

The History of the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program

at the **Lutheran Church of Our Savior**

Program Summary

In 2003 our congregation became aware of the need for an ESL program to serve the residents of Eastern Sussex County. We spent that year securing funding, studying other successful ESL programs, and building excitement for this ministry within our congregation. After starting with two teachers, a handful of church volunteers and 45 students, the program now averages 125 to 175 students a year. While the students represent over 20 countries, most speak Spanish as a first language. These students are assisted by over 40 volunteer teachers who come from all backgrounds. Most volunteers are retired professionals from the fields of education, insurance, healthcare, and engineering, among others. Many do not have a teaching background, and very few speak Spanish but our VENTURES curriculum (published by University of Cambridge Press) provides ample support for all. Five learning levels are structured from basic to advanced. At the higher levels, writing and speech are emphasized while the lower levels concentrate on vocabulary and grammar. Additional support is provided by teachers who provide extra tutoring and some who act as conversation partners.

Students are also provided with an annual health fair as well as periodic seminars on immigration, taxes, and their legal rights. Community groups, such as Rehoboth's Community Resource Center, are invited to make presentations to students. Individual students have been helped with supplemental food, housing, solving utility issues, obtaining a driver license, immigration information, job search skills, and referrals for medical problems. From 2003 to 2016, in addition to traditional ESL classes, we offered pre-GED classes, citizenship classes, and basic computer classes.

Child care is offered at no cost so that parents may attend classes without worrying about their kids. Our child care service provides a learning environment for the child, and the Harry K Foundation provides for nutritional snacks for the children.

The program is funded by grants from many local and regional businesses as well as foundations, including: the Arshat Cannon Fund, Harry K. Foundation, Gannett Foundation, SoDel Cares, WAVES Car Wash, the Village Improvement Association, and the Georgetown-Millsboro Rotary Club.

Program Historical Highlights

- January 2004, the first ESL class was held with 45 students.
- May 2004, we celebrated our first graduates!
- September 2004, classes started with 50 students, 2 teachers and 20 mentors.
- December 2006, class size swelled to 90 students representing 10 countries.

- March 2009, we received an Arsht-Cannon Fund grant via the Delaware Community Foundation enabling the expansion of ESL classes and the offering of child care services to students who might not otherwise be able to attend.
- September 2009, our enrollment grew to 150 students attending one of two sessions (morning or evening) offered each week.
- In 2010, the Arsht-Cannon Fund provided the Governor's Consortium on Hispanic Affairs grants and has provided generous support for our program ever since.
- March 2010, ten advanced ESL students were awarded scholarships to Delaware Technical Institute. In addition, all the recipients were awarded book scholarships.
- Since 2012-13, the Childcare program has received funds for healthy snacks/meals through the Harry K. Foundation.
- In 2013, we started a computer skills program with a grant from the Rehoboth Beach Rotary Club.
- In 2016, we received grants from the Gannett Foundation. We also received a small grant from the Youth Philanthropy Program as part of the Delaware Community Foundation.
- In 2017, the Harry K Foundation continued its support of our Childcare Program. The Longwood Foundation and the Arsht-Cannon Fund provided generous two-year grants. The Dollar General Literacy Foundation, the Big Fish Charitable Foundation, the SoDel Cares Fund, Mountaire Farms, and the Sussex County Council also supported our program.
- In 2018, we received gifts from the Gallo Gives Foundation, the Harry K Foundation, and the Georgetown-Millsboro Rotary Club. In addition, we initiated a fundraising campaign by selling car wash tickets to the new WAVES Car Wash in Lewes. We also held our first fundraising "dine and donate" events at Mariachi Restaurant in Rehoboth Beach and Grandpa(MAC) in Lewes.

Program Administration

The program is administered by a director and 6-8 board members. Prospective students are tested and interviewed during registration periods prior to each semester to determine their placement level. The students are placed in one of five levels. They select the morning and/or evening sessions. Each session meets twice a week for 10 weeks. An academic year consists of two 10 week semesters which run from September through November and January through March. Students pay \$20 to help defray the cost of the textbooks and workbooks.

We are grateful to all of our volunteer teachers, mentors and helpers who make it possible for us to continue this important program. We are also especially grateful for the continuous support of the Arsht-Cannon Fund and the Harry K Foundation.

If you are interested in volunteering (office work, kitchen help, childcare, ESL classes, donation of food, etc), please contact the ESL Program Director at 302-515-8345, or by email at esl@lcosrehoboth.com.