

## 2020 TRANSFORMATIONAL GRANT—Support during the pandemic

Albion First Presbyterian Church \$1,000

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Albion First Presbyterian Church received their grant to assist with our ESL classes. These classes provided instruction in English as a Second Language to agricultural workers in the Albion area. Some of these students are permanent residents and some are seasonal workers. Tutoring is provided through BOCES instructors and volunteers. While student numbers are lower during the off season, our classes grow to 24+ students during the summer and into fall. Instructional levels range from teaching the alphabet to workers never had the opportunity to attend school to some of our students “graduating” from the ESL program to GED preparation.

Meals are provided to students and facilitators during each class so workers can come right from work without having to prepare and eat beforehand. One of the major goals of the class is to help farmer worker feel welcomed in our community. Sharing a meal has been more successful than imagined in accomplishing this goal. Mealtime provides an informal setting to practice speaking in English and get to know each other better. We have learned about the students’ homes and families, sharing personal pictures and stories. Some of our students have been attending for 4 years and we have become friends beyond the classroom.



*Wendy Kirby and Santiago*



*ESL class in dining room*



*ESL dinner*

This past year was challenging for everyone and providing a traditional classroom setting was not possible due to COVID restrictions. We kept in touch with our students in many creative ways. We purchased and collected donations of household items for new seasonal workers. Some of the year-round workers helped with outfitting the living quarters. These items will remain in the housing units for use in future years. The newly arriving workers felt welcomed into our community. Learning materials were delivered to the workers over the spring and summer and outdoor tutoring sessions were held by volunteers to supplement ZOOM lessons offered by BOCES staff. Easter baskets with Bible story books helped students practice reading in English. Visits continued throughout the summer to help with lessons, bring cookies and other treats and distribute food boxes.

One of the unexpected outcomes of this project has been the awareness of the limited opportunities children in rural areas of Mexico have to attend school. Families must provide transportation, school supplies, books, and mandated uniforms for their children. Many families cannot afford to send their children to school. We have seen first-hand, adult workers who are illiterate in their native language coming to our classes for help. Differentiated lessons are offered to address the wide range of student education levels. It has been very humbling and exciting to see a man in his 20s get excited because he can read the letters on a coworker’s T-shirt.



*Group with backpacks*

In response to this need, my family has established “Ben’s Backpacks” to honor the life of our youngest son who we lost in a car accident. Ben’s Backpacks has partnered with a school in rural Oaxaca Mexico to provide needed support for children to receive an education. Over the past 3+ years, we have purchased backpacks full of school supplies and school uniforms for over 100 children. We hope to expand our program to help provide school lunches, recreational opportunities, and access to computer literacy in the future.

Our Church has enthusiastically supported Ben's Backpacks. We have started a monthly donation opportunity that has been extremely successful and very much appreciated. We look forward to expanding awareness and fundraising efforts as our world opens back up post pandemic.

We never know what God is going to put in front of us and how He will use us to accomplish His work. Looking forward to see where God will lead us this year with our ESL classes here in Albion and our work in the world.



Respectfully submitted,

*Wendy Kirby*

First Presbyterian Church of Albion

*New uniforms*

