

## FROM SKI SLOPES TO ESL

Kim Albers, lead teacher of the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes on Monday evenings, knows what it's like to struggle learning to speak and be understood in a language that is not her native tongue. "I've traveled to 29 countries, she said. "The most challenging experience was living in Southern Chile for 6 months. I taught English in a high school and lived with a host family who did not speak English. If someone would speak slowly to me, I could understand, but Chilean Spanish is full of slang and even when I would say, "Mas lento por favor" (slower please), people would speak at the same rate! I would just laugh and nod my head until my Spanish improved."

She found her gift for ESL while working at a busy ski school in California where many instructors were from South America and Eastern Europe. "I loved being surrounded by so many different cultures in one place! Instructors who were timid about

being in a new country felt comfortable around me," she said. "It was then that I realized I should get involved with ESL." The students who come to the Monday evening classes are grateful she did.

Most of them are from Burundi and are anywhere from their 20s to 60s. Some students are from Cameroon and Tanzania. Most speak Kirundi, although there is one student from Guatemala who speaks Spanish. Students always come with a notebook (and sometimes a baby) in hand!

"After we talk about how everyone is doing, we break into groups: beginner and intermediate. Cathy Grote and Gina Hautz usually work with the beginners, as they both have wonderful skills teaching phonics and know many games to build vocabulary. Linda and I usually work with the intermediate team. Sometimes Linda will help with

homework if one of the high school students attends. Every class is a little different, but there is a learning target for the evening and an activity to reach our goal. Sometimes it involves discussion, putting sentences together, taking notes, worksheets or YouTube videos. Then, we read a book together. That fills up 2 hours of learning!"

"We often discuss Africa's customs, foods, cities, and a general way of life that differs from here. We look at the map a lot! Our students really love books too," she said." Wences, one of our students from Guatemala, always adds humor to the class as well. We all take care of each other in class."



"I feel just as rewarded after a class as our students do; we always leave class with a high energy and a smile. Our students' perseverance and dedication to learning English has impressed me," she said. "So many are

away from their families overseas, but they have faith in God, in themselves and in the goodness of their neighbors to lead beautiful lives."

To any prospective volunteers, Kim says "We would love to have you join us on Monday evenings! We often team teach and have activities prepared. You don't need to have a teaching background, just patience and a heart to help."

In addition to her volunteer work at St. Leo's, Kim is an ESL teacher for Newport Independent Schools, grades K-12 and is working toward her Masters and ESL endorsement through Georgetown College in Kentucky. She says she feels lucky to work in a field that she enjoys and one that brings support to those in need.

- Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate