

Crescent Project Goal: To guide and empower churches to reach out in love to students, refugees, immigrants, and internationals living in their communities, to show Christian love, to assist them in transitioning to American society, and to create opportunities to share the gospel through teaching English language.

Starting Guide to English as a Second Language (ESL) Ministry

Introduction

God, in His sovereign will, has been bringing people from all over the world to the U.S. as immigrants, international students, business personnel, diplomats and refugees. As of 2021, more than 520 different people groups are currently represented in the U.S. God's desire is to see each foreigner have the opportunity to reach out to Him and find Him (Acts 17:26-27).

We want to encourage churches or groups of believers to start English as a Second Language (ESL) ministry to help make the Acts 17 proclamation a reality in their community. Christian-based ESL is more than a means to meet the felt need of the foreign community; it is also meeting the genuine need for Christ in their lives. ESL ministry is "literacy missions." Each ESL teacher is a "cross-cultural missionary" to the unsaved souls from other nations, even if the setting of the interaction is a classroom in the local church. This Guide will lead you through some important steps to beginning a Christian-based ESL ministry.

First Steps

- **Pray** - Step number one is to pray to the Lord of the harvest. Pray for more laborers to be sent to the harvest field He has created in your community (Matthew 9:36-38), and for the hearts of the ESL students to be open to the gospel.
- **Research** – Find out who your neighbors are, especially those from other nations. Look for ethnic shops and restaurants, as well as places of worship. Your local public school administrator can let you know how many students are enrolled as English Language Learner (ELL). Also, find out who else is engaged in ESL ministry in your community. Visit existing programs, observe some classes, and talk with the students, teachers and directors.
- **Recruit Leadership Support** – Enlist support from your church leadership (e.g., senior pastor, missions pastor, etc.); without their support, it will be very difficult to successfully launch ESL ministry at your church.

Planning for an ESL Program

Define Your Mission

ESL students of all ages typically come with various needs: the need for ESL instruction to survive in their new environment or to improve their ability to find or advance in their work, as well for community support and friendships. Being able to meet these needs opens the door for you to have spiritual conversations with the students, and eventually share the gospel with them. We encourage every Christian-based ESL ministry to be intentional. Your students can access ESL program through the local public library or community college; the Lord of the harvest has brought them into your program so that they may hear the gospel.

Find a Director

The Director should be someone who loves Jesus and is passionate about sharing the gospel with the lost. He/she will be responsible for determining and ordering the curriculum; recruiting, training, supervising and supporting teachers; recruiting and registering students; keeping student attendance; overseeing teaching resource needs; planning events; arranging snacks and refreshments; making announcements; and reporting to the congregation and church leadership.

Location

Determine where you plan to hold classes. If the majority of potential ESL students live far from your church, consider renting space closer to them. Many ESL students will have limited access to private or public transportation. Sometimes public schools will offer their classrooms for free (or reduced cost) in the evenings if a significant portion of their student body is ELL. Regardless of where the classes will be held, keep in mind that you will need storage space for textbooks, teaching resources and other supplies.

Recruit a Team of Teachers/Facilitators and Language Partners

Once you have identified the Director, begin recruiting teachers and/or facilitators. We recommend the following minimum team of seven people to start ESL ministry:

- Director (1)
- ESL teacher for three levels: beginner, intermediate, advanced (3)
- Assistant teacher for each level (3)

If your ministry allows, you can add the following to your team:

- Additional teachers and assistant teachers – to accommodate more students or sub- groups for each level (e.g., low beginner, high beginner). We recommend 10 as the maximum class size.
- Hospitality (snacks & refreshments) coordinator (1 to 2)
- Childcare facilitator (2 or more, working in pairs)
- English language partners (to meet with individual students outside of class time)

Suggestions for recruitment of volunteers:

- Pray for the Lord to send the right people.
- Prepare job descriptions: include specific duties, qualifications, and other expectations.
- Prepare volunteer application. The application should include faith testimony, commitment to your mission, teaching experience, level preference and availability.
- Make announcements during service, on the church website, in the church bulletin and/or newsletter.
- If your local church congregation is small, network with other local churches who share similar vision

Decide Program Details

- Set a start and end date. Typical semester of ESL classes coincide with public school calendar, and last 10 to 12 weeks. If you are just launching ESL ministry, we recommend a “pilot” (trial) semester of 6 to 8 weeks. Subsequently, the Director and the church leadership can decide if the ministry will continue.
- Decide whether you will provide daytime or evening classes, weekday or weekend. Will you meet once or twice a week?
- We recommend offering a minimum of three English language levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced.
- We recommend one and a half to two-hour classroom sessions, including a 15-minute refreshment break.
- We recommend starting each class with a verse from the Bible (with print out of the verse in each student’s language) and prayer.
- Teaching simple worship songs or hymns is a great way to introduce the gospel to the ESL students. Adding body motions can reinforce active learning (TPR – total physical response). We recommend worship songs like “God is So Good”, “God Will Make a Way”, and “Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart”.

- Some ESL programs include English reading exercise based on Biblical virtue, optional Bible study after class, or ESL Sunday School class.
- Decide whether childcare will be provided.
- Offering U.S. Citizenship Test Preparation Class is also a great blessing to your immigrant/refugee community.
- There are differing opinions about charging a fee for the class. Charging a modest fee to cover the cost of the curriculum encourages the students to be more committed to the program. Of course, scholarship can be awarded to any ESL student who genuinely cannot pay for the class.

Honoring the Lord and Church Policies

Some students, especially Muslims, will ask if they can pray in the classroom or another room in the church. Most churches have policies that prohibit worship or prayer by people of other faith (e.g., Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.) since the god that they worship is not the God of the Bible. Be polite but firm in asking them not to pray on church campus but to postpone their prayer. It is important to honor Christ above men. Remember that the purpose of ESL ministry is to further His kingdom and for His glory. If we do not allow human sacrifice in the church by a pagan priest (violation of 6th commandment), why should we allow prayer to Allah of the Quran (violation of 1st and 2nd commandments) in the church by Muslims? Take the opportunity to share the gospel by highlighting the difference between Christian faith and other faiths or religions.

Select and Order Curriculum

Most students will expect a textbook if they are in a more formal program. Consider whether you want to use Bible-based curriculum, secular language curriculum, or a combination of both. A significant factor in choosing the curriculum is the duration of each semester and the frequency of class per week. For instance, if your ESL classes only meet once or twice a week, we highly recommend curriculum produced by Intercambio (<https://intercambio.org/>). Pearson curriculum (*Future* or *Side-by-Side*) are designed for classes that meet five times a week. Both Intercambio and Pearson are secular publishers. Bible-based ESL curriculum is available from Language Olympics ([https:// www.languageolympics.org/](https://www.languageolympics.org/)) and International Learning Center in Jacksonville, FL (<https://ilcjax.org/>).

Additional teaching resources like picture dictionaries are great tools for beginner level students, helping them to develop basic English vocabulary. Intermediate students are often interested in activities that advance their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Many advanced students not

only want to address reading, writing, and listening, but also want to perfect their oral English as this is the most important skill required in their workplace. You can also incorporate flash cards of various types, games, maps, posters, and powerpoint slides to further supplement your teaching.

Provide Orientation and Training for Teachers

Quality ESL teacher training is provided by Presbyterian Church of America's (PCA) Mission to North America. Their 12-hour training is available in-person and online. Please consult their website for more details - <https://pcamna.org/ministry/esl-ministries/>.

ESL teacher training is also provided by secular organizations like Intercambio (curriculum developer - <https://intercambio.org/>), but their online training lacks the spiritual guidance and suggestions for sharing the gospel.

We also recommend training on building effective cross-cultural relationships (e.g., *Foreign to Familiar* by Lanier), sharing the gospel with Muslims (Crescent Project's Bridges study) and understanding worldviews (*The 3D Gospel* by Georges).

Advertising

Several weeks before your start date, advertise the classes in your community in both English and other relevant languages (Spanish, Arabic, Farsi, etc.).

- Display a large banner or sign in front of or near your church. Potential ESL students or their friends will often take a photo of the banner and circulate it amongst their network of friends.
- Distribute flyers in the neighborhood where the potential ESL students reside.
- Ask local businesses and libraries to post notices about the classes.
- Contact local apartment managers where target people live to see if they will post or distribute notices.
- Advertise in local community papers.
- Contact your local public school's non-English speaking parent liaison to share the announcement with their network of families.
- Let local ethnic groups and churches know about your program so that they can refer prospective students.
- Post the information on your church website, or develop a site (e.g., Facebook) for your ESL program.

- Ask students to invite others. Word-of-mouth from one student to another is great advertising.

Getting Classes Started

Student Registration and Placement

Quite often registration and placement (to appropriate level) are completed on the first day of classes. Content and methodology of both registration and placement are covered under ESL teacher training.

Childcare

Many adult students will want to bring their children to class. If you have the ability, we encourage you to take advantage of this built-in opportunity to hold children's classes at the same time. Depending on the number and ages of the children, classes can include homework tutoring, singing, crafts, Bible stories, and supervised play. Most states require two approved supervisors for each childcare room. Nursery care is likely to be necessary as well.

Transportation

Many students will not have access to private or public transportation. If possible, find someone in your church or another ESL student from the same area to provide rides.

Opening (First Day)

Consider a tea-time for everyone to introduce themselves. Provide a comfortable and fun environment where students can staff can interact. Be sure to pay attention to the lower level students. Give students something to take home (e.g, church souvenir mug).

Semester Schedule

Provide each student with an information sheet containing the semester calendar, class schedule, basic procedures (including inclement weather closings), expectations and contact numbers and other relevant information.

Food (Refreshments)

Eating together is a vital component of building relationships in most of the cultures from which your students have come. Gathering around food provides an opportunity for students and teachers to get to know one

another informally. We recommend incorporating games, singing, sharing personal testimonies, or celebrating birthdays during the refreshment time. The church can provide refreshments for each class, but we also recommend that you invite the students to contribute and share their cultural foods as well.

Brief, Debrief and Pray

Bring teachers together for briefing, announcements and a time of prayer before the classes start. At the conclusion of classes, gather the teachers again for debriefing and prayer. Often, there will be encouraging stories to report. There are likely to be cultural (or other) issues that have come up and need to be discussed. This time of debriefing allows teachers to support one another, hear important updates, and for the Director (or another instructor) to provide further ministry training. Conclude the debriefing with prayer for teachers, students and the ministry.

Social Service Help

Some of your students will need social service help. They may need to visit a health care professional. They may need help with enrolling their children in the local school, or even helping their children with homework. They may need help with immigration and legal matters. We recommend that you become familiar with resources that can provide help.

If the students have come as refugees, they will have access to some services, but they may still need help finding jobs, finding housing, health care, passing the U.S. citizenship test, or completing the income tax forms. Any level of help that you provide will increase their appreciation of their relationship with you. We recommend that you pray with your student for each requested need prior to taking the first step towards meeting that need.

Celebrate Special Occasions

Plan celebrations for holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, Valentine's Day, Easter, etc. Provide lessons to explain the significance of each holiday. Besides celebrating birthdays each month, we also recommend holding baby showers for those students who are expecting a child. Offer to pray a blessing for the mother and the child. Celebrate the conclusion of each semester with a banquet. Encourage the students to bring an ethnic dish to share. Hand out certificate of completion to each student. Invite one of the church pastors to bless the food as well as the students who have completed another semester of classes.

Budget

It is possible to start an ESL program with few resources, but if you plan to maintain ministry long-term, you will need a budget to meet the expenses that such a ministry will incur. This is particularly true if you decide not to charge or only ask for a "materials fee". Expenses may include curriculum, supplies, refreshments, childcare providers and party expenses.

Develop Church Support for the Ministry

- Get church leaders on board and praying for the ministry.
- Meet with the pastor or other staff regularly to share updates and prayer requests.
- Display promotional materials.
- Have an open house for church members to come and meet students.
- Invite ESL student families to Sunday services.
- Recognize volunteers publicly at a special church service.

Looking Forward

Relationships are important to your students, and many are struggling with feelings of sadness due to separation from family and friends in their native country and loneliness in their new environment. They are searching for a community where they can deepen their sense of belonging. Let them know that there is a group of Christians who are eager to welcome the students into their community. This is expressed not only through the ESL program, but also through other activities and programs at the church, including Sunday services. Invite them to a Sunday service, and if students of other faiths decide to come, it is important that they feel welcomed by Christians. Be sure to take time after the service to help the students understand what they may have heard or experienced. As ESL students come to faith in Christ, some churches have seen the joy of helping new worship services start in other language(s). Christian-based ESL ministry can be a powerful means of a local church fulfilling the Great Commission right in their own neighborhood!

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

- Do I need a degree in English to teach ESL? (What qualifications are needed to teach ESL?)
 - You do not need a degree to teach ESL. Anyone who loves Jesus (and wants to share the love of Jesus with others) and speaks English fluently can teach ESL.

- How many hours a week is required?
 - Expect to commit about 6 hours a week for ESL class that meets once a week.
- I'm interested. What do I do next?
 - Contact one of our Crescent Project staffs to help you take the first few steps.
- Do I need to speak a foreign language to teach ESL?
 - No, you only need to speak English. Students will learn English by immersion.
- What is the difference between ESL and ESOL?
 - ESL is English as Second Language. ESOL is English for Speakers of Other Languages. Since many people from other countries speak more than one language, ESOL is the more accurate description.