

Hartville Migrant Ministry Palm Sunday Mission

Good morning! My name is Donna Benzing. I have been a member of Faith church for over 20 years and have most recently been involved with our Welcoming the Stranger ministry. In the past, we have provided summer lunches for refugee and local children in Akron's North Hill immigrant community, conducted book studies to educate and inform the congregation about immigration and explore what it really means Biblically to welcome the stranger, and started the Common Table as a safe and fun way to meet people from other cultures and share a meal together. Next Sunday, Sima Arshadi from Iran will be cooking for us and sharing her journey of how she came to Akron.

Last year, we partnered with the Hartville Migrant Ministry Center to help provide supplies for their Welcome Bags. This Ministry formed more than 60 years ago to assist seasonal pickers, which were and still are one of the most highly exploited groups of people. It is one of the few remaining Christian based programs of this kind in the United States and we should be proud to have them in our community.

Every year, from May to October, over 350 men and women arrive with their families from various states, and countries (mostly Mexico and Jamaica) to work in the Hartville area farms. Most of the green onions, cilantro, parsley, radishes and lettuces you'll see in the local grocery stores are a result of the work that these temporary farm workers have provided. The majority reside in dormitory style housing provided by the farms. They are required to have new bedding. The Migrant Ministry provides each person with a welcome bag that includes sheets, towels, blankets, toiletry items, cleaning products and a pillow when they arrive. They are funded through grants and donations from local churches. Throughout the growing season, they also provide onsite medical care, adult education classes such as ESL and citizenship, Vacation bible school and summer programs for migrant children. The medical care is probably the biggest service since a lot of the workers don't have transportation. Physical therapy is a big need as you could imagine after spending 8 hours a day bending over and just the repetitive nature of picking. The workers are paid a fair wage as required by the H-2A seasonal agriculture visa. As a result, you'll see the same families coming back every year. And then you'll see their kids coming back. It's a tight knit community, very family oriented and proud of their ability to do hard work. When you talk to them, they say there is nothing like the Migrant Ministry in the other communities and states where they work.



On Palm Sunday, April 14, which is two weeks from now, we are encouraging the congregation to

once again consider donating towels (washcloths, hand and bath towels), sheets (twin through queen), blankets and pillows. In addition to the items for the migrant center, we are also collecting new and gently used coats for Faith Kitchen and Community Christmas. The items should be placed at the end of the pews in the sanctuary or the rows of chairs in the Family Life Center. During the Palm Parade, the children will be collecting the items and bringing them to the altar for dedication. We do this to remember



how the Israelites welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem by laying their best garments on the ground as he rode into town on a donkey, a symbol of peace.



Finally, we will be assembling the Welcome bags on Wednesday, April 24th as part of the Wednesday Night faith connections spring mission project. Lists for additional items needed will be available in the Navigator. All are welcome to join us as we continue Jesus' work of peace through justice.