

## EQUALITY - Adapted from: The Values Americans Live By, By Robert E. Kohls

(INSTRUCTIONS for class: take turns, each person reading one paragraph or question. Then each one select one of the numbered questions paragraphs to answer, and for the group to discuss.)

Equality is, for Americans, one of their most cherished values. This concept is so important for Americans that it is part of the Declaration of Independence; one of our country's founding documents. It says that all people have been "created equal." Most Americans believe that God gives all humans equal value and rights, without regard to intelligence, physical condition or economic status. In secular (non-religious) terms, this is translated into the belief that all people have an equal opportunity to succeed in life. Americans differ in opinion about how to make this ideal into a reality, yet almost all agree that equality is an important goal.

Many highly-placed foreign visitors to the United States are insulted by the way they are treated by service personnel (such as waiters in restaurants, clerks in stores, taxi drivers, etc.). Americans believe that it is wrong to treat people of high position in a special manner, and often treat lower class people as if they were very important. Newcomers to the United States should realize that no insult is intended by this lack of special treatment to those who have a special position in society. A foreigner should be prepared to be considered "just like anybody else" while in the country.

This view of equality has made the U.S. school system unique. School systems in many countries track smarter and slower students into different areas of study very early in life. American schools believe that most children can learn if they are given the opportunity. They strongly resist labeling some students as smarter than others. Consequently, they gear their classes toward the average student, even if this means that some smarter children are bored. Even children with major mental and physical disabilities are "mainstreamed" into classrooms because of the belief that they should have an equal chance to socialize with other students. This philosophy continues into adulthood, where students who did not do well in high school are given a second chance to get an education through the community college system and adult education programs.

### QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

1. In your country, what special privileges are accorded (given to) persons of high professional, educational, political or social status?
2. What do you believe about which people should be treated equally, or not equally? In what ways should the different treatment be expressed?
3. Jesus taught this attitude and practice of service to his followers: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Can you tell about some ways that you could do this in your life?

4. The Bible also teaches: "Give everyone what you owe him: . . . if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Romans 13:7 NIV)

Do you think that some people deserve special honor and respect? For doing or being what? How should we show that special recognition to them?

5. How is the school system in your country different from that in the United States?