

## MINISTRY WITH MIGRANT WORKERS

In 1968, a young man was desperately looking for help to cope with his brother's illness. Lack of medical insurance and limited income from migrant labor made the situation unbearable. Then he met Reverend Rafael de Armas, minister to migrant workers and their families in Terrine, Fla. De Armas became "a friend in need" to the young fellow and his family.

On October 20, 1968, the young man



surrendered his life to the Lord. Later, God called him from the agricultural fields to full

time work in the Lord's harvest. God also provided him with opportunities to complete his formal education. The young man responded, and with time he became an outstanding denominational leader in Southern Baptist life. He is Miguel de la Cruz, NAMB's missionary and director of Migrant Ministries for Florida. How differently his life might have turned out if a Christian had not been there at a crucial time to witness through loving ministry.

### WHO ARE MIGRANT WORKERS?

It is a myth that most migrant workers are "undocumented people coming from Mexico." New immigration laws make it almost impossible for undocumented people to work in the United States. Therefore, most migrant families are U.S. citizens willing to work for low wages. Boyd Little, of William A. Little and Sons, growers based in Alabama, said: "The migrant folks that come in and help us are all-American citizens who were born and raised in south Texas."

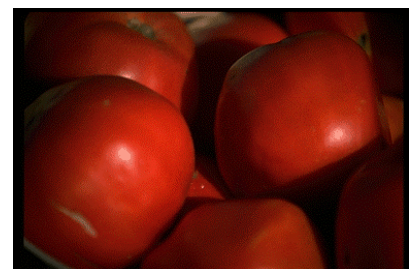
Thousands of migrant or seasonal workers crisscross the United States each year to work in the fields. They also work in canneries, packing houses, and processing facilities. They may be Anglo, African-American, Hispanic, Haitian, or any other ethno-cultural background. There are both single adults and families working long hours at low wages, with few or no benefits. Says Mr. Little: "Without doubt they are the hardest working people we know."

Some migrants are already Christians; they need fellowship, nurturing, and Christian growth. Many migrants have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ in a meaningful way. Migrant ministry is a way for them to hear that good news in a context of love and acceptance.

### WHAT IS A MIGRANT MINISTRY?

A migrant ministry is any ministry which targets some aspect of migrant needs—physical, social, educational, as well as spiritual. Keep in mind that most successful ministries allow for mutuality. In these ministries, migrant people are not only the recipients of gifts, but they also contribute to the ministry.

These exchanges are possible when the sponsoring church or



group approaches the ministry with an open mind and a non-paternalistic attitude. Recipe exchanges, joint cookouts, use of migrant leaders in worship services, and an exchange of language teaching are just a few examples of mutuality. Handouts may be good door openers, but as elements for maintaining a

ministry these may create dependency at best, or become dehumanizing at worst.



Remember, when ministering to migrants, men, women, and children may have different needs. When designing your

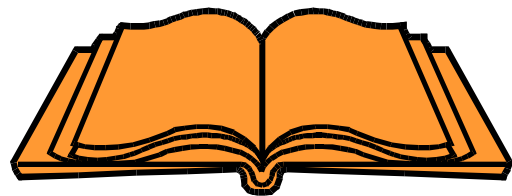
ministry, do not overlook any of these groups.

### Ideas

1. *Assistance with legal issues.* Do not dispense legal advice unless you or someone in your ministry is a lawyer. Refer migrants to a Christian legal aid service if one is available. Also, work with public legal aid agencies or secure a lawyer willing to work *pro bono*. Other ways to assist with legal issues are filling out paperwork, driving the migrant to appointments, or going with them to court to show friendship and support.
2. *Health ministries.* Health ministries can range from driving a migrant to a doctor's appointment to setting up a medical or dental clinic for migrants. Again, unless you or someone in your ministry is a healthcare professional, do not dispense medical advice. Instead, help the person to obtain the best medical care possible. Hygiene kits help the migrant maintain good health. Be careful, however, in the way you give such kits. You want the kit to be seen as a loving gesture, not an insinuation that the migrant is unclean. Lotion, sunscreen, lip balm, cologne, and new combs and hairbrushes make the kits a

little more like gifts. Kits for girls could include hair ribbons, ponytail holders, and small mirrors.

3. *Literacy ministries.* What type of literacy ministry you have depends on whether English is the heart language of your migrant group. This tool kit contains ministry action plans for adult reading and writing, as well as English as a second language.
4. *Backyard Bible Clubs.* This is a Bible-based activity for children. Curriculum is available from LifeWay Christian Resources.
5. *Food distribution.* It is a tragic fact that many of the people who harvest America's food go hungry themselves. A food distribution ministry that includes non-food items like paper products and hygiene items can be a great blessing, if done correctly. Make it the opening of your relationship to the migrant community, but not the limit of your relationship with them.
6. *Mentoring for school children.* You can provide school supplies or transportation



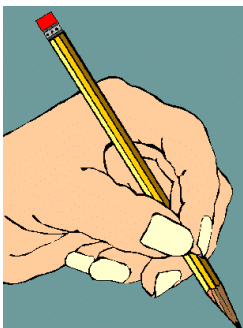
to school. You could have parents from your congregation go with migrant parents as they enroll their children in school. Be aware, that migrant children often have to babysit younger siblings so parents can work. This leaves little time for schoolwork. Frequent moves to different regions makes it difficult for migrant children to get a consistent education. Sensitivity in this area will

make your mentoring ministry more effective.

7. *Fellowships.* Get-togethers offer migrants and church members a chance to meet. At first, you may find a location other than the church to work best, as some migrants may be intimidated by a church setting. Some fellowships could be just for the migrants with church members hosting. Or, if there is an existing church mission or congregation of migrants in your area, you could arrange a fellowship between them and your migrant group. This would allow the migrants to meet Christians from their own people group in a low stress setting.
8. *Sunday ministry.* You should offer migrants the opportunity to attend your worship services and Sunday School. They may do so and become members of your congregation. For those migrants who are unable or uncomfortable with the idea of attending a church, bring worship services to them. Besides a regular Sunday ministry, you could also bring special events, such as your Easter drama or a living nativity scene to the migrant community.

## HOW DO WE PLAN A MIGRANT MINISTRY?

Before you begin in-depth planning, decide if there is a real need. Most likely, it is the visible presence of migrant workers in your area that will motivate you to start a migrant ministry in your church. Or, perhaps you were surprised during your community needs



assessment to discover a migrant population in your locale.

Either way, this ministry begins with the pastor's understanding and support. If you are not the pastor, talk to the pastor about your vision. Recruit prayer partners and pray for God's guidance. Review what chapter one says about the importance of prayer in launching a ministry evangelism effort.

Then, take the following steps:

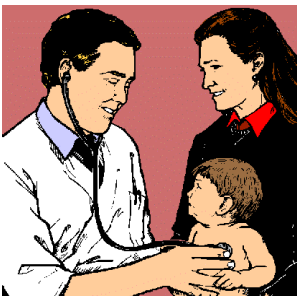
*Acquire basic knowledge.*

- Visit the migrant and seasonal workers' office in your county, or the county agricultural extension agent to find out the ethno-cultural characteristics of the migrant workers in your area.
- If the same type of migrant workers travel throughout your state, contact leaders of other ministry evangelism efforts with migrants in other counties. Ask for their feedback on what the migrants are like and what they need.
- Identify agricultural growers in your area who are Christians. Talk to them about your project. Approach non-Christian growers with professionalism and conviction.
- The crew chief is an important person in migrant life. He is usually a migrant himself and is responsible for the other workers. He knows the workers well, and it is his job to keep work smooth and productive. The crew chief has the trust of the grower, and more power than an ordinary work foreman. Identify migrant crew chiefs and learn about basic needs experienced by migrant workers in the camp.

With all the people you meet, make it clear that your intention is to serve the migrants in a Christlike way, not to disrupt their work. The crew chief, as well or perhaps even more than the grower, will likely thwart any efforts that he feels cuts down on the workers' efficiency.

*Identify resources.* Resources and planning have a circular relationship. If you plan your ministry down to the last detail and then start looking for resources, you may be disappointed to find the resources you need are not available. But, if you base your ministry on resources, you will spend a lot of time looking for resources you may or may not use, and you could limit your ministry. So what can you do? Prayerfully decide the main focus of your ministry. (Many people have found it helps to start small and work up to a more encompassing ministry as they gain experience and credibility.) Then, look for resources that specifically support your main focus. For example, if your ministry is tutoring migrant children and youth, you should look for resources that would help in this area rather than spending the bulk of your time looking for medical or legal resources.

- Consider resources available at your church, association, or state convention office. These could include, but not be limited to, personnel, space, transportation, materials, and funds.
- Identify medical, educational, and cultural resources in your county



available to migrant families. Again, your community needs assessment will be a

big help. These resources could include free clinics, G.E.D. programs, public libraries, and museums. If English is not the primary language of your migrant group, look for resources available in their heart language.

## HOW DO WE BEGIN A MIGRANT MINISTRY?

At this point, you have prayerfully assessed the need, decided what focus your ministry will take, and begun the process of gathering resources. Consider the following steps as you begin the ministry.



### *Publicity*

- Flyers in English and any other language spoken by migrants. Place them in restaurants and stores frequented by seasonal workers.
- Public service announcements using local TV, radio, and newspaper outlets.
- Mail information to growers and community agencies that work with the migrant population.
- Briefly visit with crew chiefs and growers. These are not the same visits you did when gathering information in the planning stages. This visit is to publicize details of the ministry.
- All publicity should include time, date, and location of ministry; what will be offered; who is eligible (children, adults, elderly); and who is sponsoring the ministry.

### *Record keeping*

While sheer numbers are not a reflection on the quality of your ministry, these are important to the evaluation process. See the section below on evaluating your ministry. Use the questions listed as the basis for your record keeping.

### *Volunteers*

As the ministry progresses, look and listen for clues as to what kind of training volunteers need. They might express a need for more witnessing training or a better knowledge of how to refer migrants to other helping agencies. Periodically, you should acknowledge the efforts of volunteers.

## **WHAT SOURCES OF HELP ARE AVAILABLE?**

Many sources of help are available for meeting the needs of your migrant ministry. For outreach materials in the predominant language of the migrant group, check the catalogs of LifeWay Christian Resources, North American Mission Board, and Woman's Missionary Union. Also, check these catalogs for resources in understanding the dominant religion and culture of the people groups comprising your migrant population, as well as witnessing helps.

You may wish to order Bibles and Scripture portions in the migrants' dominant language. The American Bible Society offers a wide range of Bibles and Scripture portions in English and various other languages.

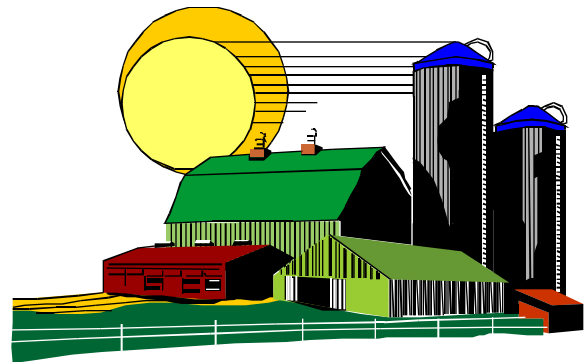
Of course, you have more sources of help than books, magazines, and videos. Check with the director of evangelism ministries at your associational and state Baptist convention office. The Church and Community Ministries Evangelism Unit at the North American Mission Board also

stands ready to help you in your ministry evangelism efforts.

## **HOW DO WE EVALUATE OUR MIGRANT MINISTRY?**

At the end of the working season, answer the following questions and present answers to your church. This will ensure the type of continued support the congregation would like to give you for future efforts. Use the following evaluation questions.

1. How many individual migrant contacts were made during this season?
2. How many professions of faith? Baptisms? Referrals to other churches?
3. How many volunteers from the church were involved? How many from other churches?
4. What is the general attitude of the congregation to migrant ministry? Were migrant workers welcomed if they visited the church?
5. Were ministry resources sufficient?
6. Is it feasible to continue this ministry?



# COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## DISCOVERING MINISTRY POSSIBILITIES IN YOUR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY **Migrant Ministries**

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"Need is the trigger which activates God's call to minister if we have the heart to hear and respond."  
Albert L. Meiburg, Called to Minister

The involvement of church leaders makes this community needs assessment unique and practical. By appointment and in teams of two, volunteers visit business people, local agencies, organizations, and community leaders who are in contact with migrant workers. The assessment focuses on unmet needs of these migrant workers and their families.

### **Purpose of Assessment**

1. To learn about migrant ministry opportunities
2. To assess community problems and unmet needs
3. To establish relationships with community agencies and organizations
4. To determine how Christians and churches can become involved in migrant ministry

### **Participants in Assessment**

1. Church and/or associational staff
2. Missions Development Council members - especially the survey director
3. Other volunteers

### **Target Agencies/Individuals for Interviews:**

- Farm owners/operators
- Industrialists (Example: poultry industries)
- Head Start Programs
- Police precincts
- Sheriff departments
- Fire departments
- Salvation Army
- Habitat for Humanity
- Human services departments
- Public health departments
- Counseling services
- Alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs
- Food banks
- Community cooperative ministries
- Food pantries/soup kitchens
- Shelters
- Vocational rehabilitation services
- School counselors
- Civil/criminal court administrators
- Chaplains
- Jail and prison administrators
- Housing project managers/resident council presidents
- Multihousing community managers
- City mayors/managers
- City council/county commission members
- Hospital administrators/chaplains

# PRELIMINARY SURVEY

## *Migrant Ministries*

The purpose of this survey is to help you identify and locate agricultural businesses and/or industries utilizing migrant workers. First, identify and contact community people who are familiar with farmers/industrialists. Second, decide whether to do a simple phone call or a personal interview. Phone calls are expeditious at the expense of a personal touch; personal interviews set the stage for future networking efforts, but could be time consuming. Whichever your preference is, introduce yourself using your church's name, be brief, speak clearly without rushing. For example:

*Our church is interested in ministering to the needs of migrant workers in our community. We are trying to locate and contact farmers or industrialists who employ migrant labor in their business. Do you know any of these farmers or industrialists? [If yes] Would you share their names with us? All we want is to secure their permission to visit their migrant camps.*

1. Informant's name, address, and telephone number:

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2. Farmer/Industrialist

*Name*

*Address and Phone*

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3. Would you be willing to introduce us to these people?

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4. Notes

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