

November 2015

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Beth-El

Farmworker Ministry, Inc.



Seasons

About a month ago our calendar gently swept into Fall. I say gently, because seasons are a bit more difficult to distinguish in Florida than



they are up north. Up north we know it's fall by the brilliant hues of Autumn leaves, or that crisp exhale of the first hard frost. But here in Florida things move differently. In Florida we know Fall has arrived as we see our city streets a little fuller with returning snow birds, or the refreshing moderate temperatures as the summer humidity finally breaks. At Beth-El we know Fall has arrived as we see our farm workers return from their summer labors up north—many returning with nothing to show for their endeavors, not even a secure place to call home.



In 2016 Beth-El will celebrate its 40th year of operation. We began in a carport in Ruskin, Florida, providing weekly worship services in Spanish for the local farm working community. Soon, however,

the greater needs of our neighbors became overwhelmingly apparent. Many were sleeping in their cars, most were illiterate, and all were hungry. As such, Beth-El's mission became clear: to be agents of support and encouragement in the name of Christ. Since those early days, thousands of people have passed through our doors seeking help to keep food on the table for their families through our food pantry, or the promise of a better life through scholarships and opportunities for their children.

In 2015 Beth-El continued the long tradition of making a significant difference in the lives of farm workers and their extended families. Our food pantry will feed over 80,000 people. In addition, since late August, Cena Comunitaria (Thursday night dinner) has provided a nourishing meal to over 1,000 members of our community. Seven students received \$1,000 scholarships to attend college, and 41 kids experienced the joy of attending Cedarkirk Camp. One hundred children began the school year in new shoes, and Beth-El distributed over 300 backpacks.

Almost 40 years later and Beth-El's mission has remained constant: to be a source of support and encouragement in the name of Christ. Yet, while we continue to make strides, there is still much more that needs to be done. While our campus is brimming with nearly 300 children attending school at RCMA, the

High School drop out rate remains especially high within the Hispanic community. Therefore, Beth-EI remains actively engaged with other community partners to work on tangible ways to keep kids healthy and in school.

Though our food pantry feeds over 80,000 people a year, there are many weeks when our shelves are practically bare. Beth-EI's hope is to not only provide a consistent source of food items, but to begin to introduce fresh produce into our weekly supply along with healthy recipes through our "What's in the Bag" program, where everything that is needed to cook a tasty and nutritious meal is in the recipient's grocery bag.

All of what Beth-EI does is through God's grace and the interconnectedness we share as the body of Christ. Without the love and financial support of the church and our mission partners, Beth-EI would cease to exist. We simply cannot do all we do without you!

Seasons are a bit more subtle here in Florida, but just the other day Javier came into my office asking to borrow one of the pictures on my shelf. It was the picture of the first graduating class from RCMA Academy (2003). He explained that one of the students pictured was in his office. She now works for Suncoast Health Care systems. Of that class of sixteen 8th graders, most have remained in the community, one has passed away, but to the best of our knowledge none have followed their parents into the fields.

I am grateful for the legacy I have inherited from those early leaders



who dared to dream beyond the vision of a carport, and hopeful that Beth-El will continue to make strides against poverty, illiteracy and hunger in the year's ahead—always in the name of Christ.

Dios le bendiga,



Kathleen Dain
Executive Director

Adopt a Family

The Adopt a family program has been a blessing for families that otherwise wouldn't be able to afford a meaningful gift for their children and even



less for themselves. Let me share the story of Rosaura, who is the head of her household.

Rosaura is a magnificent person of about 66 years of age, one of her most cherished dreams was that her daughter Lourdes would finish high school and eventually graduate from college, but instead Lourdes began having children at a young age. Disappointments with her emotional life had led her to lose control of her own life. Rosaura had taken full responsibility of raising three grandchildren, as a matter of fact I have seen them calling her mom instead of grandma.

Rosaura receives \$600 a month from her social security and other benefits that come her way from the State of Florida's Department of Children and Families. At Christmas time, Rosaura gets anxious because the wish list of her grandchildren for Christmas are out of her reach. Last year thanks to the Adopt a Family Program, her grandchildren received the things that they wished for and Rosaura also got a wonderful gift that made a memorable Christmas for her entire household.

Although Rosaura didn't meet and perhaps never will meet her adoptee, I know that she and her grandchildren prayed to God that those who benefited them will be blessed abundantly. On behalf of the families that were benefited on 2014, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and invite Sister Churches or individuals to Adopt a Family for the 2015 Christmas celebration. As soon as I hear from you, you will receive the names, ages, and suggested gift for each family member.

Gracias!

Pastor Walter F. Chuquimia

Beth-El Library Dedication

A few months ago, Javier, Pastor Walter, and I started talking about the possibility of opening a community library at Beth El. Our dream is becoming a reality! The room, located in the main building, is almost ready and we are now stocking the shelves with new and gently-used books. The library will serve all ages, including early childhood and adults. There is even a special section for Spanish speakers.



So many have helped along the way: Kathy Dain, Director, for supporting our project, Ally Davis from Usborne Books, David Childs, Perry Searcy and his work crew from First Presbyterian Church of Brandon, and the countless adults and children who have helped us sort through hundreds of books.....thanks to all of you!

The dedication of the Beth El Community Library will be held on Sunday, November 22, 2015, following our 11:00a.m. church service. Anyone interested is invited to attend.

Emma Ortega

Donofry



Cena Comunitaria

Thursdays 5pm to 7pm

Since beginning in late August, Beth-El volunteers have served over a thousand meals to farm workers and families of our community. It takes about 5 to 6 volunteers to help prepare and serve the meal. If your church or group would like to volunteer, please call Rosalva at 813-633-1548 ext. 231. ¡Gracias!

Be Sure to Visit Our New Website
at www.beth-el.org

Beth-El
Farmworker Ministry, Inc.

Fueled by Volunteers and Your Faithful Prayers and Support

Our mailing address is:
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Beth-El Farmworker Ministry is open Monday through Thursday from 8a.m. to 5p.m., or by special appointment.
We are closed from noon until 1p.m. for lunch.

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