

STEPPING STONES

WALKING alongside

strengthening congregational community ministries



» Step by Step: Family Literacy Ministry «

» GETTING STARTED

What is a Family Literacy Ministry?

This ministry provides faith communities with the opportunity to reach out to their non-English speaking neighbors and impact their lives through English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes. The program provides the families of ESL participants with child care, care for pre-kindergarten children that offers pre-reading skills, a family meal, GED classes, and computer classes to improve job opportunities. English-speaking members of the faith community serve as mentors and teachers. Faith groups that host the program are experienced as safe and trusted places for those adjusting to a new culture and society.

Components of the ministry

- ESL classes: Students receive ESL instruction from church volunteers.
- Child care: Free child care on-site provides parents with a safe place for their child so the parents can focus fully on their studies; Pre-K children receive pre-reading instruction.
- Free meal: The fellowship of the table promotes relationships within nuclear families, the community and with the congregational volunteers.
- GED and/or computer classes to improve job opportunities.

Why is there a need?

The Federation for American Immigration reports that more than 67 percent of immigrants live in the states of California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois and New Jersey¹. There are an estimated 11.5 million to 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States searching for safety, work, education, food and employment². The church has an opportunity to respond to this growing population. The total number of the foreign born population in the United States is 37.4 million and it is increasing (289 percent since 1970).

Stepping out in faith

Here are some “first steps” to consider before your congregation begins a family literacy ministry:

- Participate in the assessments recommended above.
- Research existing programs in your community that provide literacy or ESL programs and whether or not they include the entire family. Speak with local school district representatives to gauge interest and support.
- Gather national and local statistics on literacy needs and resources available (see our Backpack).
- Visit an existing literacy or ESL program at your local high school or community college.

What this ministry might look like in your church

Congregations can offer any or all of the components of the family literacy ministry program for families. Here are some options:

- Provide the free child care for another agency/institution offering ESL.
- Provide the free meal or collaborate with other groups to offer it.
- Offer the ESL class or GED class at your facility, staffed by church volunteers.

For more effective and sustainable community ministries, we recommend engaging in:

- » internal and external assessments of interests and assets
- » ongoing education, information, promotion and support from pastoral staff
- » regular, periodic evaluation

MORE ON BACK

» Step by Step: Family Literacy Ministry «

Backpacks

The Walking Alongside Web site provides a Backpack of additional resources and examples for this specific ministry. Included are published articles, Web sites, selected books, testimonials and existing ministries with contact information.

Pathways

Learn from the first-hand accounts of those already engaged in this specific ministry. Plus, develop networking contacts as go-to sources to explore solutions to challenges or celebrations of successes.

FOOTNOTES:

1. "The immigrant population of the United States in 2006," Jack Martin, Director of Special Projects, Federation for American Immigration Reform. Washington, DC, 2007 (p. 3). Retrieved from <http://www.fairus.org/site/DocServer/06USFBPOP.pdf?docID=1561>.
2. "Size and Characteristics of the unauthorized migrant population in the United States," Jeffrey S. Passel, Senior Research Association. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Retrieved March 7, 2006 from <http://pewhispanic.org/reprts/report.php?ReportID=61>.