



# The Basic English Service:

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A Gathering of  
Nations at Church  
of the Servant





April 7, 2019

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Grand Rapids, MI  
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[coscrc.org/bes](http://coscrc.org/bes)

## Purpose

These words and images are offered in thanksgiving for what God has done over the last ten years in the Basic English Service at Church of the Servant. As we look back in celebration, we also desire to learn where the Lord is leading us. Our common destination is His table, where we meet with brothers and sisters from all over the world to celebrate His amazing love. We give thanks that we can share in this blessing, offered to all.







*March 3, 2019 – Epiphany*

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# Together on a Journey

On a Sunday in April 2009, a small group of people gathered at Church of the Servant (COS) for the first Basic English Service (BES). The service was a result of prayer, planning, and a desire to worship with people from different cultures and countries, many of whom were new to the English language.

BES has grown over the last ten years. Today, we regularly welcome as many as a hundred people from more than a dozen different countries.

We celebrate this ten-year anniversary by giving thanks to God for the birth of BES. The BES fellowship has been a great blessing to COS's ministries and our community.



***There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.***

***Galatians 3:28***





# Come into His Presence

Worship in BES follows a traditional liturgical form, with the center of the service focused on holy communion. We recite The Lord's Prayer and Apostles' Creed together. We pass the peace of Christ to each other. So what is different?

The original aim of the service was to simplify its language so that all could understand. Consequently, preachers and liturgists seek to communicate directly and clearly. We also distribute translations of the day's scripture readings to worshippers in a few of the more common languages used by our members. To encourage the English language learners among us, and to demonstrate unity, Scripture is read in English by members of different immigrant language groups. International pastors, some from the BES fellowship, are invited to preach in addition to our own co-pastors.

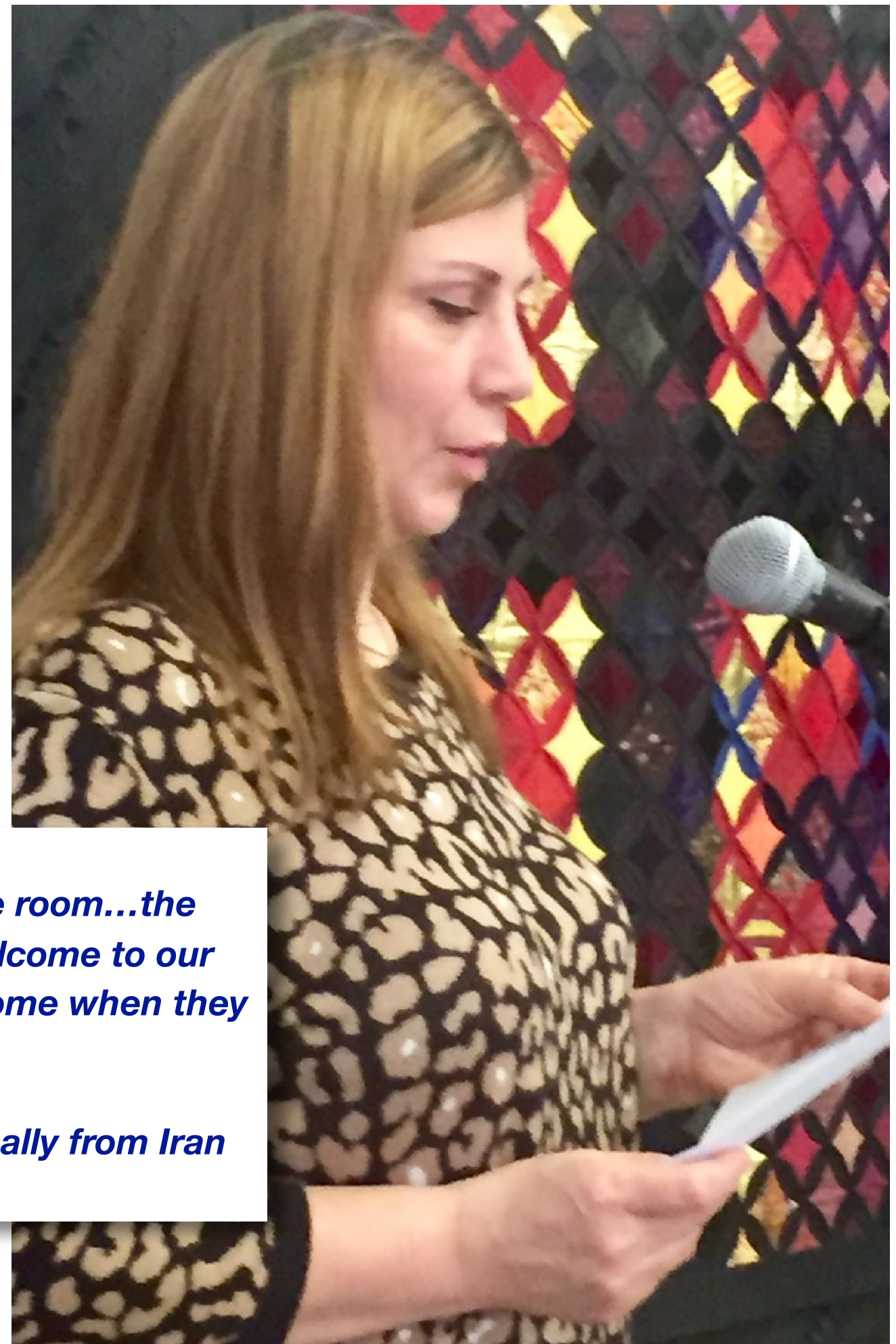
We also try to slow our pace and use many illustrations and visual aids. Repetition and variation of important words help comprehension. Key words of the day's message are occasionally sung or chanted, with the preacher leading in call and response.

Music is selected from a variety of global worship sources. The words are projected on a screen so that worshipers won't fumble with hymnbooks. We have recently added a "song offering" delivered in the mother tongue of the singer, who introduces and explains the song.

The typical BES service provides two opportunities where worshippers reach out in greeting and in passing the peace. Members circulate throughout the room, sharing hearty handshakes, hugs and words of blessing in different languages.

Another intimate and significant moment in worship is the sharing of prayers of thanksgiving and petition. Members volunteer their prayers, which are projected on the screen for all to see. This is followed by a communal prayer led by a BES member. All attending BES are free to pray in their own language. We thank God for good news of babies welcomed, family members' marriages in distant countries, baptisms celebrated, school diplomas awarded, and drivers licenses earned. We grieve over deaths and pray for strength in illness and injury. We ask for God to bless the nations, including the US, with peace and justice. And as we pray we reflect on the power and grace of God, who knows all of our needs and cares for each one of us.





***“BES is another door that opens into the same room...the church of Jesus Christ. BES offers a special welcome to our church for those who have difficulty feeling welcome when they enter through the main entrance.”***

***Zara Qashqaei, BES Leader and Member, originally from Iran***



# Learning Faith

Not all of BES happens in Room 4. The children are included in the same Children's Worship with all COS kids. Older kids stay through the service and often perform small duties, while teenagers help with projection, audio and music. BES youth are sometimes asked to read scripture, lead prayer or provide guidance for smaller children.

Most Wednesday nights also offer activities at church in which BES kids and families participate: an all-church dinner, followed by Boys' Club, Girls' Club, and other special events.

It is gratifying to see some BES youth bringing friends from their neighborhoods or schools to church. Some do more than just attend services. The majority of teens on the summer 2018 COS Youth Mission trip were from BES...and they brought their friends!

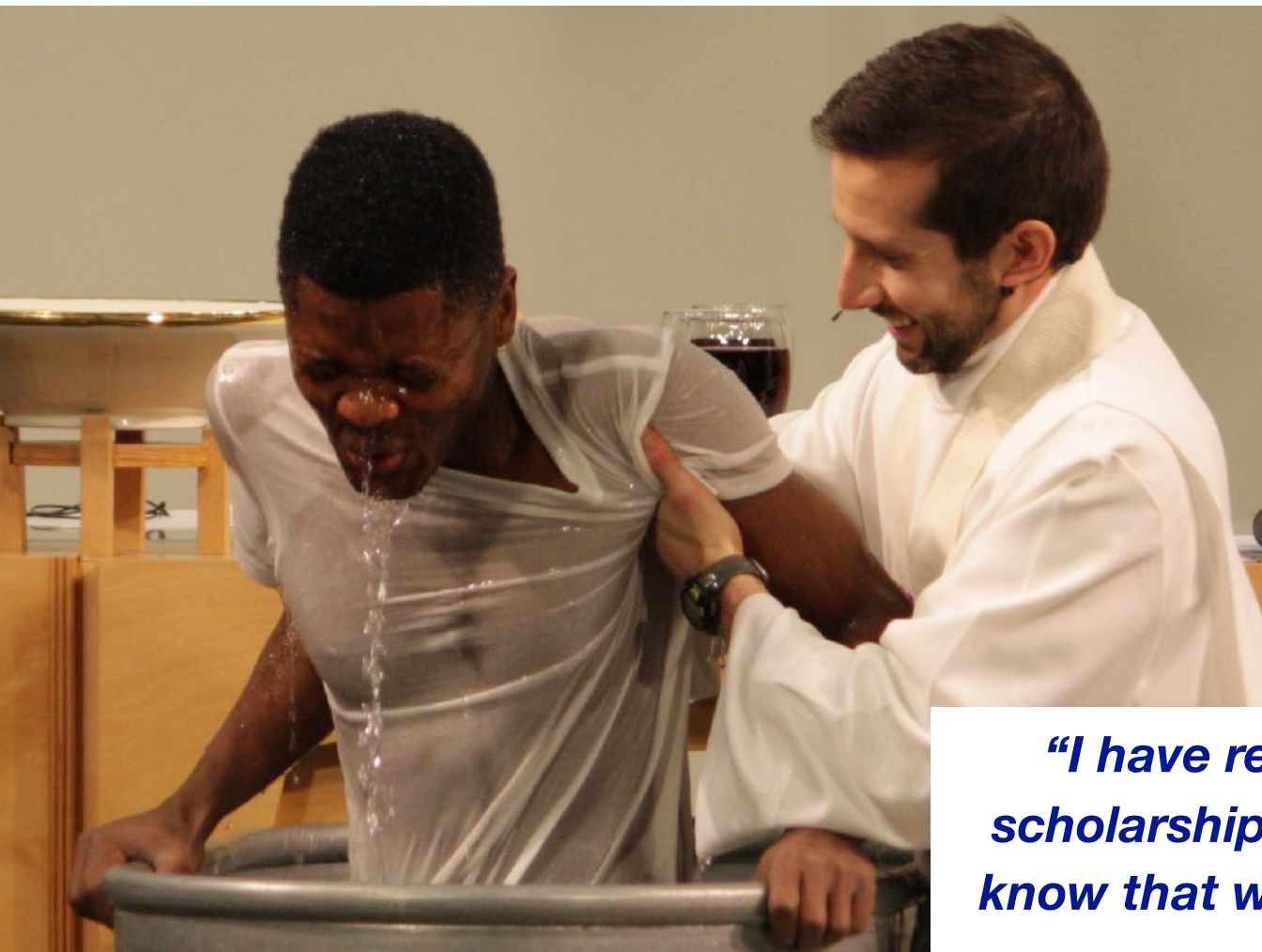
A few immigrant kids attend BES on their own, while their parents attend another service elsewhere in their home language. These kids regularly show up on their own because they desire to be here, with rides provided by faithful volunteers.

Along with faith formation activities in church and at home, our church traditionally values Christian education. COS offers financial assistance to members who are interested in Christian education, something particularly helpful for families with lower incomes.

In addition, COS has established a scholarship fund that helps BES refugee families send their kids to college. Every semester, money is made available to help BES college students with tuition expenses.







***“I have received much financial support from the COS scholarship fund, which has allowed me to attend GRCC. I know that without this money there is no way I could do it.”***

***Alex Mujaliwa, BES Member and recipient of Jack and Carol Roeda Refugee Scholarship Fund awards. Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo***





## One Body, Many Members

BESers know that we belong to God and to His family, the church. In a family, brothers and sisters want to serve each other. Whether it is helping to plan worship, serving coffee, reading scripture, leading prayer, playing music, or praying for each other, all in BES can find a place to offer their gifts.

Recently a BES member approached a Congolese family who came to our church after arriving just a week ago. She spoke to them in their native Swahili, welcomed them, and asked them how we could help. How delightful that this woman, who had come to the US from Rwanda several years ago as a refugee, was able to engage these newly arrived strangers in their home language, and offer them the hospitality of our church!

The Bible says that we are differently gifted. Some gifts appear very different from the ones we are familiar with. As North Americans participating in BES we are learning that our models of efficiency and order do not necessarily harmonize with an inclusive approach to multi-cultural worship. Coming together to serve the body through everyone's gifts, we learn humility.



***“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”***

***Romans 12:4-5***





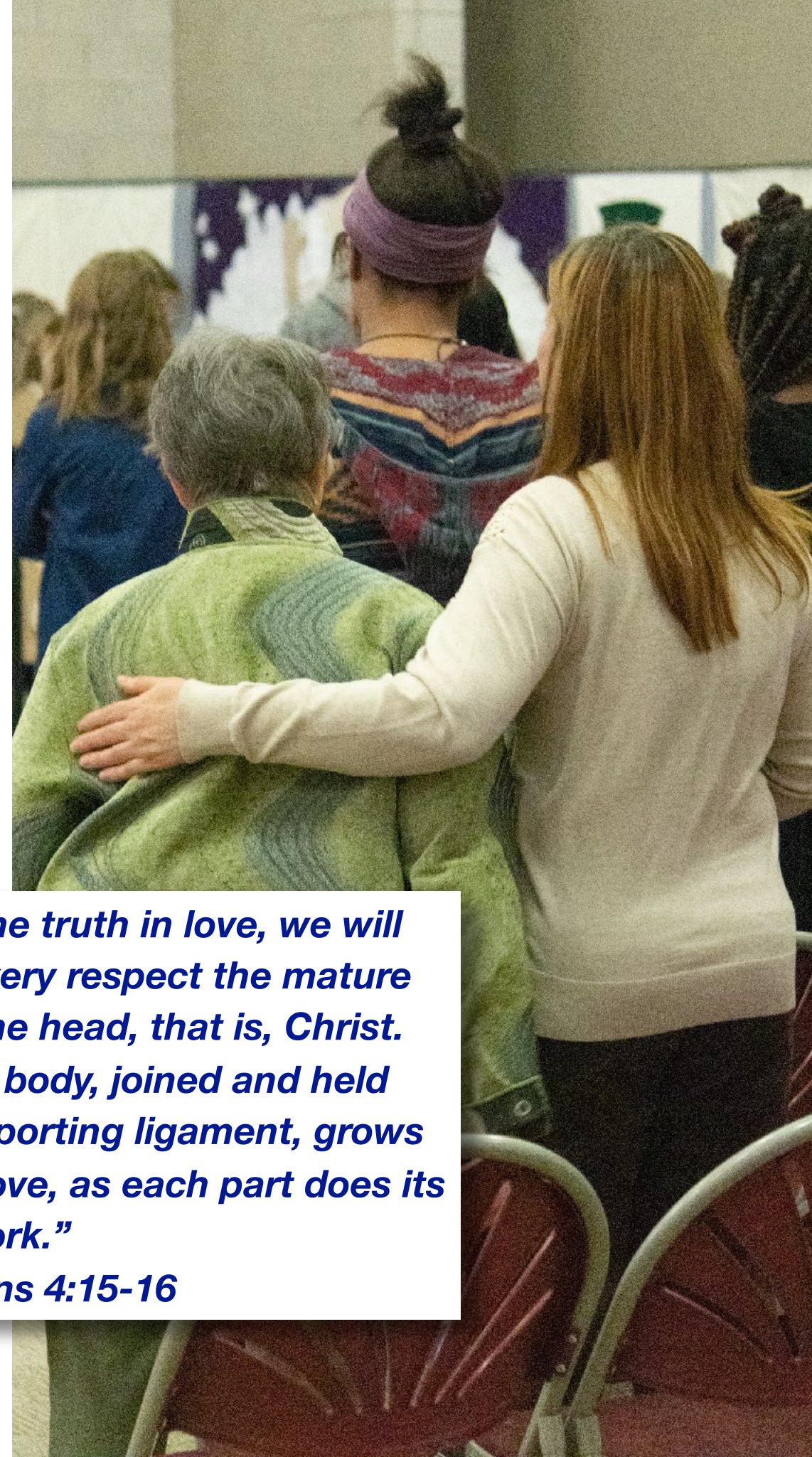
# Broken and Made New

Knowing that we have different gifts, come from different cultures, and are each broken by sin informs how we provide pastoral care and benevolence in BES. While many immigrants prosper soon after arriving, others (including some BES members) struggle due to a lack of resources, little education and past trauma.

Some of our New American friends with low incomes and few assets must deal with difficult systems issues which affect the poor disproportionately. Injustice and discrimination also can impact our friends, especially those of color.

Whenever a BES member asks for help with a housing crisis, a lack of school success, a marital problem, or a loss of employment, we are mindful that the first step is to pray. Next, we must simply be with our fellow members, as a witness to Christ's presence. In grief and trouble, or in joy and gladness, He is here!

Only after we pray together can we appropriately direct our friends to a church resource, help them in an emergency, or refer them to an agency which can help address the immediate as well as the systemic challenges they face.



***“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”***

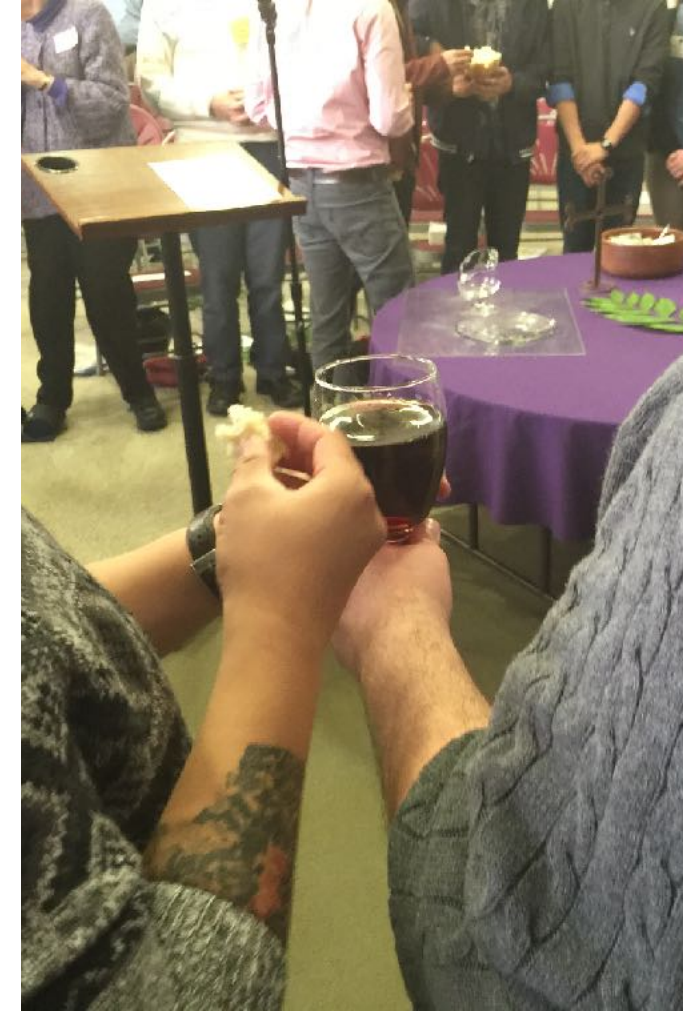
***Ephesians 4:15-16***



# Finding Our Way

On this tenth anniversary of BES, we are all very grateful to God for leading us on this journey, with joys and sorrows but mostly many blessings. But what do we know about how the journey started?

The founders tell us that the inspiration for BES came mainly from a sense that our “regular” COS worship services were not welcoming to immigrants, refugees, and others whose first language was not English. A new approach was necessary to provide scripture, sacrament and music in a way which would be more intelligible, and thus more welcoming, to English language learners who wanted to worship with us but were baffled by COS’s complex language.







***“Lord,” we prayed, “these immigrants came to our English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and now they attend our Sunday morning worship. But ecclesiastical ‘church’ words are not in the first-level ESL texts. What do you want us to do?”***

***Helen Bonzelaar, BES founding member***



# Welcoming the Stranger

BES is built on COS's forty-year history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. Through our Refugee Support Team (RST), we continue to help local agencies resettle refugees. In addition, our church's twenty-plus years of commitment to the Friendship ESL program ensures that many English language learners continue to come through our doors.

COS has also sponsored two food distribution ministries to needy people in our neighborhood, where there are two subsidized housing complexes. These ministries provide a connection point for our international neighbors to begin to know our church and our members. We have also joined with other churches and with a local charter school, to form Camelot Community Partners, which seeks to reach out to our neighbors who have recently come to the US.

God knows that we are made to live in love, and love for a stranger represents God's love. This is why God tells us to welcome the stranger: connecting with others that we do not know connects us more closely to our God.



***“(God) loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.”  
Deuteronomy 10:18b-19***





# From Neighbors to Friends

Relationships with new Americans can begin through a friendship with an ESL tutor, or perhaps with a COS member who helps with immigration paperwork, with church staff helping people fill bags with groceries in the food pantry, or with Vacation Bible School and Children's Worship leaders who help kids learn about Jesus while playing games.

BES is built on such relationships, many of them created through COS outreach efforts in our community. When we join in worship that embodies the global scope of Christ's kingdom, we deepen relationships with each other and with God. As we share the bread and wine around the table, we see Christ in faces that look different than our own. Members of our church who reach out to others find that God "reaches in" to renew our faith and our church.







***“Our Friendship ESL classes are offered to the community so that students can develop their English language skills. We welcome them to our church and to our Bible studies, and seasonally we explain why and what Christians believe. We do not evangelize at ESL. When students show interest, the BES service becomes the place where they can begin to know Jesus, who inspires our work and our lives.”***

***Mark Fackler, COS Friendship ESL Program Director***



# A Gathering of Nations

The refugees our church helps are members of migrant groups that are forced from their home countries by war and other tragedies. Arriving in the US, some groups tend to form their own communities of faith rapidly. For example, there are about 44 different African Christian churches meeting in the Grand Rapids area currently. Most are organized around linguistic or ethnic lines. BES has provided an alternative, multi-cultural approach using English as the common language of worship.

Other immigrants to the US identify as Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist, or have no faith at all. In any case, when we connect with a refugee family through the COS Refugee Support Team, we ask them to join our fellowship and to worship with us if they desire. Of course, not everyone takes us up on our offer, while some attend services for a while and then move on.

We believe that offering the hospitality of fellowship and a community of worship to all is important. Our deepest desire is to show the love of God and to reach out to the needy in the name of Jesus, not to make converts or add to the numbers on our roll.

This ecumenical approach has encouraged many people (including those of other faith backgrounds) to stay connected with us and to contribute in one way or another to our ministry in the community. Some have even celebrated their baptisms with us.



***“I came as a refugee to the US almost 10 years ago and soon after began attending the Basic English Service at COS. I liked it right away because so many other people were learning English, like me. I feel like this place is home, and the people here are my family. There is a "comfort zone" here at BES. People know each other and care for each other.”***

***Prasad Rai, BES Leader and Member, originally from Nepal***





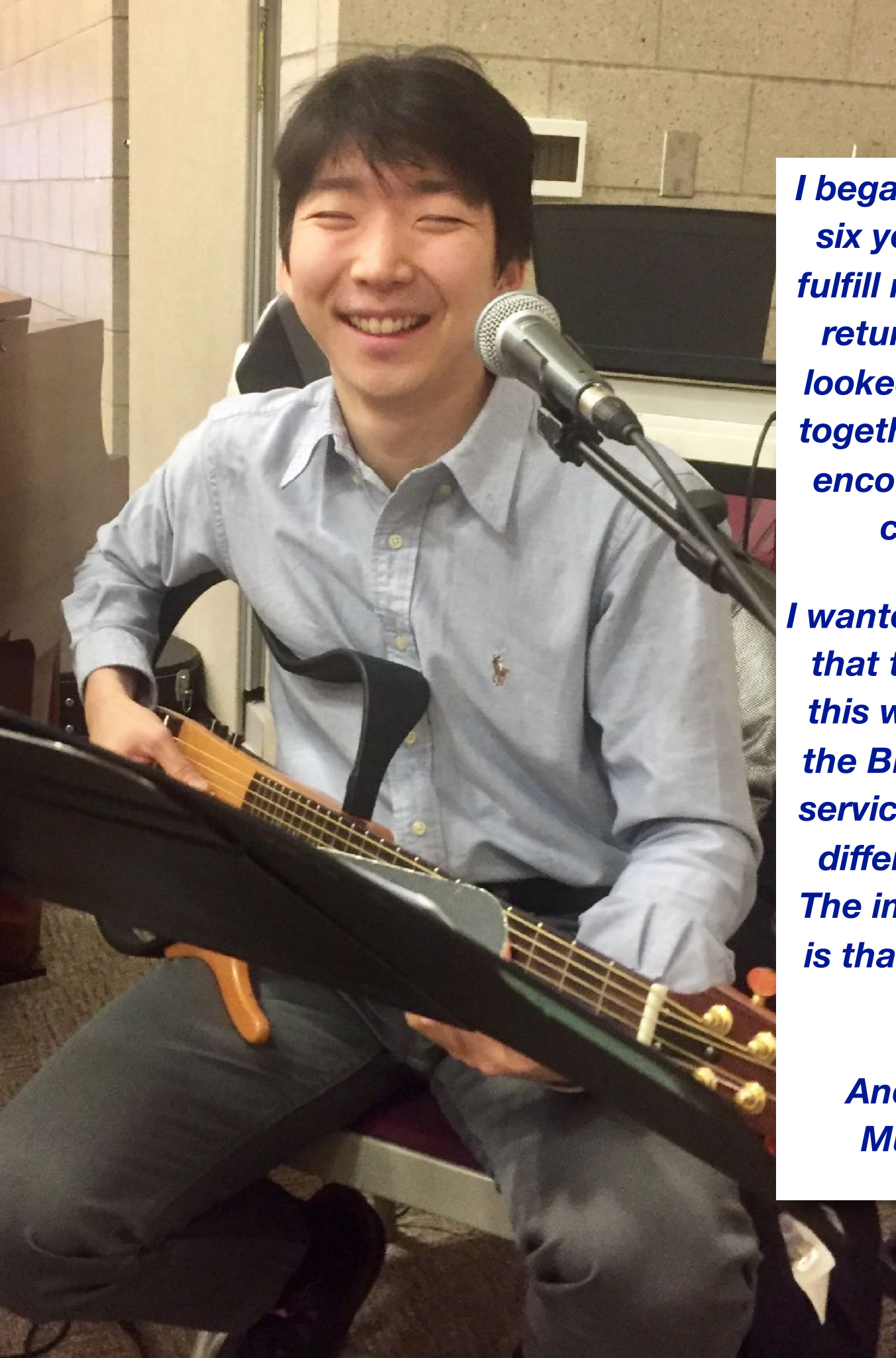
# A Table on the Way

Not all BES attenders come to us as refugees or immigrants. Some are longtime COS members who have a heart for people from other cultures. Others have had experiences in the global Christian church, as educators, missionaries or aid workers. A significant number are students and scholars from other countries who may be here for a time of study.

Therefore, BES also serves as a “table on the way” for those whose journey includes a stop in Grand Rapids. Those who become members for a time continue to be part of our fellowship, and remain connected with BES long after they have gone on to other places, churches and ministries.







*I began my undergraduate studies at Calvin College six years ago, but left after three years in order to fulfill my military service obligation in Korea. When I returned to Grand Rapids to resume my studies I looked forward to coming back to COS. To worship together with people I knew from six years ago was encouraging, especially when I did not have many college friends still living in Grand Rapids.*

*I wanted to serve in one way or the other, and seeing that the BES music team needed people I thought this was the right place to start. Leading music for the BES is a very different experience than worship services back in Korea. Forms and methods may be different, but I think the essence is still the same. The important thing in performing music in worship is that we are not doing it for our own sake, but for God.*

*Andrew Park, Calvin College student and BES Musician and Member, originally from Korea*





# Growing Our Fellowship

As BES has grown, its international members have had opportunities for leadership. Among these members are our current BES Deacon, members of our Pastoral Care Team and our BES Leadership Team, and a number of our regular musicians. Going forward, it will be critical to create space for more international BESers to lead us as we seek to be faithful to our mission of “nurtur(ing) a sense of community and belonging for all.”

We also know we must make room for young people in leadership, so that our future leaders are more representative of the whole body. We want our younger folks to bring ideas and start initiatives that arise from their own experience and understanding of God’s leading.



***“I love, love, love BES because the people here are my church family! They care for my kids, and so my kids are learning to love Jesus and the church. I am so happy to be here at BES!”***

***Delphine Dukandane, BES Leader and Member,  
originally from Rwanda***





# The Journey Continues

The excitement we have found in this “new thing” which God is creating here at COS is contagious! Many of our BES folks are eager to bless others by reaching out: one member has begun bringing several small children to participate in children’s worship each Sunday; another pursues an interest in audio and video recording by working with other international folks to produce Christian music videos; and several of our current BES leaders continue to recruit college students, friends and others to BES.

BES has become important to those of us who regularly attend its worship services, but it has also become important to others. BES has created connections: between members who have come from the same home culture; between New Americans and those who were born in the US; and between those who worship with BES in Room 4 and those who worship in the large sanctuary at COS. Many care about what we do here, for it is God’s work.

In response to the hardships and challenges associated with the experience of flight and resettlement, connections also continue to develop between COS and other local churches and nonprofits involved with refugees and immigrants. In addition, three of our BES attenders work for area resettlement agencies. Others work for nonprofits focused on development of the local African community.







## Leaders Emerge

Since joining us when he arrived in the US about four years ago, Sepa Nashale has become a leader in BES and in our community. He has preached at services and served as a translator. In addition Sepa has been using his prior experience as a lay pastor in his native Democratic Republic of Congo as well as his language skills to minister to families who have immigrated to this country from East Africa.

***"Through BES, God has given me an opportunity to share my gifts as a pastor and leader with the church and the African immigrant community. Glory to God!"***

***Sepa Nashale, BES Leader and Member, originally from Democratic Republic of Congo***

Recently Sepa and his wife Esperance visited the home of a family new to BES. Through their shared Swahili language Sepa and Esperance were able to answer questions and encourage their interest in church membership and fellowship.

Sepa sees this as the Lord's work: We are so grateful for leaders like Sepa who can cross culture and language to help us join as brothers and sisters in Christ through BES!





## Keeping the Door Open

We cannot know exactly where new connections will develop, or how God will use them. However, we will keep the BES “door” open to those who want to join us on the journey. We are grateful to God for leading us into community, and trust Him to keep telling His story of love and grace as we meet around the table each Sunday. Praise God for His faithfulness to BES, and to all of us!



# Basic English Service at Church of the Servant

Church of the Servant is a diverse community of Christ's servants, a home for God's children, and a prism for God's light in liturgy and life.

As children of the light, we desire to

- participate in worship that is Reformed and liturgical, historic and modern, local and global
- prepare people for service by nurturing their gifts and encouraging them to grow in discipleship
- create a fellowship where the burdened and suffering will find support and comfort, where the alienated will be accepted, and where those seeking God will be shown the way
- present Christ to others by showing God's love in Jesus for the world and promoting justice and peace for our neighbors near and far

In obedience to this call, Church of the Servant offers a worship service in basic English. The Basic English Service is for all who come, especially those whose understanding of English prevents full participation in the larger worship service.

# The BES Enhances COS's call to:

- reach out with love, encouragement, and fellowship to people of all cultures, faiths, and language groups;
- nurture a sense of community and belonging for all;
- embrace those not yet enfolded in Christ's family and invite them to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- disciple all believers in the gospel;
- create space for the gifts of the global Church to be mutually shared and appreciated across lines of language, ethnicity, culture, and status, thereby expressing the unity-in-diversity of the Church.