

## **Better English on Sixth**

Increasingly diverse urban centers such as Tacoma have an enormous and growing 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 five adult levels, a children's level, youth homework help, 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 2017 we concluded our second academic year with enthusiastic attendance averaging about 30 students and 20-25 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 two more training sessions in DeSoto hall, and enjoyed the participation of about 25 new recruits, some of whom came from our sister congregation, Resurrection Presbyterian, Puyallup. Added partners increased capacity and we welcomed an average of about 45 students, maintaining our 1:1 ratio with partners.

Our students hail from more than 40 countries and we have registered an estimated 300 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. Many friendships continue outside of Monday nights.

One additional ministry related to Better English on Sixth is our ESL Sunday School which has grown this year and has modified to a more individual approach as well. We have also been able to help many individuals work on a resume, hunt for jobs, and practice interview skills; the deacons have been actively helping some of our constituents. New this year, Andrew Milton has begun a writing club for our international friends on Wednesday nights, which has especially been a blessing to the upper levels.

There are several collateral benefits from Better English on Sixth. One is the intergenerational and joyful 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 and overcoming stereotypes while learning more about the world.

The ministry faces several challenges and appreciates the ongoing prayer support by the congregation. Retaining students who, as a group, are naturally quite transient and pressed, is difficult. We are especially 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, and are currently blessed with, a large and consistent participation of church partners.

Jonathan Nichols