

Our Faith on the Road

by Veronica Rodriguez



Migrant farmworkers come to our diocese every summer to work in the crop fields such as asparagus, strawberries, blueberries and many others. There are a total of approximately 300 camps in the nine counties of the Diocese of Kalamazoo. Although migrant farmworkers arrive in all nine counties, the vast majority arrive in Allegan, Berrien and Van Buren counties. These counties are the ones closest to the lake and where most crops are grown.

We have had the great privilege that, since the beginning of our diocese, the mission has been to accompany the farmworkers during the summer so that they know that the Diocese of Kalamazoo is here to support them in whatever they need and that they are not alone. It doesn't matter if they are Catholic or not, our mission is to accompany and support them.

Every summer, through the Office of Hispanic Ministry, priests and religious sisters are brought to strengthen this ministry of accompaniment and to visit each of these 300 camps. In addition to the diocesan group, several parishes have volunteer groups who also visit the camps. Visits are made once a week.

The visits are no more than an hour, so as not to extend the already-long workday and are simply meant to offer a little conversation and allow volunteers from the diocese to get to know the families and the men who have come to our diocese. These conversations are very enriching, and several of the volunteers have expressed that many times one learns and receives more than what we offer.

It is a time to meet Jesus in the midst of each one of our migrant brothers and sisters who, with all their difficulties, great fatigue and sometimes shortcomings, are the happiest and most grateful people with God. This is where, through such a small action, our faith, and the mission that God has entrusted to us to accompany, evangelize and be evangelized is strengthened. A simple game to pass the time, some reading or Bible talk, or simply being there to listen has a greater impact than one can imagine.

I invite you to not take a vacation from your faith, but rather, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, wherever we are, to be open to meeting that stranger who, by walking and accompanying us, strengthens our faith.

May almighty God guide and grant the necessary words to each of the persons who will be visiting and accompanying our migrant brothers and sisters.

BECOME A MISIONARY IN YOUR OWN HOME

Many times you think that being a missionary involves traveling to a different country, but what if you were a missionary in your own country or, better yet, in your own diocese? And what does migrant ministry entail? Games, readings, Bible studies and more are provided for adults, children and youth, or the opportunity to just simply be present, listening to the people. The visits are done once a week and last about an hour.

