

Beth-El

Farmworker Ministry, Inc.



Investing in the Future

Many of us begin the new year with dreams of how we will do things differently and better in the coming year. At Beth-El we are hard at work turning some of those dreams into reality.

Wonderful things are at work on our campus. January brought new partnerships with Feeding America and a Sarasota area foundation. Thanks to these affiliations, Beth-El now receives a large shipment of rice, beans, and fresh produce for our food pantry. Of course canned goods are always needed, but this new avenue for food products is a real blessing for our farm working community.

Another one of our dreams has been to replace our old, run down, warehouse with a new, larger facility. Thanks to several grants from mission partners including Matthew 25 Ministries and The Church of the Palms of Sarasota, construction work has begun. We anticipate that by late spring the new warehouse will be completed. This new space will not only greatly help our ministry, but it will also provide an added benefit as a distribution site for other area non-profits in need of products and goods to promote their ministry.

But perhaps our greatest investment for the future comes by way of our support for the children of farm workers. The calendar has hardly turned to February, and already the mission is busy making plans for summer youth activities like Vacation Bible School and summer camp at Cedarkirk. Still, one of our biggest dreams is to more than double our ability to provide scholarships for teens and young adults working toward their GED or college degree.

So, dreams can come true, but our greatest wish and prayer remains with our farm workers and their families. The warm fall and wet winter has made harvesting the crops more difficult. Strawberries are smaller, which means it takes more berries to fill a flat. The winter storms have reduced the days the farm workers can go out and pick, and if you are not picking then you are not being paid. This time of year unless the storms are particularly fierce, farm workers are out in the fields 7 days a week rain or shine. Please keep these workers in your prayers, and Beth-El, as we continue to turn dreams into reality.

Dios le bendiga,

Handwritten signature of Kathy in blue ink.

Kathleen Dain
Executive Director



Moving Forward by Degrees~



Beth-El Farmworker Ministry helps scholarship ¾ of the students attending Adult Educations classes. Classes include GED and English as a secondary language. There are students across the board from different areas from as far away as Apollo Beach, Gibsonton, and Riverview. Adult classes are a beam of hope for individuals that need to finish their secondary education or learn English. Individuals from various ethnicities benefit from the classes offered at Beth-El Adult Education. I can say from experience that it

opens a door to many wonderful things. I attended Adult Education classes to obtain a GED. By having obtained my GED I was able to work for the State of Florida for nine years before moving on to my dream job at Beth-El, where I have been for eight years now.



I am currently enrolled at HCC where I work toward my Associates Degree in Liberal Arts. Last December I was inducted into the International Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. All of my accomplishments would not have been possible without adult education classes.

Rosalva

Rosalva Serrano
Executive Assistant



BETH-EL ON THE ROAD

We love visiting churches and other organizations to share all the exciting things happening at Beth-El. Here's where we will be this month:

February 7th

Kathy @ Kirkwood, Bradenton

February 20th

Kathy @ St. Andrew's Dunedin
Presbyterian Women

February 21st

Kathy @ Roser CC, Anna Maria



In the early hours of January 21st, thieves broke into our campus. They vandalized our van, and stole our bus. The van is still out for repairs, while the bus has been deemed a total loss. This has been a great hardship for the mission. The van is used almost every day, while the church depends on the bus for transporting its members and youth to worship.

Javier @ Sun City Center Food Drive

February 28th

Kathy @ Buckingham, Ft. Myers

Javier @ Siesta Key Chapel

Walter @ Palma Ceia



If you would like a member of our staff to visit your organization, please call us at 813-633-1548, or email Kathy at Kathy@beth-el.org!

If your church or organization knows where we might be able to find a replacement for our 15 passenger bus, please call either Kathy or Javier at 813-633-1548.



We have regular volunteer opportunities every week at Beth-El. Every other Monday, volunteers help sort and pack rice and beans for the weekly food pantry. On Tuesdays, numerous volunteers are needed to help out in the food distribution program. Wednesday and Thursday's are re-packing days to prepare for the following week's distribution.

Thursday night is our weekly community dinner. If none of those opportunities fit your schedule then give Javier a call at 813-633-1548 ext. 228. He has a whole list of special projects that can be customized to fit your schedule.



I would like to become more involved at Beth-El Mission as a Volunteer:

- Community Dinner
- Food Pantry
- Conduct Vacation Bible School
- Organize a Workgroup
- Organize a Food Drive
- Organize a Clothing Drive

I would like to donate \$ _____

- Summer Camp Scholarships
- Back to School Program
- VBS Supplies
- College Scholarships
- Music Lessons for Youth
- Food Pantry
- Mission's Greatest Need

This particular Thursday at Beth-El was different from all others for the Beth-El Board of Directors. There would be no committee reports, motions, and other “business,” as customary. Instead, the board members came in with boxes filled with food, rolled up their sleeves and began to cook a feast! Each member, joyfully chopping, stirring, and perfecting their portion of the meal, for their guests of honor. There was no Presbytery meetings on the calendars. Therefore, who could these guests possibly be? And why such a fuss?



“They’re here, they’ve arrived,” said one of the board members excitedly. The buses drove up, and over 130 men entered, one by one, shaking each of the board members hands, and thanking us for inviting them. They wore their Sunday’s best: worn, white collared shirt, and dark pants.



Their hands roughened by their labor, their skin bronzed by the sun from dusk to dawn. They are mostly young men, between 18-30 years of age, representing various states of Mexico: Jalisco, Chiapas, Veracruz. Lands rich in history and tradition, but currently torn by violence. They come from all walks of life. Some were carpenters, taxi cab drivers, others have worked the fields from childhood. Most of them have had to leave their hometowns in search of work, and fleeing violence. The one

thing they have in common is that they all leave behind either their mothers, wives, and children, in essence, everything they know and cherish. But, they consider themselves to be the “blessed” ones, able to work a hard day’s labor in order to provide for their families.

Some have never worked in the fields, but Mother earth is part of their folklore, their medicine, their history. Dinner is ready, and so we invite them to pray. They stand for the invocation, heads humbly bowed before GOD in thanksgiving. After prayer, board members eagerly serve each guest, table after table. As they eat, board members “break bread” with them. We learn about their families: Carlos shares a photo of his six month baby boy, and wife Sofia. He nervously confesses that he is counting the days to see his first born, because he is worried about the violence in his town. We practice our Spanish, and they, their English. Before long, laughter fills the room. The evening draws to an end, and they graciously thank us for a homemade meal, our hospitality, and the various items the community has donated to them as



they pack the old, weathered school buses.

Tomorrow, while most of us sleep, or drink our coffee and read the morning paper, they will be harvesting mother earth for her strawberries. And when strawberry season is over, they will follow the crops to other states where they will pick other crops such as blueberries, pickles, and melons, to name a few. Some will return next year, if they are lucky, but others will certainly not. Regardless of whether our paths cross again--today, we the board

members of Beth-El put the reports and Robert's Rules of Order aside, and served a meal to our brothers; we exchanged a word and laughter, as we sat at the table of the Lord, partaking of HIS bounty, ALL equal in HIS eyes. As our Lord Jesus Christ said: *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.* [Hebrews 13:2]

Ofelia Uribe

Peace Presbyterian Church

Beth-El
Farmworker Ministry, Inc.
Cena Comunitaria
Los Jueves de 5pm a 7pm

"To shake hands with 100+ farm workers who have given up their family

and friends to travel to a foreign country to have a shot at a more normal life. It is sobering to think about how bad the conditions must be in their home land to make that their best option."

That was the impression left with Beth-El Board Member, Don Olson, of Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church after he and other board members gathered together to prepare and serve a community dinner for our farm working community. Board member David Childs and spouse, Carrie, organized and recruited members for the evening's festivities. "It was great fun," added board president, Sue Rice, of Hope Presbyterian of Valrico. "Everyone seemed to have a good time--farm workers and volunteers alike."



Has your group volunteered, to help with our community dinner?

We now have dates open for March and April to help prepare and serve a Thursday

night meal to our farm working community.
Those who have participated say it is one of the most rewarding experiences they
have ever had. Find out for yourself,
Call Beth-El today at 813-633-1548.



Spring Open House
Sunday April 17th, 2 - 5pm

Come and see all the new and
exciting things Beth-El is working
on to better assist the farm
working community.



We look forward to welcoming the Presbytery
of Tampa Bay to the Beth-El campus on
February 27th.

Support Beth-El Mission with your online contribution today.



Please Note!

Our email addresses are changing from .info to .org
Please update your address book accordingly.

Beth-El
Farmworker Ministry, Inc.

Fueled by Volunteers and Your Faithful Prayers and Support

Our mailing address is:
18240 Highway 301 South
PO Box 860
Wimauma, FL 33598-0860
Phone: 813-633-1548
Email: info@beth-el.org
Web: www.beth-el.org



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.

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



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