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HISPANIC COMPASSION MINISTRIES

# ESL Ministry in Greater Washington, D.C.

IGLESIA BETHESDA  
METODISTA

By Edward R. Davis



faith  
IN  
COMMUNITIES  
*A Hudson Institute Initiative*

# *ESL Ministry in Greater Washington, DC*

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IGLESIA BETHESDA HISPANA

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*by Edward R. Davis*

**Church Name:**

Iglesia Metodista Hispana de Bethesda

**Location:**

Bethesda, Maryland

**Size:** 66

**Compassion Ministry:**

Ayuda Especial

**Year Started:** 1986

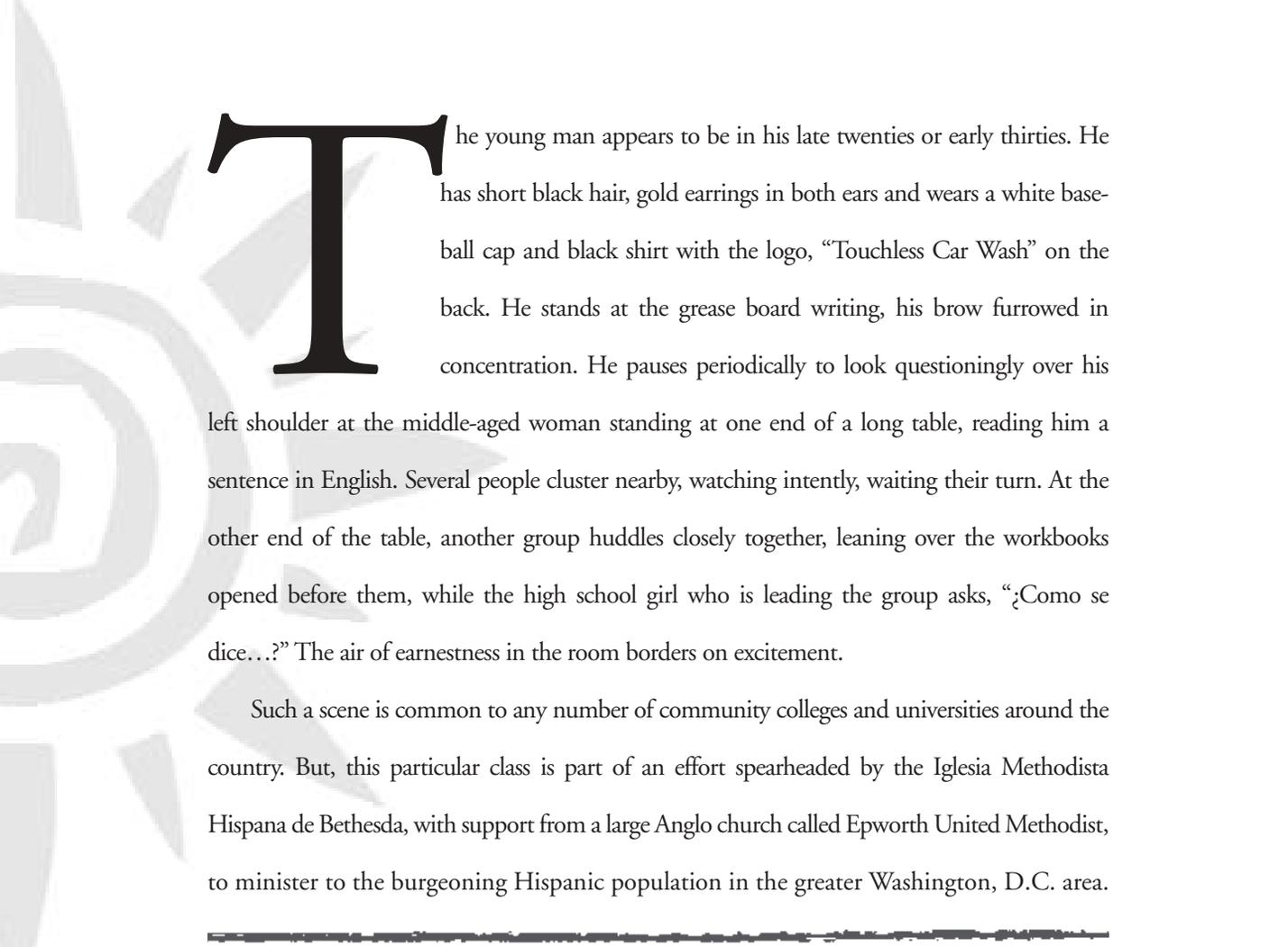
**Estimated Yearly Budget:** \$10,000

**Paid Staff:** 4

**Volunteer Staff:** 9

## **Brief Description**

Ayuda Especial serves the families and children of the greater Washington, D.C. area through its English classes for adults and its tutoring program for children from pre-school through the 12th grade. The ministry is jointly supported by the Hispanic-speaking Iglesia Metodista Hispana de Bethesda and the English-speaking Epworth United Methodist Church.



**T**he young man appears to be in his late twenties or early thirties. He has short black hair, gold earrings in both ears and wears a white baseball cap and black shirt with the logo, “Touchless Car Wash” on the back. He stands at the grease board writing, his brow furrowed in concentration. He pauses periodically to look questioningly over his left shoulder at the middle-aged woman standing at one end of a long table, reading him a sentence in English. Several people cluster nearby, watching intently, waiting their turn. At the other end of the table, another group huddles closely together, leaning over the workbooks opened before them, while the high school girl who is leading the group asks, “¿Como se dice...?” The air of earnestness in the room borders on excitement.

Such a scene is common to any number of community colleges and universities around the country. But, this particular class is part of an effort spearheaded by the Iglesia Metodista Hispana de Bethesda, with support from a large Anglo church called Epworth United Methodist, to minister to the burgeoning Hispanic population in the greater Washington, D.C. area.

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## GENESIS

Ana Brito, one of the first members of Bethesda Hispanic, has been the driving force behind the program since its founding in 1986. A short woman in her seventies, with curly brown hair, she is quick with a laugh or a smile. Exuding a sense of energy and purpose that is infectious, she can rightly be described as a ball of energy. She possesses a deep compassion for the students enrolled in the program and an acute awareness of the unique hurdles they must clear as immigrants to the United States.

An immigrant herself, Ana grew up in Cuba. She completed her secondary education through a Presbyterian church school and then taught at a Methodist college for several years, both before and after the Cuban revolution. In 1968, she and her husband fled Cuba for the United States, eventually settling in Maryland, close to Washington D.C.

Because of her commitment to education, Ana began to volunteer in the school system as a translator. She worked for many years as a bookkeeper for the court system. Following retirement from that position, she accepted a job in the school system as a paid translator and assistant teacher.

One of the challenges Ana and the other teachers experienced was getting in touch with the parents of Hispanic students. Many of the parents would not return phone calls; few showed up for parent-teacher conferences. Ana came to realize that this was because many of the parents were embarrassed by their limited ability to speak English.

This recognition, and her own experience as an immigrant, convinced Ana that while adapting to American culture was a challenge, it was not the greatest hurdle immigrants faced. As she puts it, “We ate hamburgers in Cuba as well.” The far greater barrier was that of the language itself. She became convinced that one of the most practical ways to help Hispanics

to integrate and succeed in the U.S. was to teach them English. And because of her experience in Cuba, first as a student and then as a teacher in church-run schools, Ana was committed to pursuing education within the context of the church. She was already voluntarily teaching about twenty fellow church members English in Saturday classes. Now she saw that the church could reach outside its walls, inviting Hispanics in the community to attend a program that would address their pressing need to learn English.

Ana took several steps to publicize the new initiative. She spoke with area principals and received the names of students who didn't speak English. She then contacted their families directly. Pamphlets describing the program were produced and left in churches, libraries, and stores around town. The ministry also developed a relationship with a social service organization that began to refer people to the program. The ministry's profile was also heightened in the community simply through word-of-mouth. Students who had benefited from the program started telling their friends, and enrollment increased.



## MISSION

Called "Ayuda Especial," the program helps Hispanics to integrate into United States culture and improve their economic prospects, and encourages them to become involved with a local church. Developed and refined over 16 years, the program seeks to achieve those goals by offering free English classes for adults and tutoring for children from pre-school age through high school. Currently, eighty-seven adults and sixty-seven children are registered in the program—an impressive feat for a small congregation like Iglesia Metodista Hispana de Bethesda. The church has approximately 66 attenders, who refer to their congregation affectionately as "Bethesda Hispanic."



## PROGRAM

The ESL program provides English language classes year-round, free of charge. It has the capacity to serve one hundred adults and employs the aid of five teachers, four of them Hispanic and one Anglo. Several of the teachers receive a small stipend. Three levels of English instruction are offered. Level one addresses the needs of those with very little or no English speaking ability. It consists of three different classes of beginners at different stages of proficiency. Level two focuses on basic composition, and level three is offered to those who can read and write English at a functional level. The program offers all three levels of English classes from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday nights. On Wednesday nights from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m., only first level classes meet.

The teaching is geared towards the practical. Little emphasis is placed on flawless pronunciation or complex grammar. Rather, the instructors help students to prepare for interactions in the variety of settings they face regularly: riding public transport, shopping for groceries, going to the bank. As one teacher puts it, "Their children will learn flawless English; the parents need to learn [functional] English immediately." Accordingly, the teachers primarily use high school ESL textbooks. They focus on the basic language skills necessary to navigate life successfully everyday in the United States and they avoid advanced teaching methodologies and concepts.

The textbooks that have proved most helpful are: *Foundations*, by Steven J. Molinsky and Bill Bliss and *Challenger 1 and 2: Adult Reading Series*, by Coreia Murphy. Two other books some teachers have used are: *Ingles Hecho Facil*, by Patricia Duncan and *Teaching Adults: An ESL Resource Book*, developed by Laubach Literacy Action.

Some instructors use no textbooks. Instead, they design each class to be self-contained so that students who miss several classes will not find themselves too far behind to catch up, as they would if the class were following a textbook. These teachers organize class so that each

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one class consists of the students reading an article from a magazine, reviewing a photocopied page of grammar exercise, or taking dictation based on a current event and then discussing it. In this way, each class “stands alone,” and students who are not able to attend each week do not fall behind. Maintaining the students’ interest and confidence is important. There is no formal testing, and students’ progress is judged by observing their class participation.

Because many of the adults come straight from work to class and do not have time to eat, some kind of food is typically served after class. Snacks of cookies and hot tea are also often provided during class. Small amenities like these help to encourage a relaxed environment where students feel cared for and at ease .

The tutoring program enrolls sixty-seven students from pre-school through high school and employs the aid of fourteen volunteer tutors. The tutoring classes are offered concurrently with the ESL classes with the result that 95% of the children have at least one parent enrolled in an ESL class. Parents come and drop their children off downstairs then walk upstairs to their ESL class.

Volunteers working with the younger children focus primarily on their math and reading skills while those working with older children help them with whatever homework their teachers have assigned them for that day. Tutors rotate from student to student. This one-on-one attention has proven particularly effective and is necessitated by the fact that most of the children go to different schools and so have different homework assignments. The programs are held in tandem with the public schools so that when there is a school holiday or cancellation, both the ESL and the tutoring program are also cancelled.

Every Tuesday night after class from 6:00 to 6:30 p.m. there is a worship service held in the chapel for any students who wish to attend. The service is led by Yolanda Pupo. An ordained pastor and leader in the Methodist church on a regional level, Pupo is also, along with Ana Brito, one of the founding members of Bethesda Hispanic. Pupo served as the church’s first pastor. The evening service exists to meet the spiritual needs of the ESL participants. Ministry leaders have seen ESL participants come to know Christ and join the church. They also hope that the Tuesday worship service may one day serve as the nucleus for another Hispanic church that could serve the Gaithersburg area.

Class parties held at various times during the year are another important part of the Ayuda Especial ministry. Through them, the program seeks to introduce students to aspects of American culture, foster relationships between the church congregations and students, and meet spiritual needs the students might have. Three parties are held each year. At Thanksgiving, church volunteers provide the main course while ESL students are encouraged to bring additional dishes typical of their countries of origin. Care is taken to explain the cultural and religious importance of the Thanksgiving holiday. The church also sponsors an Epiphany party and a Christmas party for the ESL participants. As with the Thanksgiving party, the religious significance of each holiday is explained. In addition, at the Christmas party, gifts that have been donated by the members of Epworth United Methodist are distributed to the children in the tutoring program. Members of both congregations are encouraged to participate in these celebrations as a way to form relationships with and reach out to the students in the ESL program and their children.

Another way that the church seeks to minister to students in the tutoring program is through summer vacation bible school. Held one week every summer, it is considered a crucial part of the outreach to the children in the program. Therefore, students are encouraged throughout the school year to participate. There is no fee.



## KEY RESOURCES

What has it taken to develop a program like Ayuda Especial? Leaders identify several important elements:

<1> **Leadership.** The importance of effective leadership for the success of the program can best be summed up in the words of program supporter Pat de Spain, “If we didn’t have

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## T E S T I M O N Y

**B**eatrice had come to the United States in 1979 from Bolivia. Although her new life in America had given her a fresh start, it had not been without its struggles for her or her family. She recalls talking to a neighbor, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, one day about the issue foremost on Beatrice's mind: her daughter, Carmen.

A fifth grader then, Carmen was painfully shy and had difficulty even looking her teachers in the face. She was not doing well in school and had just been diagnosed as having a learning disability.

The neighbor recommended that Beatrice investigate a tutoring program called Ayuda Especial that she thought might help Carmen. After listening to her friend describe the program, Beatrice decided she would look into it. It was a decision that would not only profoundly affect Carmen's life, but Beatrice's as well.

Carmen began attending Ayuda Especial's tutoring program, meeting several times a week with volunteers who helped her with her English and math skills. She continued in the program for the next six years, growing in profound ways. Carolyn Ridgeway, one of Carmen's tutors, comments on the change in Carmen over this time. "When Carmen first came to the program she had no confidence. When called on to practice a speech she had to give for school, she would stand wringing her hands. I've seen confidence build in her over the years. [Now] she's a good student, a wonderful student." Carmen successfully graduated high school and today is in her third year of college at Towson College. Beatrice is quick to praise Carolyn's commitment to her daughter. As she puts it, "Carolyn was like a godmother to my daughter."

Ayuda Especial has not only deeply impacted Carmen's life, but her mother's as well. Beatrice clearly remembers the night Ana Brito approached her and asked, "Beatrice, you bring your child and you don't want to go home and come back. Why don't you join one of the English classes?" Like many Hispanics, Beatrice was convinced that



**Ano Brito and long-time teacher Carolyn Ridgeway at the yearly volunteer appreciation banquet.**

English was necessary to get a better job. In addition, as a mom, she wanted to be able to help her children in school and better communicate with their teachers. She didn't want her children to be ashamed of her. She decided to enroll in Ayuda Especial's ESL program. She improved her English skills so thoroughly that now she is one of the ESL instructors at Ayuda Especial, helping others to learn as she has. Beatrice also has plans to attend college.

Beatrice has gained far more than English-speaking ability through her involvement in the program. She has gained an extended family. Over the years, she has formed close relationships with the others involved in the program and has become a member of Bethesda Hispanic. As she puts it, "Ayuda Especial is not just [about] language. I know I have a place to come and there are people who can help me. It's like heaven for me. Sometimes, if you've had a bad day at work, you come here and forget about it."

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## KEY RESOURCES continued

someone as good as Ana, it [the program] wouldn't be there." Having someone who believes in the essential objective of the program and who will serve as the point person is absolutely crucial for an effective program. According to Rev. Green, pastor of Epworth United Methodist, you've got to "find someone who knows the community and is well respected in the community; a person who is able to gather the volunteers and who is willing to put in the long hours in terms of garnering support. [The program] needs to become the individual's mission." When it comes to an ESL program, he adds, the leader has "got to speak the language, and that's more than Spanish." Ana Brito possesses all of these qualities. Through her work over many years as a translator and teacher in the school system, she has formed numerous relationships with Hispanic families. In addition, it is essential that the program be supported by the pastor. Both Rev. Muñoz and Rev. Green actively support and promote Ayuda Especial and see it as an important ministry in the life of their respective churches.

**<2> Volunteers.** In order to carry out the ministry's objectives, many people are needed who see the program's mission as vital and are willing to work hard to see that mission fulfilled. Ayuda Especial relies on the service of a committed team of ESL teachers and tutors, who give sacrificially of their time and talents. Impressively, some of the volunteers have been with the program for over ten years. Ayuda Especial utilizes a special segment of the population that is often overlooked, but one that possesses a tremendous amount to offer both in time and skills: retirees. Ana Brito works hard to recruit retired teachers. She says they have a passion to teach, bring years of experience, and have ample time to give. Though retired, they want to continue serving their church and community in meaningful ways. High school students and college students who are required by their schools to perform a certain number of hours of community service compose another part of Ayuda Especial's volunteer base. Two high school students and one college student currently serve in the program as classroom aides and in the past, the number of teen volunteers has been even higher. Ana Brito explains that all that is required of her as program director is the completion of a school form confirming that the student has fulfilled his or her community service obligation.

**<3> Facilities.** Probably the greatest single contribution Epworth United Methodist Church makes to Ayuda Especial is the use of its building. It is a large, spacious facility with an ample supply of well-stocked, attractive classrooms. Ayuda Especial is spared the cost of having to lease, equip, clean, and heat a comparable space and Epworth members are given the satisfaction of knowing that their building is being used during the week to further God's ministry rather than merely sitting vacant.

**<4> School System.** Because she worked as a teacher, it was natural for Ana Brito to look to her local schools as a resource. Although not every high school has an ESL department, increasingly, those in cities with large numbers of immigrants do. A great way to learn about useful ESL curricula is to contact the ESL department in your local high school and see what they are using. The curriculum used in such programs, Ana reports, is often ideally suited for adult students with no prior experience with English. If your area high schools do not have ESL departments, it is highly likely that your state's Department of Education does.

**<5> Public Library.** Like the local school system, the public library has proved a valuable resource for Ayuda Especial as well. It offers a twenty-hour course on teaching English as a second language. The cost of the course is only \$20. Ana Brito requires those volunteers without prior teaching experience to enroll in the program and Ayuda Especial pays their \$20 enrollment fee. Because the course trains people in how to teach ESL in a one-on-one, rather than classroom, setting, Ana finds it necessary to supplement the library's training program by working individually with the potential ESL teachers. Tutors working with Ayuda Especial have also found the public library a useful resource for obtaining books for use with the younger children.

## T E S T I M O N Y

Lillian knew what it meant to be afraid. Forced to flee her native El Salvador after learning her name was on a government hit list, she came to the United States seven years ago seeking refuge and a chance at a better life. The transition has not been easy. There is one thing that has helped her to make it successfully, though. It is Ayuda Especial.

Lillian heard about the program through a friend who was enrolled in the ESL classes. She was impressed that Ayuda Especial's program was free and was offered year round. Aware that her inability to speak any English hindered her chances for success in the United States, Lillian realized Ayuda Especial's program was an opportunity she should not miss. She enrolled in the ESL beginner's class and registered her son, then in 7th grade, in the tutoring program.

Now two years later as she talks about the program, her voice bubbles over with enthusiasm. "This is a very good program. I'm excited." Aware of the ways Ayuda Especial's graduates have advanced, she reports: "Some people have gotten very good jobs in the post office. One person got into an American [university]."

Ayuda Especial has blessed Lillian in significant ways as well. She comments, "When I came to this country, I spoke no English. Now I speak it and understand. I have gained many friends and I participate in the church Christmas parties." She has much more confidence now because, as she

puts it, "I resolve problems for myself. I don't need an interpreter. Now when I go to the bank, if I need to talk to the teacher about my son, or go to a PTA meeting, I understand."

She has seen her son, too, benefit greatly from the program. His English abilities have improved significantly, allowing him now to be in an English-speaking classroom at school. And, after his first year in the tutoring program, he finished the year as an honor student. Now an eighth grader, he recently made the honor roll again.

Lillian's other son, aged nine, just arrived from El Salvador. Like Lillian herself when she came to this country, he speaks no English. Lillian has already enrolled him in Ayuda Especial, even though he's been on American soil only one week!

It would be hard to find another person as enthusiastic about Ayuda Especial as Lillian. When one considers the many ways she has been blessed through the program, however, it is easy to understand why. As she puts it, "I think that my life is transformed now."

## LESSONS & ADVICE

Ayuda Especial's leadership team highlights several lessons they have learned in their many years of reaching out to Hispanics in the greater D.C. area. Several are described below:

► **Get to know your community.** For Ana, this meant helping in her local school system and attending meetings that targeted Hispanics. Although Ana was Hispanic herself, her awareness of the needs of the Hispanic community increased as she did this. The relationships she formed with parents and teachers were to prove crucial as she began to develop Ayuda Especial. Ana recommends that church leaders find out about what other Hispanic churches in their community are doing and try to form relationships with them. If these other congregations already have an ESL or tutoring program, learn as much as you can by offering to help.

► **Volunteers are your most important resource.** One of Ayuda Especial's greatest

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strengths is its team of committed volunteers. As supporter Pat de Spain puts it, “When you get these kinds of people together, all kinds of good things come out.”

Look for motivated volunteers. As Ana Brito says, you don’t want to have to spend all your time calling your volunteers and badgering them. Ayuda Especial recruits retired teachers with a passion for teaching, a desire to serve, and time on their hands.

Once motivated volunteers have been successfully recruited, the ministry needs to put practices in place that will help to ensure their continued loyalty and effectiveness. This is best accomplished by developing in the volunteers a deep interest in and enthusiasm for the program, so that it becomes a regular part of their life and they receive joy and satisfaction from serving. This is done through a variety of ways, Ana explains. One of the most important is to protect volunteers from “burn out” by not asking too much from them. Ana asks her workers to commit to no more than two to three hours per week. As she puts it, “You can’t ask people to come five days a week. You have to give them something manageable.” Another way to ensure a rewarding experience for volunteer tutors/teachers is to provide them with adequate training before they step into the classroom. It is important that the volunteer’s first experience not be overwhelming. Lastly, ministry leaders must strive to have a consistent, well-run program. A disorganized program will drive away even committed volunteers.

► **An ESL program is about far more than teaching English.** Ayuda Especial’s leaders recognize that their program isn’t only about teaching English. It is about creating an environment where people feel accepted and cared for, where students taste God’s love. Volunteers know that for some of the ESL students, the ESL class may be the only place all day where the students can feel special, like they are the center of attention. Ayuda Especial has found that cookies, coffee, hot chocolate and other small amenities can go a long way towards creating an environment where people feel comfortable and “at home.”

The program also helps students to feel at ease by having a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy regarding their residency status. While students are asked for their name, phone number and address, they are never required to produce any legal documents or residency papers. The ministry’s leaders realize that when people feel comfortable and accepted, they begin to open up and discuss issues of importance to them, personal issues that provide a doorway for deeper relationship between the students and volunteers. Parents will often drop by to talk to tutors about how their children are doing in school. ESL students chat about how their day has been at work. At times like these, ministry volunteers report, a sense of family is attained, and true, meaningful, heart-felt interaction takes place. God moves. As one former student put it, “It’s not just the language...I know that I have a place to come and there are people who can help me.”

Many volunteers and students talk about the importance of the relationships they have developed over the years through the program. Most importantly, as Bethesda Hispanic’s pastor Bríndice Muñoz and Ana Brito testify, the ESL program has fostered the relationships through which some students have come to know Jesus as their Lord and have been welcomed into the faith community at Bethesda Hispanic.

► **Raise the level of awareness of the congregation.** To maintain strong ties between church members and the outreach program, it is important that the ministry is regularly showcased among the congregation and that opportunities are created to allow church members to participate—even if they lack the time to serve as tutors or English teachers. Ayuda Especial does this by holding several holiday celebrations during the year at which church members and participants in the program are able to interact. Such events enable church members to build a sense of ownership for the program and give them an opportunity to form genuine relationships with the students and their families. Church members are also more apt to give both their time and money to a ministry that they see as “theirs.”

► **Focus on practical English.** In your teaching of English, focus on the practical. Adult students need to learn the basic language skills needed to successfully navigate daily life in the

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United States. They're not worrying about flawless pronunciation or complex grammar. They're worrying about making it through the check out counter the next time they are at the super market. Look for curriculum that recognizes this fact and don't be afraid to supplement it with articles from magazines, books from the library, etc. Beatrice Arce, who teaches the intermediate level ESL class, does this because she finds the textbooks at times to be boring or impractical.

► **You can often reach adults through their children.** Many parents were not interested initially in learning English. But as they came to drop their children off for tutoring, over time they began to express a greater desire to learn English. As a result, more adults began enrolling in the program. Today, there are now more adults enrolled in the ESL program than there are children in the tutoring program.



## CHALLENGES

One of the challenges faced by Ayuda Especial is the lack of consistent attendance on the part of some students. Because of their job situations, or problems related to their residency status, students in the ESL program will often not show up for weeks or even months at a time. This makes it difficult to use a curriculum that builds on itself. At least one teacher, Joyce Shorten, seeks to address this problem by designing her class lessons so that each one stands alone, and does not explicitly build on the prior week's lesson. Such inconsistency on the part of students can also prove discouraging at times for teachers, leaving them wondering if the problem is their teaching rather than their students' job situation. Ministry leaders need to be intentional in encouraging the volunteer teachers to realize the challenges faced by the Hispanic students and not take personally the failure of some students to stick with the program.

Because Ayuda Especial's ministry takes place not at Bethesda Hispanic but on the campus of the Epworth United Methodist Church, it has been difficult at times for the church to develop a sense of ownership regarding the ministry. It has also led to a lack of clarity at times concerning the respective roles played by Rev. Green from Epworth and Rev. Muñoz from Bethesda Hispanic.



## CHURCH CONNECTION

The Ayuda Especial program was birthed out of Bethesda Hispanic sixteen years ago, and continues to be an integral part of the church's outreach to the community. The relationship it shares with both Bethesda Hispanic and Epworth United Methodist has been a crucial one, one in which all parties have benefited.

According to Reverend Muñoz, pastor of Bethesda Hispanic, the basic commission of the church is to make disciples "by reaching out and touching people's needs." To this end, Bethesda Hispanic has tried to combine outreach and evangelism. Muñoz sees Ayuda Especial as a natural outgrowth of this desire. As he puts it, through Ayuda Especial, "we are helping to spread the gospel, and through the healing process, to help people struggling with culture shock to adapt and improve their spiritual life."

Bethesda Hispanic has seen its membership grow as a direct result of Ayuda Especial. While the church doesn't promote Ayuda Especial as an evangelistic tool, Ana reports that when she sees a family in the program that isn't going to church, she is quick to invite them to her home congregation. As a result, five families that participated in Ayuda Especial are now active in Bethesda Hispanic and several people have given their lives to Christ.

Rev. Muñoz also believes Ayuda Especial helps to develop leaders within the church. Members who have participated in Ayuda Especial are now bilingual and can participate in denominational

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meetings such as Methodist women's meetings, etc. In addition, the outreach ministry promotes spiritual growth and develops leaders by giving them opportunities to use their talents to assist others. Two members from Bethesda Hispanic, for example, are currently serving as ESL teachers.

Epworth United Methodist Church has benefited from its relationship with Ayuda Especial as well. The most obvious way is that its large, spacious facilities do not sit idle during the week, but are used for practical services to the surrounding community. Epworth benefits in other ways too. As Rev. Green puts it, "We get a greater sense of the rich diversity of the city of Gaithersburg... a sense of the struggles of folk who are new to the community and how we can be of help. We benefit from the gifts these individuals bring to Epworth."

For its part, Ayuda Especial has benefited as well from the relationship it shares with both churches. One of the most obvious ways is through the members of the church who serve as ESL teachers or aides. Another way is through the support provided by Reverend Muñoz and Reverend Green. Both provide spiritual oversight of Ana Brito. They also make themselves available to provide counseling to families in the program who might express to their tutors or teachers that they need such a service. In addition, Reverend Muñoz helps occasionally with the Tuesday evening chapel service that is held after class. Importantly, Muñoz helps to obtain funding for Ayuda Especial each year by writing and submitting a proposal to the United Methodist denominational board that provides such funding.

## Who Could Do This, Too?

Ayuda Especial was launched primarily through the efforts of a dynamic leader, Ana Brito, who through her work with the school system developed contacts in both the Anglo and Hispanic communities. It has succeeded in large part because over the years Ana has continually sought to recruit committed teachers and tutors with a vision for ministering to their community. Crucial to its success has also been the financial support provided by the denomination and the cheerleading and spiritual oversight given by pastors Muñoz and Green.

The increasing availability of ESL resources and its relatively low cost make such a ministry feasible for even small churches, as Bethesda Hispanic has proven. By offering English classes to adults and tutoring to children, such a ministry has the potential to impact not just individuals but entire families. And with increasing numbers of immigrants entering the U.S., this kind of ministry addresses a very clear need by offering individuals skills that will directly affect their ability to succeed in this culture.

The benefits for those serving in such a ministry are great as well. It is an enormously satisfying ministry because it makes a genuine difference in the lives of the program participants. Carolyn Ridgway, a tutor in the Ayuda Especial, tells of seeing one of the students she tutored transformed during the course of just one year. He went from a boy who could not look people in the face to a confident student who ran for class office in his high school. Seeing such dramatic change in people's lives causes many teachers and tutors in Ayuda Especial to keep serving year after year. Their long-term commitment is also spurred by the rewarding personal relationships they have formed with the students over the years.

Ana Brito and the rest of the team of Ayuda Especial have caught a vision for empowering Hispanics to succeed. As they have sought to bless others, however, they've realized that they themselves have been immeasurably blessed through their interaction with the students.

As Beatrice Arce, ESL teacher and former participant in the program puts it, "Because the little thing I know, I'm able to give to others, and able to help others with more than English. [I'm] doing what Jesus asks us to do—to help others. It's tiring to work all day and then come here, but when you see people who have gotten jobs because of the program, it's wonderful."