

**Missions Opportunity: International Teachers’ Welcome Baskets**

CMBA churches are invited to participate in a special ministry to international teachers through the South Carolina Baptist Convention and its commitment to serve local schools and communities through Heart4Schools ministries. Each Fall, teachers relocate from other countries to teach students in the Richland One and Two School Districts, which are located within the CMBA footprint. According to Associational Missions Strategist Jamie Rogers, the welcome baskets meet real needs while intentionally sharing the love of Jesus with these new neighbors.

“We get to serve those that God is bringing to our communities, many of whom do not know Him. We also get to serve local schools that are right here in our neighborhoods. What an occasion for us to show the value we can offer to these schools that are also serving the families and children in our area,” Rogers says, adding that it may be through first meeting needs like this that churches have opportunities to share the hope of the gospel.

According to Angela McNeal, Community Ministry Strategist and Heart4Schools Coordinator with the state convention, the two Richland County school districts employed 250 international teachers last year and they anticipate having 100 additional teachers this coming fall. Teachers arrive in South Carolina with two suitcases, very limited funds, and are faced with the challenge of finding housing and transportation. The basic household items contained in the welcome baskets meet immediate needs.

Each welcome basket contains the same items, including kitchen plates, utensils, a can opener, paper towels, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, towels, and washcloths. One teacher called the baskets “an excellent starter kit, enough to help us transition as we begin our teaching journey here.” Another expressed thanks for the unexpected gift saying, “Some teachers come to the United States with their children and have left many things behind, so everything in the basket is useful.”

McNeal says many CMBA churches have supported this ministry, including Shandon, North Trenholm, First Baptist Columbia, and Spring Valley, which serves as this year’s collection site. Ryan Dupree, Internationals Pastor at First Baptist Columbia, helps to connect teachers with ethnic church plants in the area once they’re settled. Several CMBA churches host Fall events just for these teachers, and one joined Spring Valley as a result.

Member Andie Lester has been active in ministries to international teachers since Spring Valley began partnering with Heart4Schools’ initiative three years ago. In addition to coordinating the welcome basket ministry, Andie helps connect teachers with resources to help furnish their homes, perform minor home repairs and installations, and with moving assistance. Spring Valley also provides fun fellowship opportunities like a traditional Southern barbecue meal, where the teachers are invited to share about their cultures while experiencing a new one here. Last year her Sunday School class alone provided 15 of the total 65 welcome baskets that were donated.

According to Andie, the welcome baskets are a great way for churches to minister to internationals living in the Midlands and that could lead to an exciting new passion to build intentional relationships. “Our goal is to ensure that teachers feel supported, even before they step into the classroom, and they are so appreciative,” she says. “We also want them to feel a sense of community here and to feel comfortable asking for help if they need it.”

The 2023 welcome basket content list is available [here](https://www.scbaptist.org/resource/international-teacher-welcome-basket-list-for-columbia-metro-churches/). The collection day is Monday, July 17, and completed baskets may be dropped off between 9 a.m. and noon. The church is located at 91 Polo Road in Columbia.

In addition to church involvement in this year’s missions drive, Rogers invites those within the CMBA Family of Churches who have a deeper interest to prayerfully consider coordinating this annual collection for the association going forward. Ideally, Rogers says this would be “a family or individual that loves internationals, has a passion for educators, and who has the time to be a volunteer point person for us in this endeavor.” Contact Rogers at [Jamie@ColumbiaMetro.org](mailto:Jamie@ColumbiaMetro.org) for more information.

For her part, Andie says when given an opportunity like this to share the love of Christ, churches should respond because “we can reach the nations right here in our backyard. These teachers then take and share the love of Christ with their families and in their home country.”