

Better English on Sixth

Diverse urban centers like Tacoma have a great need for ESL (English as a Second Language) services and Faith Presbyterian is meeting some of those needs on Monday nights with Better English on Sixth. We offer a unique free program with six adult levels, a children's level, and nursery. Our typical Monday night begins at 6:20 with prayer among the partners, and then greeting students, new and returning, for 15 or 20 minutes. At 6:50 we start in classrooms, followed by a snack break at 7:30, and then more class and individual assistance until 8:30.

In May of 2016 we concluded our first academic year with enthusiastic attendance averaging about 40 students and 25-30 church volunteers. Each of the summer months Better English hosted one BBQ picnic at Titlow Park to maintain contact with our new friends and encourage fellowship. In September Better English completed its second training session, this time done in-house and more specifically targeted to train volunteers for our program.

Our students hail from more than 40 countries and we have registered an estimated 200 students total. Our philosophy of ministry is based on serving their need for English, building friendships, and pursuing spiritual conversations as we gain trust and show love. Our particular strength is a very high volunteer to student ratio, often nearly 1:1, so the fun of learning is enhanced by friendship and personal attention to individual needs.

Additional ministry related to Better English on Sixth is our ESL Sunday School, meeting each week in room 304 during the Sunday school hour. Also the Ladies Knitting on Thursday welcomes international ladies for further conversation practice, hosting "Tea and Talk." Furthermore we have been able to help many individuals work on a resume, hunt for jobs, and practice interview skills.

There are several collateral benefits from Better English on Sixth. One is the laboring fellowship of the church partners, who, in working shoulder to shoulder, grow closer to each other and appreciate God's gifts to them as found in their brothers and sisters. Another collateral benefit is church members discovering gifts and talents in themselves in the exercise of them. A third benefit is the broadening of our view of the universal Church in Tacoma.

The ministry faces several challenges and appreciates the ongoing prayer support by the congregation. Retaining students who, as a group, are naturally somewhat transient is difficult. We especially are eager to have as good a retention rate as possible since the ministry intends to leverage relationships. To best build these relationships, we need a 1:1 partner to student ratio, for which we need a large and consistent participation of church partners. Finally, our Sunday School is an excellent ancillary ministry, but there are apparently particular hurdles to translating Monday night attendance into participation on Sunday mornings.

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