
Las Casas - *English as a Second Language (ESL)*

Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose

California, United States

OVERVIEW

Las Casas - ESL is a program of the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose. It is named for Bartolomé de las Casas, who was a 16th century Dominican friar and advocate for the rights of indigenous people in the Americas. Las Casas seeks to pay forward his belief that all people deserve equitable treatment and an education. The evening program provides leveled English language instruction to the Oakland community during the academic year.

GOAL¹

Empower adults to reach their educational and vocational goals through ESL instruction.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Las Casas - ESL offers English instruction to adults, predominately Hispanic, three nights per week from September through May. Classes are held on the St. Elizabeth High School campus in Oakland's Fruitvale district, and all teachers are volunteers. Approximately 115-125 students attend each night. Students are tested to be placed in one of five skill levels: Introduction to ESL, Beginning Low, Beginning High, Intermediate Low and Intermediate High.

INNOVATION

Featured Criteria: Effective, New Approach to Resource Development, Enhances Social Justice, Leverages Social Capital

Las Casas - ESL excels in leveraging social capital through its reliance on volunteers, channeling over 1,500 volunteer hours annually across seven classes covering five skill levels (Beginning Low and Beginning High typically have two sections to accommodate the demand). The program is effective in its instruction, offering sequenced courses that expand accessibility and encourage student growth. The opportunity for students to learn English at night, outside of typical working hours, enhances social justice as it provides access to an important skill for the community's immigrant population.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL VALUES

Featured Values: Preferential Option for the Poor & Vulnerable, Common Good, Human Dignity, Subsidiarity

Las Casas - ESL exhibits a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable by structuring and scheduling its program with the needs of the under-served immigrant population in mind. Classes are accessible and intended to enhance the lives of this group in particular. Most students are employed, but work at very low paying jobs often with little stability. Having improved language skills provides greater economic opportunity, and also makes them better able to support and encourage their school-age children. Additionally, the program promotes the common good, as volunteers contribute their time and energy in order to meet a need in their community concurrent with empowering English language learners to become more productive and engaged members of US society and the domestic economy.

IMPACT

Since its founding in 2002, over 2,000 people have learned English at Las Casas. For this population, there are very limited options for learning English in a structured environment outside of this program.

¹ Goal derived from organizational website