before eating, simply inform your guest that this is your family ritual and all will be well.
- Eating habits differ from culture to culture. Some new arrivals have been known to slurp, burp, and eat with fingers. Your friend will adapt to a more western style of eating, so don’t be too hasty to pass judgment until they have time to adjust.
- Remember to spell your friend’s name phonetically on a note card for you to refer to during the evening, and pinch yourself if you are tempted to make up a nickname.

A Meal to Remember

One evening a graduate student from India attending Harvard came to eat with a family with two small children. The wife had fixed an Indian curry recipe that she had found in an international cookbook. The student was so excited that he began eating with his fingers. Immediately, the 4 year old boy at the table said, “See mommy, I don’t have to use a fork after all!”

⁴ A great international cookbook with recipes around the world is *Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook* by Joetta Handrich Schiabach (Paperback - 336 pages Spiral edition (August 1991) , Herald Pr; ISBN: 083613561X)

Conversation Starters

Friendships in any culture are built upon the same foundation -- shared experiences and trust. Conversation is often the entry point into developing a trust relationship, and the following questions are suggestions for learning more about your international friend's customs, culture, and family. As you converse, offer insights into your own family and culture when appropriate. We do not want to pry or force conversation, but want to be prepared to offer suggestions on what topics to discuss for your time together. It is also fun to exchange pictures of family, special sights from vacation or back home, or other personal interest items to provide a more personal context to what you are discussing. You might also consider topics relating to your friend's home country that you get off the Internet.

When it comes to conversation topics, you will find that your international friend approaches the issue in a different manner than most Americans. While we are taught that the two topics to avoid are religion and politics, our international friends are most likely very open to discussing these. Why? Because they have not been raised with a compartmentalized view of life, like church/state separation. Culture is a unified whole, and these two topics are as normal to discuss as it is for us to talk about sports and weather.

Customs & Gestures

1. How would you introduce me to your family?
2. What form of greeting would I use?
3. Would I be expected to bring a gift?
4. What would we do after the greeting?
5. What is the polite way to leave a social evening together?
6. What is the most common greeting and farewell in your country?

Education

1. What are some of the differences you have observed between schools in your country and those in this country?
2. How do you plan to use what you have learned here back home?
3. What are the procedures for a student desiring to enter the university in your country?

Food

1. What are your favorite types of foods?
2. Does your family eat together? Do you talk during the meal or keep silent?
3. How would you prepare one of your favorite meals (could we cook it together)?

Leisure Activities

1. What is the most popular sport?
2. What films from here are popular in your country?
3. What kinds of music do you listen to?
4. Are libraries available in your cities? Are they free, or is there a fee involved?
5. How do most university students spend their leisure time in your country?
6. What kinds of activities do most families enjoy after work or school in your hometown?

Pets

1. What is the most common kind of pet?
2. Where do people keep their pets?
3. What animals are useful for work, and how are they used?

Religious

1. What is the predominate religion in your country?
2. Is there a state religion? If so, what is it?
3. What is your perception of religion in this country?
4. What are your centers of worship like?
5. What is your concept or belief about God?

Children

1. How do parents select a name for their baby?
2. At what age do children start school?
3. Are children punished for bad behavior? Who does it?
4. What song or story do you remember from your childhood?
5. Is school mandatory? Up to what age? Does the government provide free education?

Shelter

1. Please describe the appearance of a typical home in your neighborhood.
2. What furniture is found in a typical residence?
3. How frequently do people move to a new residence?

Social Groups

1. What different languages do people speak?
2. How strong are class distinctions?
3. What types of organizations are most popular with adults?
4. What is the most common religion in your country?
5. Do you find that people are willing to openly discuss religious or political issues?

Family Life

1. What is the average family size in your country? How many members are in your family? Do you have pictures?
2. Do grandparents or other relatives live in the same house with the family?
3. Do married women work outside the home? Do they have similar or different job opportunities as men?
4. What are some special holidays for your family, and how do you celebrate?
5. What is an acceptable way to meet someone to marry?
6. At what age do children leave home to live on their own?

Transportation

1. What forms of transportation are available in urban areas?
2. How do you get to school or work?
3. Is it customary for a family to go somewhere for vacation?
4. How expensive is it to purchase fuel?

Activities

Conversation is a great pastime when your international friend has a good command of the language. You will most likely discover that your international friend is well informed when it comes to music, movies, and current events. At the same time, you will probably want to experience a variety of activities together. One thing to keep in mind when planning activities is to be aware of the academic calendar. Ask your friend when midterms and finals will be, as well as any other busy times for them. You can do the same for them if you will be particularly busy or out of town. The following activities are designed to give a variety of options depending on your skill level and personal interests:

Passive Activities

- Card games (“Uno”, rummy, etc.)
- Chess
- “Pictionary”
- Board games
- Sports events
- Concerts, church plays, musicals
- Sightseeing
- Shopping, garage sales
- Movies, videos
- Zoo, fairs
- Visit extended family, particularly for holidays
- Cook a meal together
- Outdoor barbecue or picnic
- Visit children’s school or activities
- Computer games, Nintendo, Play Station
- Holiday events (concerts, fireworks, plays, games, costume parties)

Active Activities

- Bowling
- Ping-pong, badminton
- Putt-putt golf
- Volleyball
- Soccer
- Fitness club
- Racquetball
- Canoeing, white water rafting
- Picnic games (races, horseshoes, etc.)
- Cycling
- Water skiing, sailing, boat ride on the lake or river

Attitudes

- One of the greatest temptations American hosts face is making your friendship one-sided. This occurs when you become the “giver” and your international friend the “receiver.” You might be older, you might have more financial resources, but in the end this kind of arrangement makes for an unhealthy relationship. Why? Because over time, the “debt of gratitude” for your generous giving becomes too great to repay, so the only course of action is to cool down or exit the relationship. Don’t allow your friendship to get one-sided like this. Instead, allow your international friend to initiate ideas for things to do, like inviting you to their apartment or dorm for a meal, attending a campus activity, or bringing you a special gift from home.
- Another temptation to avoid is trying to squeeze too much into your day and giving your international friend the leftovers of your time. No one doubts that Americans can become over committed with obligations at work and with the family. At the same time, volunteers who have done this kind of thing say that it is far easier to include their international friend in things they are already doing rather than trying to create specific and unique activities every time they get together.
- Genuine cultural exchange requires the free and open flow of ideas. You can bet on the fact that you and your friend will not see eye-to-eye on every issue you discuss, so prepare yourself now by committing yourself to be a learner and a listener.
- It is easier to offend someone from another culture than someone from your own. This is because you are operating out of two different points of view.
- Overseas, Americans can be perceived as being aggressive and demanding, so be careful not to live up to this expectation. We must be careful to not manipulate or control conversations to present our views in a coercive or offensive manner. Hotspots are usually related to religious or political views. A great guideline for us is I Pet. 3:15: *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...*

Point

A student from France was invited to a picnic by his host family, but was not informed that it was a church function. Even though the student enjoyed meeting many nice people, he became uncomfortable when the picnic turned into a worship service with singing and preaching. He felt trapped because he did not want to offend his hosts by asking to leave, but he also did not want to listen to the speaker talk about religion. Later, the student complained to university officials for being forced to participate in a religious activity. He told them that the speaker was trying to convert him to his religion.

Counterpoint

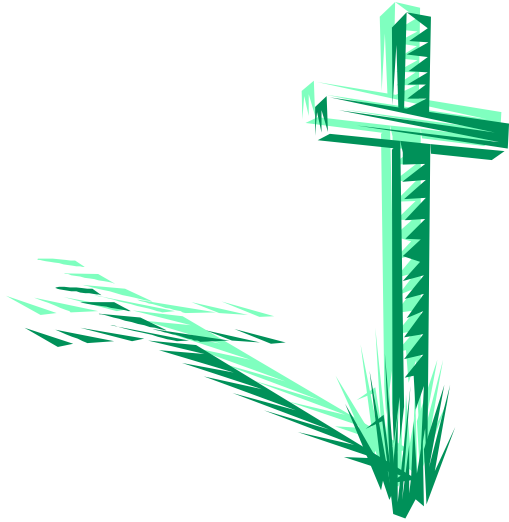
A student from China was invited to attend a small group Bible study. The student was informed about the nature and purpose of the meeting beforehand, and she decided that she wanted to attend to learn more about Christianity. Her grandparents were Christians in China, and she was curious to know more about it. The Bible study group warmly welcomed the student, and helped her when she wrecked her car the next week. Three weeks later, the student informed the group that she has decided to become a Christian, and asked them to help her do this.



Top Ten Hosting Goofs

(The following are true stories.)

10. Inviting a vegetarian for pork roast.
9. Grabbing the hand of your Muslim friend and try to place it on your German Shepherd dog's head to show that he will not bite.
8. Taking your international friend to Hooters.
7. Calling Mohammed "Mo" and his roommate "Curley."
6. Inviting your international friend to a concert and making them pay.
5. Receiving an invitation from your international friend to eat an ethnic meal, but decline saying, "I don't like foreign food."
4. Teaching a 6-year-old Japanese boy how to play the "**Red Alert**" computer game that involves dropping atomic bombs on enemy positions.
3. Telling an international student that his country's government is backward and corrupt.
2. Offering to befriend an international student "as long as they are not black."
1. Refusing to host another international student. The reason: "We fed them, talked to them, and entertained them, but they did not become a Christian. We think it was a waste of time."



THE GOSPEL AND CROSS- CULTURAL FRIENDSHIPS



Insights for Sharing Christ Cross-Culturally

One of the great surprises American Christians experience is the degree of openness that most internationals have toward religion. Even though our nation experiences a large degree of religious freedom, we are also one of the few nations that attempt to legally separate religion and culture (church / state).

For most international students, culture and religion are one in the same. We say in America that the two things we are not to discuss with strangers are politics and religion. Can you guess the two topics most international students coming to America will openly discuss? It's politics and religion.

Why are internationals open to discussing religious issues? Think for a moment that you were going to live overseas for an extended period. Would you not want to learn as much as you could about your new culture? Of course you would. The same is true for international students coming here. They see the church buildings and TV programs, and are curious to know what it is all about. This natural curiosity often leads to questions about faith issues and religion in America.

Yet in spite of such openness, you may feel uncomfortable about sharing your faith with others, particularly with someone from another culture and religion. Your reluctance may stem from not wanting to offend or endanger your friendship. The foundational Scripture addressing this issue is I Pet. 3:15:

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...”

The apostle Peter knew from firsthand experience that sharing the Gospel "with gentleness and respect" provides the type of motivating love relationship that can tear down walls of misunderstanding. Here are some key points to consider:

Conversion As A Process

- One never needs to be intimidated by other religions or cultures. The love of Christ has its own way of dismantling "walls of difference" between us.
- He dismantles this wall brick by brick over time.
- God sees coming to faith in Him as a process rather than an event. This is precisely how Jesus describes it:

Jesus said, *“I am sending you to them
-- To open their eyes
-- And turn them from darkness to light,
-- And from the power of Satan to God,
So that they may receive forgiveness of sins
and a place among those who are sanctified
by faith in me.”* (Acts 26:18)

Jesus said, *“I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”* (John 4:35-38)

The Process of Spiritual Awareness & Growth

(Modified with permission of Dr. James F. Engel)

God's Task	Our Task	The Process
<i>Reveals Himself</i>	Prepare the soil	-10 No conscious awareness of a Supreme Being
↓	↓	-9 Religious awareness but no knowledge of God
↓	Plant the seed	-8 Questioning present religious concept of God
↓	↓	-7 Developing positive attitude toward God
<i>Convicts</i>	Cultivate and water the crop	-6 Awareness of fundamentals of God
↓	↓	-5 Grasp implications of the Gospel
↓	↓	-4 Positive attitude toward the Gospel
<i>Imparts spiritual life</i>	Harvest	-3 Recognition of personal problem in relation to God
↓	↓	-2 Decision to Act
↓	↓	-1 Repentance
<i>Provides Holy Spirit to empower for ministry</i>	Provide fellowship, modeling, and teaching	<u>NEW CHRISTIAN</u>
↓	↓	1 Assurance of salvation
↓	↓	2 Adoption of Christian identity
↓	↓	3 Conceptual and behavioral growth
↓	↓	4 Growth in Bible study
↓	↓	5 Understanding and applying Bible doctrine
↓	↓	6 Recognition and utilization of spiritual gifts
↓	↓	7 Growth in total stewardship
↓	↓	8 Christian leadership development
↓	↓	9 Effective outreach to others
↓	↓	10 Vision for future ministry
↓	Develop leader skills	
↓	↓	
↓	Encourage once back home	



A Biblical View of "Success" In Evangelism

*True Stories About Being faithful with
God-given opportunities*

“Success” in evangelism is not defined by the result (conversion), but by our being faithful to the part of the process God has us involved in. Whether God uses us to plow previously untouched ground, water the seed, or reap the harvest, we can trust Him to use us in at least one part of the process. It is rare, however, for one person to be totally responsible for someone coming to faith. If we look back, we will find that God has used others along the way to build a living witness into the lives of our friends who are in the process of coming to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

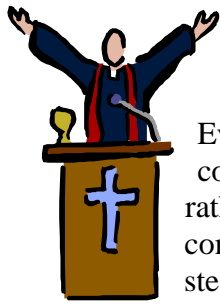
ROM - TO

Professor Hu, a visiting scholar from China, loved the opportunity to befriend an American family. Once when the family invited him over for dinner and said grace before the meal, Professor Hu remarked that he saw no need for God. Professor Hu loved to get together with the Smith family, and even agreed to attend a church service with them. He met many of their friends from church. One year later, the Smith's took Professor Hu to the airport to return to China. With the sincerest of expressions, Professor Hu said, “I now realize that Christians are very important to your society. When I return home, I want to see if Christians in my country are the same as here.”

ROM - TO

Mayumi came from Japan to study, but her first few weeks were very difficult. A Christian student befriended her. Having attended a Catholic school in Japan, Mayumi knew some things about Christianity. But when asked she would call herself a Buddhist. Yet after six weeks in America, Mayumi gave her life to Christ. She transferred to a women's college the next semester, but experienced intense persecution for her openness in sharing about her hope in Christ. In spite of such hardships, Mayumi returned to Japan and led her mother and several close friends to Christ.

Gideon was a graduate student from Cameroon, West Africa attending a university in this country. He was pastor of an 800-member church back home, and taught in his denomination's theological seminary. When Gideon and his family came to America, they faithfully attended services and Sunday school each week at a church in their denomination. During his three-year stay, Gideon was never invited to teach, preach, or minister in the congregation. Gideon and his family returned home with a sense of deep discouragement. To this day, they do not understand why American believers would have such disregard for their spiritual input.



Sharing Your Faith in America

Even though Americans consider their civil liberties rather far-reaching, religious communities are experiencing a steady retreat of privileges that were once afforded them by society. Over the past 35 years, our legal system has established precedents that seek to further compartmentalize religion in society. High profile issues such as prayer in school, prayers at commencement or athletic events, or prohibiting the Ten Commandments from being displayed in public buildings are actually symptoms of a deeper widening of popular opinion to isolate religious influence. This is why a growing number of Christians in this country are becoming increasingly hesitant to share their faith with others.

The good news is that this hesitancy to introduce religion into our everyday discussions is virtually non-existent in other cultures. In fact, America is probably the only society on earth that attempts to compartmentalize religion from everyday life. For the rest of the world, religion and culture are one in the same. They feel as comfortable discussing religion as you do talking sports or weather with another American. This is important to keep in mind when forging friendships across cultures. You need to be prepared for the fact that your international friend will most likely be the one to initiate conversation inquiring about your faith and beliefs. Granted, their motives for religious inquiry may not rest in an interest to convert to a new faith. Cultural curiosity will be the primary motivation behind any religious inquiry. But the opportunity for dialogue will still remain. Don't pass it up when that opportunity presents itself.



Understanding the University's Role in Monitoring Religious Groups

Generally speaking, college and university administrators responsible for international students on their campuses see it as their responsibility to monitor the activity of religious groups who show an interest in their students. This interest stems partly from a desire to protect individuals who are new to this culture and may be more vulnerable to proselytizing. Some administrators see any attempt to share one's faith experience with others in a negative light. This response is usually more a result of the individual official's past negative experiences with religion rather than anything else. Such an overprotective stance is inappropriate in two primary ways:

- It defeats the purpose of international educational exchange, which is the free and unhindered exchange of ideas.
- It is highly patronizing, since the majority of international students are graduate students, and, as grown adults would highly resent another adult trying to monitor their movements in the community.

Defining Proselytizing

It is important for you to know what proselytizing is and what it is not.

Proselytizing is defined in the dictionary as:

1. *Inducing someone to convert to one's own religious faith.*
2. *Inducing someone to join one's own political party or to espouse one's doctrine.*

In American culture today, the word is used almost exclusively in a religious context, and with negative connotations. This is unfortunate, because proselytizing is really

about persuasion and the manner in which we are persuaded. Seen in this light, we are exposed to persuasion daily through the media, in the classroom, and in daily conversations. With regard to proselytizing international students, the key concern lies with the manner in which they are persuaded.

Fortunately, there is a recognized guideline among university administrators as to how community organizations and community volunteers should interact with international students and scholars. NAFSA: Association of International Educators has published a *Code of Ethics* for its membership, which constitutes most of the universities and colleges in America. Specific guidelines are mentioned that provide community organizations with acceptable modes of behavior regarding religious activities and discussions:

(Article 10, The NAFSA Ethics Program, p.11)

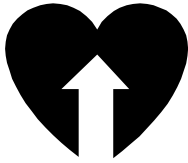
- a. Make certain that organizations providing programs for foreign students and scholars have clear statements of purpose and responsibility, so that all parties can know what is expected of them.
- b. Accurately portray their services and programs, making clear the identity, the intent, and the nature of the sponsoring organization and of each particular event and service.
- c. Provide appropriate opportunities to observe and join in mutual inquiry into cultural differences. ... The organization should make clear that surreptitious, deceptive or coercive proselytizing is unacceptable.



Seeking Common Ground With the Code

NAFSA's Code of Ethics is a helpful guideline for churches or individuals working with international students and scholars, because the Code provides common ground for defining appropriate and inappropriate behavior for religious discussions or activities. The guidelines are simple:

1. *When advertising activities, be clear about who you are and what you intend to do.* Don't try to hide the fact that you are a church or religious organization.
2. *Do what you say you are going to do.* Don't invite an international to a potluck dinner and follow it up with a religious talk or Bible study without letting them know in advance what to expect. This is particularly important for organized group activities. The same is true when you invite your international friend to church. Let them know what to expect, and offer them the chance to participate or decline.
3. *Encourage dialogue, and refrain from using devious, misleading, or coercive forms of communication.* University officials are concerned about cult activities on campus. Aggressive forms of evangelism are usually viewed in this light. Besides, this kind of aggressive approach is virtually worthless when communicating with individuals from other religious backgrounds, and violates the heart of the Gospel message (Jn. 13:34,35; I Pet. 3:15, Rm. 12:9,10).



Guidelines for Sharing the Gospel With International Students

Start with yourself

Accept the fact that you are God's display case to the world (Mt. 5:13,14). If you are walking closely with the Lord, people will see this and be attracted to Jesus. Jesus said, "*All will know you are my disciples if you love one another.*" (Jn. 14:35)

Trust takes time

There are no shortcuts to developing the kind of trust that fosters deep sharing and openness. The walls of difference between people from differing cultures are not brought down with one mighty blow. They are dismantled brick by brick. The greatest attraction to the Gospel is love. Nothing brings people into God's kingdom more effectively than building loving relationships.

Friendship must be unconditional

Your friendship is not based on your international friend's interest in Christianity. Rather, it is based on your desire to love them and respond to their felt needs regardless of their interest in God. You represent the "host culture", and therefore need to take the initiative in offering genuine assistance and hospitality.

You don't have to hide the fact that you are a Christian.

You only run the risk of being considered a religious fanatic when you act like one. With internationals, you will find conversations about religion to be refreshingly different than with people from your own culture. Many will also want to hear your own experience in coming to know Christ, but never force the conversation in this direction. No one listens when they are pressured into a conversation about something that is of no interest to them.

Utilize all three forms of biblical witness

Allow adequate access to your life, your words, and your fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. True followers of Christ act like a magnet with the way they express their love for God and for one another.

Emphasize faithfulness over results

Looking at the big picture, God is the one who draws people to Himself. Whether we plant the seed of the Gospel, water it, or witness the harvest, God's interest for us is being faithful to that part of the process He has assigned to us.

Pray for spiritual discernment

Only the Holy Spirit can reveal the spiritual "penetration point" in a person's life where the Gospel can be the most effective -- that felt need, hurt, or empty place that only God can heal and fill. Specifically pray for this kind of discernment so you may be able to minister more effectively in the power of the Holy Spirit. Also, when the occasion presents itself, share your own testimony of coming

Understand the true cost of commitment to Christ

International students have one eye focused here, and the other back home. Becoming a follower of Jesus may have serious implications, resulting in loss of family, career, or life itself. Be aware of these kinds of pressures at work.

Use literature

There is nothing quite like reading God's Word in one's mother tongue to help you grasp the fact that Jesus Christ loves the whole world and not just us living in the West. Tracts, Bibles, and the *Jesus* movie are available. Request a catalog from Multi-Language Media, PO Box 301, Ephrata, PA 17522 (717) 738-0582, or order online at www.multilanguage.com

Communicating the Gospel Cross-Culturally: The Influence of World View and Cultural Values

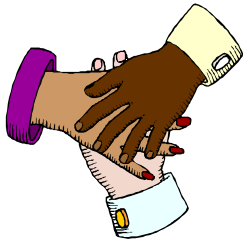
©2000, John Eaves, InterFACE Ministries

Imagine yourself having a conversation with someone from Southeast Asia about Jesus Christ who is from a Buddhist background. Notice how one's world view affects the way we perceive our reality, making the task of sharing faith more complicated than we might think. The Holy Spirit has a lot of layers to penetrate and peel back before the Gospel begins to make sense.

<u>Topic</u>	<u>When the American Says</u>	<u>The Southeast Asian Buddhist Is Probably Thinking ...</u>
Future	<i>“God wants to give you eternal life when you believe in Jesus”</i>	<i>“No one can alter their destiny.”</i>
Change	<i>“God wants to do something new in your life and change you through a relationship with Jesus.”</i>	<i>“What is good for my ancestors is good for me.”</i>
Family	<i>“You need to make your own decision about Jesus. No one else can do it for you.”</i>	<i>“What will my family say if I became a Christian? They would never accept it.”</i>
History	<i>“Don’t concern yourself with what your family used to do. God wants to show you a new life in Jesus.”</i>	<i>“Our family beliefs have been the same for centuries. Christianity is not that old, and does not exist among my people.”</i>
Time	<i>“The Bible says, ‘Now is the day of salvation.’ Do it now. Don’t wait until it is too late.”</i>	<i>“This person is not interested in me. He (she) would never ask me to turn my back on my family and culture.”</i>
Relationships	<i>“Don’t worry about what others think. This is your decision alone to make.”</i>	<i>“My friends and family will abandon me. The cost is too great.”</i>



OUR CHURCH AND INTERNATIONALS



What Should Happen When the Nations Come to Us?

By John Eaves

If Jesus is the head of His Church, where is he leading us? ¹ This is not a trick question. Rather, it points to a simple truth that God's present plans for His people are directly influenced by future plans for His Kingdom. To uncover this mystery, we have to read the Bible in reverse chronology, starting with Revelation and working backward to Genesis.

Working Biblical History Backward

When it comes to the topic of eternity, the Bible tends to give us snapshots into the future rather than a running narrative. Two foundational passages are found in the last book of the Bible. As you read in context the Apostle John's vision of our collective future, we are offered a significant insight into God's plan and purpose for our lives. We witness the followers of Jesus Christ before the throne of God, positioned for worship:

Passage #1

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9,10)

³ Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:10, 22, 4:15, 5:23

Passage #2

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:9,10)

Notice carefully who is gathered for this occasion? We find people from everywhere.² There is no mention of homogenous groupings of peoples and cultures. Instead, we find the literal fulfillment of Paul's description in Ephesians 2:11-22 of how Christ dismantles the "dividing wall of hostility" between us. These two passages have traditionally been used to help us identify God's desire for all peoples around the world to follow Jesus Christ. But they also reveal an important truth about God's character in that He intends for us to worship Him together. For reasons known only to God, greater glory is derived from differing peoples and cultures coming together for worship. The question we must ask ourselves is if this is God's intentions for eternity, shouldn't we start practicing now?

With this foundational thought, we are better prepared to understand the tremendous significance of some key passages in the Old Testament and the Gospels that further validate the fact that God had in mind from the beginning to draw the nations together under His Lordship. A few of these passages are listed on the next page.

⁴ The term "every tribe, language, people, and nation" is used frequently in Revelation, usually in reference to God's interest in all people coming to know Him. See also Rev. 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15.



What Is God's Plan For Drawing the Nations Together In Worship?

Step 1: I will extend my favor and blessing to all peoples.

The Lord said to Abram, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen. 12:1-3; 28:14)

Step 2: I will tangibly express his love to the nations by instructing Israel on how to treat "foreigners."

"When the foreigner lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The foreigner living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself, for you were also foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 19:33,34)

Step 3: I will issue an official invitation for any person from any culture to come worship me. (Jesus reissued the invitation)

"And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my alter, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." (Is. 56: 6,7) (see also I Kings 8:41-43)

Step 4: I will make a personal appearance to clarify my intentions.

*Jesus said, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." (Jn. 12:32)
"All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, Go and make disciples of all nations ..." (Mt. 28:18,19)
"Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there (the Court of the Gentiles). As he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: *My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*" (Mark 11:15,17)*

Step 5: I will convince holdouts that I really intend to draw my people together from the nations of the earth to be part of my Kingdom.

*Peter said, I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right. This is the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."
(Acts 10:34-36)*

Step 6 : I will draw the nations together now to begin practicing what they will be doing for all eternity.

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9) (also Rev. 5:9,10)

The Covenant

The Law

The Prophets

Jesus

The Early Church

All
Eternity



What the Kingdom Of God Should Mean To Us

As we recall the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, the "Kingdom of God" emerges as one of the dominant themes of Jesus' teaching ministry. Jesus insisted that God's Kingdom was to have a direct and unique influence on anyone who followed Him. How did Jesus describe this Kingdom lifestyle?

It is God's announcement to the world.

He is going to do something radically unique in the person of Jesus Christ, and we needed to listen up.³

It is a call to repentance.

Our loyalties need to switch back to our Creator. Jesus invites us to be set free from past failures, and from the consequences of rejecting God's rule and authority through our self-centeredness.⁴

It is a tangible expression of God's power invading the domain of Satan.

This results in the fracturing of Satan's power over humanity. Life transformation is now possible through the unleashing of God's power in our lives.⁵

We join a new tribe.

God connects our lives with others that have entered into His Kingdom through our mutual faith in Jesus Christ. This new tribe puts us in contact with a different set of cultures and peoples.

God is about bringing people together to worship Him.⁶

It begins now.

The Kingdom of God is not a future event in heaven. It has already begun with the coming of Jesus, and is here. God is not waiting. He is transforming us and including us in His Kingdom purposes.

From an historical perspective, it is the last two points that the Church has struggled with the most. We are uncomfortable with the thought of having to fellowship with people who are different than we are. As we will see, it is a problem that is deep-seated in cultures around the world.

Transforming Tribal Tendencies

Regardless of what culture you are from, people generally prefer to associate with people who are most like them. It is what defines whether you are "in" or "out" of a particular cultural group. God's agenda involves the transformation of this tribal grouping tendency. The apostle Paul calls this tendency "the dividing wall of hostility", and is characterized by suspicion and misunderstanding between people from differing culture and ethnic groups.

Christ intends to remove our culturally determined tendency toward the separation of tribes by providing a common link in Himself. Jesus becomes the glue that sticks us together. His primary intent is to not make us all alike, but to enrich our understanding of Himself through the diversity of our cultural perceptions:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and

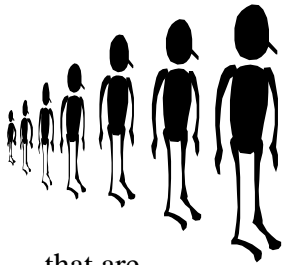
³ Lk. 4:43; Mk. 1:15; Lk. 10:9,11, 21:31

⁴ Mk. 1:15, 10:15; Mt. 21:31; Jn. 3:3,5

⁵ Mt. 12:28; Lk. 9:2,9,11; 10:9; 11:20

⁶ Lk. 13:29

in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Eph. 2:13-18, see also vs. 19-22).



The Downside of Being Alike

Many church growth experts today will tell you that it is actually better to create churches ethnically and culturally similar. Statistical evidence supports this claim. Homogenous churches do grow faster, but at what price? What is the downside to your church having only one culture or ethnic group?

1. *We diminish our witness because we are just like everyone else.*

What kind of witness do we give to the world when we simply associate with people who are just like us? They do that all the time. On the other hand, what do people think when they enter a room with individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds? The first question is “Why are these people together? This is unnatural.” It is precisely this unnatural, counter-cultural association with people who are “different” that becomes our wordless witness to the world. Christianity is intentionally counter-cultural in this respect.

2. *We limit our capacity To learn God’s ways*

Culture is like superglue. It gets all over you and cannot be easily removed. Culture has a profound effect on how we see things. It has been said that culture is the eyeglass through which we see and define reality.

All we do, think, and believe is filtered through the lenses of our culture. It even affects the way we perceive God. When our church is only one culture group, we inevitably miss our own blind spots. Manuel Ortiz, author of *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* says:

I believe that we limit the greatness of our Lord when we know God only as a local God who speaks our language and understands our conditions alone. The multiethnic church provides us with a more comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures. It takes away our haughtiness – our belief that we are more important and more knowledgeable than anyone else. It teaches us to see things that our blinders shut out before. It tells us we need each other (1 Cor. 12:12-27), and that one part cannot tell another, ‘I have no need of you.’”⁷

3. *It makes us bigheaded.*

No one culture has a monopoly on God, but we often act like we do. Because culture influences our perceptions of the world around us, our learning the ways of God from only one cultural perspective deprives us of all we could potentially know of Him. Every true Christian on earth is looking to the same Lord and Savior, but our cultures place us at differing vantage points. When we begin to share what the Holy Spirit is teaching across cultural and ethnic lines, God becomes much larger and more wondrous than we ever imagined.

⁷ 1996, InterVarsity Press, p. 13



Making Your Church into “A House of Prayer for All Nations”

If you ever study the Book of Acts from the point of view of people learning to accept other races and cultures, you come closer to understanding the heartbeat of God. Having an all Jewish Church was not what God had in mind for His Kingdom. Rather, it was a mission that not only reconciled the nations to God, but also to one another. Multicultural congregations are a lot of work, but the effort is richly rewarded beyond our wildest imaginations. When it comes to the practical “how-to” for developing a multicultural congregation, there are some practical observations that any church should keep in mind when moving forward with God’s Kingdom vision for the Church:

1. Do your homework.

Gain a good understanding of the ethnic makeup of your community and neighborhood – who is here (permanent residents, immigrants, refugees, international students, business people or tourists), from where, how many, where do they live? With this data, begin to envision in what ways God could use your congregation to draw the nations together from your community.

2. Don’t Look For A Formula.

How a congregation wants to express unity in their cultural diversity is more up to the imagination than to an established formula. Churches who are aspiring to become “a house of prayer for all nations” have incorporated a wide range of strategies. The three most popular models being used today are:

- *Renting Model:* a “host church rents facilities to one or more ethnic congregations.

- *Celebration Model:* Various culture groups have separate Sunday Schools, but schedule joint worship.
- *Integrated Model:* All activities are done together by the various culture groups in the congregation

3. Establish a biblical foundation.

Your church should have a written statement and a mission statement that encompasses this vision. Eight aspects defining this new way of relating cross-culturally as a church should be covered:

- Great Commission (Mt. 28:19,20), ministering to All peoples, not just one.
- One in Christ (Gal. 3:28), no second class citizens of the Kingdom.
- Common spiritual ancestry (Gal. 3:29), Abraham’s offspring.
- The abolishing of superior/inferior classifications of people (Eph. 2:14,15,19)
- The “New Self” of Kingdom Culture (Col. 3:9-11)
- Loving one another as God’s people (I Jn. 4:7)
- Loving the foreigner (Ex. 12:49; Lev. 19:34; Mt. 25:35)
- Serving one another in Christ’s love (Jn. 13:1-17)

4. Leadership must model it.

If your church leadership represents only one culture group, the chances are good that it will be difficult to attract other culture groups. People want leaders that model servant leadership and tangibly represent the diversity found in their congregation.



Developing an Effective International Student Ministry Outreach

Have you been noticing the different faces in your grocery lately? If your town or city is like most in America today, you will find developing ethnic sub-communities within the community at large. These people might be immigrants, refugees, or business people. One sub-community that is often overlooked by local churches are international students and scholars. They are here in significant numbers today, and provide an excellent starting point for moving your church in the direction of becoming “a house of prayer for all nations.”

As we have already learned, ministering to internationals is a relationally intensive activity. The primary task is to locate individuals in your congregation with the courage to step out and befriend someone from another culture.

Since volunteers today tend to make shorter ministry time commitments than in the past, the secret is to develop a ministry structure that fits the time constraints of your volunteers while maintaining a sufficient level of interaction with our international friends. An outreach of this kind should:

- Make ministry manageable. Responsibilities need to be broken down into smaller "bite size" pieces than we have been accustomed.
- Present a clear picture of expectations and time commitment.
- Provide a sense of community among the volunteers so they have a sense of belonging and accomplishment.

Launching any new ministry requires a lot of hard work, but it is surprising how many ministries begin without conducting an adequate amount of information gathering. The following suggestions will help you generate the right kind of information that will help establish an international ministry in your congregation.



Getting Started

Find out where God is working

Begin to pray with others in your congregation for internationals living in the community. Ask God to provide a genuine empathy for their welfare, and ways to make contact and meet needs. Customize your dreams and strategies to your unique situation.

Survey existing programs In the community

Find out if there are any community or church programs for internationals in existence, such as conversational English classes, host programs, wives or children's programs, airport pickup, Bible studies or fellowship groups. Your interest is in designing a program that meets the needs of internationals in your area. Don't be discouraged if other churches are ahead of you. The chances are good that you will uncover an unmet need. You will then have to decide if it is best to join in an existing program, or develop a new initiative. Do not automatically assume that you need to start something new. Many effective international ministry programs around the country utilize a consortium of like-minded congregations to avoid duplication.

Survey your church's resources

In this ministry, geography is everything. How close or distant your facilities are to campus will directly affect the types of programs you will offer. You would not offer a conversational English class if you were 15 miles away, but you could host weekend home stays and sightseeing for international students living on campus. How do you find your core volunteers? Begin to inquire about who has traveled or lived overseas, gone on a short term missions trip, is interested in missions, interested in learning a new language, or has small children and would like to expose them to other international kids.

Dream the dream ... develop a team

Pray for your church's leadership, and for the congregation to be receptive to reaching the world that has come to our community. Begin to ask God to bring others who will help you in developing the ministry. You cannot do it alone. Meet with the pastor and share your ministry vision. Emphasize that your desire is to not make more work for the church leadership, but to help mobilize the laity for ministry. The pastor's role will be to cheer on the volunteers, and to provide access to the congregation to present the ministry vision. How you contact the congregation will be largely determined by your particular church. Most churches today are inundated by requests for announcement time by many ministries. Your task will be to link international ministry with the core vision of the congregation so that it is seen as a key component to the overall direction and outreach of the church.

Meet the Foreign Student Advisor(s) from area colleges and universities

Someone from your leadership team needs to meet the Foreign Student Advisor (FSA). It is important to understand the position of the FSA. They have been charged to care for the welfare of the students. Some may be open to volunteer involvement from churches in the community, but others may be suspicious or openly hostile. When you call, indicate your personal interest in learning how to get involved rather than trying to represent the entire church ministry.

Your objective is to:

1. Establish yourself as someone willing to help meet the needs of the international student community.
2. Inquire about the current international student enrollment. Are there many students from a few countries, or are they spread out?
3. Find out what programs in the community or at the school are currently being offered.

The FSA will be looking to see if you are:

- Someone who genuinely cares.
- Willing to help meet the student's needs
- Assess if you are a person who will not force their religious or personal views on the students (are there any hidden agendas?).
- Follows through on your commitments.

It is strongly suggested that either someone on your team or the church join *NAFSA: Association of International Educators*. Most Foreign Student Advisors and international educators belong to this national organization, and your involvement in their "Community Section" will positively affect your acceptance on campus. Associate memberships are \$85 a year. The address is: NAFSA: Association of International Educators

1307 New York Avenue, NW, Eighth Floor,
Washington, DC 20005-4701 USA
tel: 202.737.3699
fax:202.737.3657
Internet: www.nafsa.org

***Review student needs with
corresponding outreach possibilities***

- ◆ **Airport pickup**
Transport service to campus

- ◆ **Furniture/household items**
Garage "give-away"

- ◆ **Language assistance**
*Conversational English, student conversation partner
(student to student match with college group)*

- ◆ **Friendship with Americans**
friendship hosting program

- ◆ **Transportation**
*Driver's license clinic, "How To Buy A Car" or "How
To Repair a Car" seminar, establish a bike co-op*

- ◆ **Community orientation**
Welcome reception, city orientation, shopping

- ◆ **Mentoring**
*Match students with church members in same career
field*

- ◆ **Travel/sightseeing**
Special trips or activities

- ◆ **Housing assistance**
Apartment listings, help with moving

- ◆ **Spouse at home**
*book club, pre-school play group, cooking classes,
language assistance*

***Offer all volunteers training and
orientation according to their tasks***

All volunteers need training and orientation.
Never ask anyone to do a job without first
preparing them to succeed in what they have
been assigned to do.

Provide Recognition For Service

Let your ministry team and volunteers know
how much you appreciate their efforts and
time.



Building A Leadership Structure

Since every congregation and international ministry opportunity is different, it is impractical and unwise to devise a systematic plan that is designed to fit into any ministry setting. We can, however, explore some of the fundamental guidelines for selecting leadership and broadly outline key responsibilities. While one may not deny the effectiveness of a gifted individual who has a vision for ministry, experience shows that building a church-based ministry around an individual is extremely unwise. What happens to the ministry when that gifted person leaves (for whatever reason)? It is far better to develop a ministry team that is cross-trained to insure that the ministry will have consistent and seasoned leadership. Here are five suggestions for selecting a ministry team:

1) Share the vision with church leadership, and seek their support.

International student ministry, by design, is a lay-based ministry because it involves opening heart and home in friendship. It is one of the few outreaches today that permits the entire family to participate at the same time, and appeals to singles with flexible schedules and older members of the congregation who are respected by age-oriented internationals.

You are not asking the church leadership to do the ministry by coming to them with your vision. Rather, you are seeking their support and encouragement to make international student ministry a viable outreach strategy for the church that has a truly global impact.

2) Emphasize "team" rather than position

Greater weight should be given to selecting people who are willing to pitch in and help when needed, but also take responsibility for their assigned tasks.

3) Looking for the right match

The size and composition of your ministry team will be influenced by the scope of your outreach efforts. Finding a perfect match for each ministry task will become an exercise in frustration, so consider a person's heart for ministry as much as his or her skills.

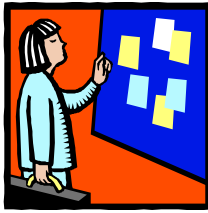
4) Quality recruiting = quality ministry

One time a university asked a local church if they could provide 25 host families. The church rounded up every warm body they could find and all the students were matched. However, within three months, only a handful has actually met their student that they had been matched with. It is better to have six people committed to the task than sixty who are just filling a name on a list.

5) Utilize the talents and experience of individuals and organizations specializing in international student ministry.

There are many churches and cross-cultural ministries around the country who are doing great work among international students and scholars. You will want to make contact with them through:

- Association of Christians Ministering to Internationals (<http://www.acmi-net.org/>)
- InterFACE Ministries (www.iface.org)
- International Students, Inc. (www.isionline.org)



Team Responsibilities

There are at least three contributing factors that will influence the size and scope of your church's international ministry team:

1. The size and number of outreach opportunities you have (More activities =more coordinators).
2. Your church's particular personality when it comes to committees or outreach teams (some are very organized, others prefer a more informal structure).
3. The team size that you are most comfortable to work with. Most teams range in size from four to eight people.

The following list of coordinator titles and job descriptions are designed to help your International Ministry Team a sense of what is involved in doing this kind of outreach. Treat each description as a helpful suggestion based on years of experience rather than some kind of binding agreement or contract. In this way, you will be free to develop your team according to your specific ministry situation.

International Student Ministry Team Coordinator

The Need:

To develop a ministry team from your congregation capable of recruiting, organizing, training, and motivating volunteers who desire to befriend internationals in your community.

Basic Tasks:

1. Develop a ministry plan and submit it to the church leadership for feedback and approval.
2. Recruit someone with appropriate speaking skills to share the ministry vision with the congregation.
3. Use existing networks within the church to identify potential team members. Place articles in church newsletter. Recruit qualified team.
4. Take responsibility for calling team meetings, developing an agenda, and facilitating meetings.
5. Support and encourage each team member by providing adequate access to training materials and supplying adequate feedback and recognition for ministry tasks.
6. Take responsibility for keeping the ministry vision in front of the congregation and participating volunteers, and providing adequate momentum for implementing the ministry plan.
7. Keep church leadership informed as to the development of the ministry, and establish annual evaluation of programs.
8. With the help of the team, develop a ministry budget to submit to the church after proving the viability of the ministry through actual volunteer and international student participation.

Favorable Qualities:

- Desire to reach international students in your community with the unconditional love of Christ
- A supportive and encouraging team builder
- Planning and administrative skills
- Visionary-- able to grasp the big picture of where the ministry is headed
- Able to delegate tasks

Community Host Coordinator

The Need:

To recruit and train from the congregation families, singles, and seniors committed to pursuing genuine friendships with internationals in the community.

Note: This is a friendship program, and not a home placement program.

Basic Tasks:

1. Identify and recruit volunteers from the congregation.
2. Provide proper orientation and training.
3. Match volunteers with internationals (Note: If your church's volunteers are participating in a university sponsored host program, the university will most likely do the matching.)
4. Encourage hosts throughout the year. Maintain contact.
5. Maintain good rapport with the university foreign student advisor's office on campus.

Favorable Qualities:

Respected in the congregation-- a good networker
Persuasive-- able to motivate others
Enthusiastic-- excited about the ministry vision
Willing to make phone contacts with host volunteers
Able to delegate tasks
Genuine love and concern for internationals

International Recruitment Coordinator

The Need:

Make contact (either in the community or through foreign student office at the local college or university) with internationals who want to develop friendships with Americans.

Basic Tasks:

1. To act as a liaison between the church volunteers and the university in providing volunteers for the university hosting program.

(Note: In some locations, no university program exists. You may either offer to help them develop one, or do so on your own. It is also a good idea to develop a consortium of like-minded congregations that you have a history of cooperating with to establish a host program. It not only helps with university relations, but broadenes your volunteer base to recruit from).

2. Maintain good rapport and trust with the foreign student advisor's office.
3. To cooperate with other local ministries and organizations working with internationals in your community to avoid needless duplication of activities.

Favorable Qualities:

Outgoing personality

Diplomatic

Pioneering spirit

Strong verbal skills/good listener

Able to relate well with internationals

Genuine love and concern for internationals

Team oriented-- willing to delegate tasks when necessary

Prayer Coordinator

The Need:

To develop an intercessory prayer network on behalf of the internationals and church volunteers.

Basic Tasks:

1. Recruit people willing to pray for the ministry on a regular basis.
2. Gather and distribute prayer requests from ministry volunteers and students.
3. Record and share with congregation answered prayers as a form of encouragement and praise.

Favorable Qualities:

Proven commitment to intercessory prayer

Persistent

Respected in the congregation as a mature believer

Organized-- able to keep track of bits of information

Activity Coordinator

The Need:

Coordinate group activities designed to cultivate a bond of friendship between church volunteers and internationals.

Basic Tasks:

1. Plan and coordinate group activities in cooperation with ministry team.
2. Supervise and evaluate planned activities. Seek feedback from participants to improve the quality and increase level of participation.

Favorable Qualities:

Creative in activity ideas
Organized-- detail oriented

Outreach Coordinator

The Need:

To encourage spiritual sharing and caring in the lives of internationals and volunteers participating in the various activities.

Basic Skills:

1. Provide ministry volunteers with adequate training and orientation for developing unconditional friendship in a cross-cultural relationship.
2. Link interested international students with people in the congregation who could help them grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ.
3. Insure that international believers are spiritually prepared to return home.
4. Keep in contact with returnees as an expression of the church's ongoing commitment to friendship and spiritual nurture.

Favorable Qualities:

Grounded and committed to "lifestyle evangelism"
Skilled in biblical knowledge, evangelism, and discipleship
Respected spiritual leader and/or teacher in the congregation



International Ministry Through Small Groups or Cell Groups

Human beings, regardless of cultural background, enjoy a sense of belonging. We want to be included in our community, and to enjoy friendships with a variety of individuals that share a common bond with us. This common bond is found in three primary ways:

- Who we are (defined by race, clan, religion, family)
- What we do (occupation, work environment)
- What we like (hobbies, interests, etc.)

This recognition of having a sense of belonging is extremely important in ministering to internationals. By your church utilizing existing groups in the church (Sunday school classes, cell or small groups, interest groups), the possibility exists to multiply the potential impact of your ministry many times over. Here is why:

Friendships: A Matter of Chemistry

Do you like every person you meet? Probably not. Friendship is often a matter of two people experiencing the right combination of common interests and personality attraction. This is also true for cross-cultural friendships. Internationals in our community are both excited and apprehensive about meeting an American. They want to know about our culture and way of life, but are somewhat reluctant to make friends with strangers who have no prior connection to their culture or family. When an international student is matched with an American through in some kind of

host program, there is only one chance for that relationship to click. But when an international student meets others in your small group, the chances of establishing a lasting friendship are significantly increased each time your international friend meets another member of your group...

Broader Interests

Let's say you are matched with an international that enjoys playing racket ball. You as the host may not play racket ball, but someone in your church's small group might be an avid racket ball fan. By linking group members and internationals in activities of mutual interest, trusting relationships have a chance to develop at a much quicker rate.

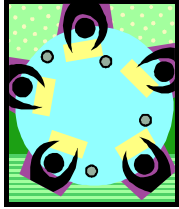
Increased Socialization

Many internationals have commented that the one thing they miss most while studying in America is a lack of deep social relationships. They meet many people on campus, but few take the time to go beyond a superficial conversational level. Your small group can provide a context for deepening relationships that one cannot easily find in other social settings. Many church small groups are multi-generational with adults and children. This is of particular interest to an international since there are few children and older adults on campus.

A Body Life Experience

Our spiritual witness is not restricted to words alone. There is nothing quite like being in a room full of people who are seeking after God and worshipping Him. This corporate witness can have a profound affect on an international who has advanced to a point of being comfortable with and trusting members in a small group. While this corporate witness is a powerful ministry tool, we must also remind ourselves that trust takes time. There are no shortcuts.

Hosts who prematurely bring their international friend into their small group without first developing individual relationships in a more social context risk doing more harm than good because the international student may feel deceived or an unknowing participant in some hidden agenda.



How to Get Started? Guidelines for Small Group Outreach

(Note: It is very important that you follow these steps in sequence and not skip any step!)

Step One: You must decide if your small group would like to befriend an international. Pray together, and seek the Lord's will for your cell's involvement. This is not a project. It is friendship building, and friendships take time to develop.

1) **Step Two:** Appoint one person from your cell to be the official host.

(Note: Approx. 75-80% of all internationals who request a community host are male, so keep this in mind when you select the designated host from your group. Families can also be selected).

Step Three: Your small group's designated host will be matched and meet his or her international friend.

Step Four: The host SHOULD NOT attempt to invite their international into the small group at this point. Rather, the host should arrange social gatherings for members of the small group to meet one another. This process may take two to three months to meet everyone. This is a time to explore common interests between your international friend and group members. Some use picnics, concerts, meals, shopping, or sightseeing. One small group did their homework and put on a special

event honoring the country and culture of their international friend from Turkey. When the student arrived, he was met at the door by the flag of Turkey, Turkish music playing in the background, and Turkish food being served. The student was completely overwhelmed that a group of Americans would take such interest in his culture (He came to the Lord, along with his girlfriend, a few months later).

Step Five: After your international friend has met the other group members, you may issue an invitation to participate in one of your small group meetings. There are no hard and fast rules for how this is done. Sometimes, your international friend will want to participate right away. Other times, there might be a hesitation. We must be careful not to rush the process, or pressure in any way. No one likes the feeling of being coerced or placed in a potentially uncomfortable situation.

When you do invite your international friend to a small group meeting, make sure to tell them ahead of time what to expect ("We will be singing, sharing from the Bible, eating ...") whatever it is that you do.

Remember that your international friend is keeping one eye on where he or she is now, but the other eye is focused back home. We must remind ourselves that spiritual decisions are often weighed out in respect to how it will be accepted by family and friends half a world away. We must be patient, and continue to pray for them during this critical time.

International students will be different than the Americans who attend your small group:

- a. They will probably have little prior knowledge about the Bible and teachings about God. Our Christian vocabulary will be like another foreign language.

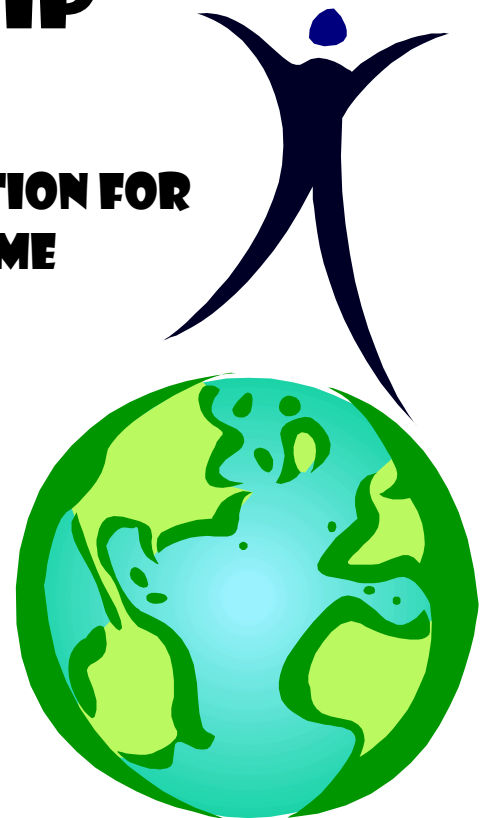
- b. Their apparent openness to spiritual things can be misread. It could be nothing more than cultural politeness. Only time will reveal their intentions for involvement.
- c. They will be working under extreme time demands due to studies. Can you imagine having to study in a university in a language that is not your native tongue?
- d. Most will totally enjoy the opportunity to be around children and older adults. Extended families are more the norm in cultures around the world.

Step Six: From the day you learn your international friend's name, make it a point to regularly lift their name before the Lord. You may be the first people on earth to lift your international friend's name before our Heavenly Father.



CROSS- CULTURAL DISCIPLESHIP

**SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR
RETURNING HOME**



"Is God still with me in Japan, or is he only residing in the West? If I must read my Bible and pray in English, as I have learned, is God a foreigner in my culture?"

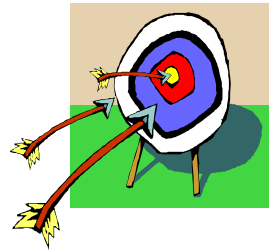
Kazuhiro was a student with high expectations when he arrived in America. As a Japanese college student enrolled in a six-month intensive English program, Kazuhiro dreamed of making new friends and mastering this difficult second language. But one friend he didn't count on meeting was Jesus Christ.

Through the friendship and witness of another student on campus, Kazuhiro committed his life to Christ two months before returning to Japan. He was warmly received by a local church, and joined the college Sunday school class. Prior to returning home, the class presented Kazuhiro with an English study Bible as a token of their friendship.

Kazuhiro appreciated the gift, and was faithful in reading his new English language Bible. Yet once home, he found it increasingly difficult to study his Bible in a non-English speaking environment like Japan. Over time, without contact from his friends in the United States and an unsuccessful attempt at attending a Japanese church, Kazuhiro began to question his faith. He wondered, "Is God still with me in Japan, or is he only residing in the West? If I must read my Bible and pray in English, as I have learned, is God a foreigner in my culture?"

Kazuhiro's experience is not uncommon for internationals that come to faith in Christ while studying in the United States. His experience, and others like him, reminds us that we are uniquely challenged to keep one eye focused on a returnee's

spiritual and relational needs while with us, and the other eye on their future when they return home. In fact, discipling an international student in our congregation will require the adoption of an entirely new set of spiritual and relational priorities.



Cross Cultural Discipleship: Missing the Mark With the Best Of Intentions

A student named Yusef from Iraq was experiencing language difficulties in class and feeling very homesick when he was introduced to a Christian family participating in the university host family program. Over a period of several months, Yusef developed a close relationship with this family. In fact, he chose to attend church regularly with his host family, and enjoyed the friendship and fellowship from many in the congregation.

When Yusef returned to Iraq as a new follower of Jesus Christ after completing an engineering degree, his host family and church friends were disappointed by his seemingly insensitive behavior in not writing. After fifteen months, Yusef sent a brief letter stating that things were not working out with his new job and a few other remarks. For returning international students, living in two worlds at the same time is no easy task. In this situation, Yusef thrived on the love and acceptance of his Christian friends as a student. But when he returned home, his new faith in Christ was subjected to an entirely different set of cultural and religious values in an Islamic culture.

Congregations ministering to international students must constantly remind themselves of the ultimate spiritual challenge for each returning international

believer-- to survive and spiritually grow in their HOME CULTURE. Those churches that are prepared to help an international "think home" from a spiritual and cultural point of view will express a tangible form of love that says, "I care about you today, but I also care about your tomorrow back home." What are some tangible steps to take in making sure you are adequately preparing returning international believers to thrive in their home cultures?



Practical Steps For Cross-Cultural Discipleship

1) Better Understand Differences In Learning Styles

Human development is marked by a journey from parental dependence to personal independence. Spiritual development is just the opposite. To be a follower of Jesus Christ requires every believer to move from our state of independent, self-centeredness to an ever-increasing dependence on Christ. Since many international students who come to Christ make that commitment during the latter stages of their stay here, our priorities need to be clear as to what experiences and knowledge will best contribute to their spiritual growth once they return home.

Unlike American culture, which perceives spiritual growth occurring in a more individualistic environment, many international believers see their spiritual growth occurring within the context of a group or family setting. This preference is due in part to the dominant role of peers and family in personal decision-making. Consequently, priority should be given to

providing international believers studying in the U.S. with relationships that reflect some form of family orientation. These relationships may more closely pattern extended family households back home by being:

- * Multi-generational -- all age groups should be involved
- * Informal rather than structured
- * Incarnational, by modeling Christian behavior in real life situations rather than just discussing in classroom situations.

Nyen from Vietnam was a new Christian, eager to learn about God. However, Nyen's Bible study leader from a campus para-church ministry concluded that he really wasn't serious about spiritual growth. Nyen consistently failed to complete his weekly Bible study assignment, which was arranged in a short answer, fill in the blank format. When Nyen was asked why he failed to complete his assignments, he replied in frustration, "I am a student, not a teacher. It is not my place to give the answer."

Nyen represents a legacy of misunderstanding and misperception in cross-cultural discipleship. Discipleship is not primarily the transmission of information about God. Rather, it is a process of encountering and following our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and learning from other believers who have followed Him longer than we have:

- * *We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (Heb. 12:6)*
- * *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Heb. 13:7)*
- * *Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your*

father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. (I Cor. 4:15,16)

2) Provide a Tangible Role Model

Many Christians in the U.S. who were walking with the Lord in the 70's remember the "shepherding movement," where accountability between a believer and a spiritual leader was foundational to the discipling process. Many can also recall stories of "shepherding" becoming at times excessively authoritarian and emotionally damaging to participants. This experience, along with a continuing cultural trend toward individualism and self-rights, has caused many evangelicals to shy away from expressions of relational accountability in the church. Discipleship today is often viewed as an educational curriculum or program format. This is unfortunate, because discipleship can only be appropriately educational if it is first relational:

** Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (Jn. 15:5-8)*

** Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (I Cor. 11:1)*

International students currently studying in the U.S. bring with them a history of learning that is radically different than our educational system. The student's role is to listen and observe everything about their

teacher. After spending a year in the Philippines and observing my children attend Filipino schools, I was reminded that our free-form style of education emphasizing individual problem solving, expressing personal opinions, and class discussion has little in common with the educational process in much of the world. Such practices as rote memorization of facts, unquestioning acceptance of the teacher's instruction, and an extremely competitive learning environment are more the norm. It is no wonder that our "fill-in-the-blank" approach to discipleship would be a daunting learning experience for Nyen and others like him?

3) Encourage the Reading of Scripture, Prayer, and Worship In the International's First Language

Internationals face the unique task of learning to walk with Christ first in their host culture, then in their home culture. How can we help them succeed? First, if we are using English as the exclusive medium of communication for Bible study, worship, and prayer, you can count on your international friend having a tough time back home. Remember our story about Kazuhiro? The language he learned to communicate with God (English) was not the same language he used back in Tokyo. How much better it would have been for him to use a Japanese translation of the Bible, to read and pray in Japanese, or even translate some of the Christian songs he learned. Our primary task is to narrow the perceived distance between Jesus in our country and Jesus in Japan or wherever our international friend resides in this world. This process must begin while they are still with us.

Some churches with larger numbers of internationals, like Park Street Church or Tremont Temple Baptist Church in Boston, have organized ethnic fellowship groups by

country or language. Others have encouraged internationals to link up with existing ethnic churches in the community. These are good short-term strategies, but may become counter-productive in the long-term. Every fellowship or church should recognize that God has something much bigger in mind than to group people by race or language. While grouping ourselves in this way is extremely beneficial for some things, it is not good for all things. We need the racial and ethnic mix more than we may presently realize, and this holds true even if you are a minority in a given culture.

Why then should we consider the necessity for developing multi-cultural congregations instead of homogeneous ones?

4) Envision What It May Be Like To Become A Cultural or Religious Minority As A Christian

International students who commit their lives to Christ while studying here may face an uncertain future when they return home. How will their family react when they discover that their child has adopted a "foreign religion?" How will fellow colleagues or workers respond? What is the position of their home government regarding religious conversion? What are the possibilities of facing physical harassment, prison, or death?

These issues need to be sensitively addressed with international believers as we help them prepare for returning home. Here we can recommend a helpful publication entitled *The Challenge--Victory: Lessons From the Suffering Church* (Order from International Students, Inc (800) 474-4147, ex. 111, or www.isionline.org). This series is particularly applicable for internationals from "restricted" countries in helping them plan for spiritual survival in a potentially hostile environment.

5) Exercise Caution In Correction or Confrontation

A student from Indonesia was in the process of completing several papers at the end of the semester and missed two consecutive weeks of his campus Bible study. When he failed to show up the second time, the American leader called the student and jokingly said, "What's more important -- classes or Bible study?" He was even laughing when he said it. But the Indonesian student never returned to the Bible study, and refused to talk with the American again.

Cultural differences don't seem like much of an issue with international students who know our language and culture until something like this occurs. Experience has shown that international students are generally more vulnerable to negative comments regarding their person or performance. This is due to the fact that in many cultures, public criticism is a form of public censure where the individual "loses face" and is shamed before his or her peers. This is why several cultures resort to using a third-party or "go-between" to mediate situations involving interpersonal conflict. Americans are encouraged to exercise restraint when discussing personal issues or behavior in a cross-cultural group situation. Your comments may very well be taken more to heart than you intended, with obvious negative results. The same holds true in offering critical remarks or evaluating an international's performance. The emotional damage you inflict may be far more pronounced than you ever intended.

6) Learn To "Think Home"

Spiritual maturity is a life-long process, and there is much we can do to help prepare a returning international believer for continued spiritual growth in his or her home country. Thanks to the diligent and

insightful efforts of a Christian returnee, an excellent publication is currently available to help returning international students prepare for life back home while they are still with us. The workbook is entitled *Think Home* by Lisa Espenali-Chinn Church (Order from International Students, Inc (800) 474-4147, ex. 111, or www.isionline.org).

Think Home not only helps a returning international student to reflect on the life changes that have occurred since leaving home, but also additionally offers some concrete suggestions on how to prepare now for continued spiritual growth and successful cultural adjustment back home. This publication is most effective when used one to two months before the international returns home.

Our job in discipling international students does not end when they board the plane for home. We must utilize our available resources to help locate national believers who are willing to encourage them in their faith. Other foreign mission organizations may also be able to provide valuable contacts.

Contact with international students from our congregation should continue after they return home with letters of encouragement. We can pray regularly for their adjustment, or even visit them in their own country. At the same time, we must encourage a weaning process designed to help them become fully integrated into their home culture. Churches should exercise restraint in attaching financial or emotional strings to any returnee. There is overwhelming evidence that external ties (particularly financial) create tremendous adjustment problems for the returnee, and long-term complications for the church in their home country. An excellent treatment of this problem is Rolland Allen's classic work *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1962).

7) Utilize Corporate Disciplemaking Opportunities

If we were able to stand at a distance and observe how American culture has influenced Christian discipleship, we would most likely conclude that our approach is highly individualized. To us, individual choice and meeting individual needs constitute one of the foundational values of our society. Yet for many international students, identification with family and community is so pronounced that personal needs are secondary. Personal identity and self-worth is tied to the well being of the community and family. One way for American congregations to model this social structure is to provide opportunities for internationals to develop caring friendships with church families in learning the day-to-day realities of Christian living. This learning opportunity will more closely pattern conditions back home than the exclusive peer relationships on campus. Churches with small group or cell group structures are ideal for this.

8) Encourage Practical Leadership Opportunities

Not every returning international will become a spiritual leader back home, but some are indeed called and gifted for spiritual leadership. How unfortunate it would be if we did not provide practical opportunities for some form of leadership development. A pastor from Cameroon with an 800-member congregation came to Harvard University for graduate studies in counseling. He was also a professor at the leading theological seminary in his country. He and his family were actively involved in a local denominational church close to the university, and faithfully attended Sunday school and services every week. Yet in spite of his prior experience and commitment to the local church, he was never once asked to

preach or teach during the four years he was part of that congregation! How tragic when we stop learning from others, especially those from outside our culture who really are the only ones who can help us see our spiritual "blind spots."

If we are true disciple-makers, we must be willing to risk our pulpits, Bible studies, and programs to provide international believers with opportunities to discover and develop their spiritual gifts and talents. How are we to expect them to be spiritual leaders back home if we don't provide spiritual on-the-job training here?

9) Impart A Vision For Christ's Great Commission

A few years ago during an international student conference, a speaker spoke on Matthew 28:19,20 about Jesus' command to "go and make disciples of all nations." The Great Commission is a very familiar theme for American evangelicals, yet after the talk, a student from Iran came up to the speaker in tears saying, "This is the first time God has given me a clear picture of what he wants for my people."

Not every international believer will return as a missionary, pastor, or spiritual leader, and we should be careful of our expectations in this regard. At the same time, each international believer should be exposed to God's plan for the nations. In fact, there are instances where internationals have chosen to relocate for employment in countries that are closed to "westerners" because of their desire to share the Gospel in a cross-cultural context!

10) Equip for Spiritual Warfare

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (Eph.6:10-13)

The apostle Paul was emphatic about the Christian properly preparing for demonic confrontation. This is particularly true for people from cultures where the demonic spirit world is openly operational. It may also be the case that an international who comes to Christ in this country may not be fully aware of the "devil's schemes" in their home culture.

International believers need to know the crafty ways of our enemy, and explore the available resources God provides believers when under attack. One Japanese returnee was completely unprepared for addressing the issue of ancestor worship on her return. Another Filipino returnee was involved in exorcising an evil spirit from a village woman involved in divination. International believers need to know the spiritual battles they will face, and how to respond from a biblical point of view.

Special Considerations For Cross-Cultural Discipleship In the American Church

- (a) Make discipleship a lifestyle experience more than a classroom experience. Promote opportunities for younger believers to mix with mature believers in informal settings. Some encourage international believers to be roommates. Mature Christian families have invited an international to live with them. Parents whose children have left home and have a room available, or families who are not threatened by having someone live with them are also likely prospects. The key for cross-cultural discipleship is daily access and observation in everyday situations.
- (b) Group discussion may prove to be a frightening format for international believers at first. Be patient as they adjust to this new learning style.
- (c) Case studies involving "critical incidents" in the Christian's life have proven to be an effective tool for discipling from a "life situation" approach. It is often easier to talk about someone else than yourself in group situations. Also, internationals can make up their own case studies from their own cultural context.
- (d) Give priority to discipleship that is informal and relationship-based. Sunday School or Sunday worship services will not be enough, and much too impersonal to have any lasting effect.
- e) If you choose to expose the international to believers from his or her culture, make sure he or she is in agreement and willing to do so. This is particularly true for those students from countries that restrict or prohibit Christianity.

Guidelines For Using Cross-Cultural Discipleship Materials

- (a) Exercise caution in using a study series format that jumps to a new topic each week. Do not be afraid to linger on a topic until it is understood. One is seeking quality more than quantity. It is better to master smaller portions of biblical truth and use it with confidence than to know many facts but do nothing with it.
- (b) Self-taught, fill-in-the-blank studies require considerable mastery of the English language, Bible history, and passage location skills. More importantly, internationals frequently mention the anxiety they feel in attempting to come up with the "right" answer. Use fill-in-the-blank studies sparingly.
- (c) Consider reading and discussing a Christian biography-- Jim Elliot, Corrie Ten Boom, etc. Stories are powerful tools for discipleship.
- (d) Bible memorization is more suited to many international's learning styles, and should be encouraged (especially in their mother tongue.) Encourage using the Bible as the international's primary written discipleship resource.
- e) The multitude of Christian books and study materials currently available may provide needed discipleship resources for international believers. Yet a dependency on these materials often proves to be counterproductive for the returnee who cannot locate or afford such materials back home. Also, American study materials may be culturally inappropriate. Even though we follow the same Lord, spiritual priorities and lifestyle issues for Christians do vary from culture to culture. One Indian believer once commented, "Why are you American Christians so obsessed with dating and marriage? In my village, most Christian marriages are still arranged, and we have far fewer divorces than you do."
Our best bet is to expose an international to the Scriptures, helping each one to grasp the historical and cultural context of God's revelation in history. It will then become the task of the returnee to contextualize biblical truth back home.