

Ministry in Virginia's Apple Country Plants Hope for Migrant Workers

Some international laborers who come to the state seeking jobs end up finding Jesus after visiting Harvesters of Hope

On a hillside amid the apple orchards of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley sits Bunkhouse 13, a cinder block building that overlooks a migrant farmer's camp. Hanging over the door to the whitewashed building is a sign that reads "Haven of Hope Center."

Inside, dust-covered lightbulbs struggle to keep the room lit as six migrant workers sit on overturned lockers waiting for the evening service to begin. One of the workers flips through his Bible, reading verses at random. Another studies a tract and nudges his friend, pointing to a picture in the thin pamphlet. The friend smiles.

As the minutes pass, more workers file into the makeshift sanctuary, and extra lockers are brought in to accommodate the crowd.

Just after 7 p.m., those gathered stand and begin praising God with the volunteer worship team. As the presence of the Lord fills the dusty room so do more workers.

Within 30 minutes the room is packed. Standing side by side with arms outstretched, Jama

worship together.

"May the Spirit of the Lord move upon this place!" shouts one worker in Spanish.

Responses in Spanish, English and French ascend in unison. The singing subsides, then begins anew. The service is the fruit of Harvesters of Hope, a ministry to migrant workers started in 1997 by Daniel Hesse Jr., an Assemblies of God minister, and his wife, Sheryl.

"Our work is to reach these people while they are here in the United States," Hesse told Charisma. "These are some of the people that are closest to the heart of God."

Most of the 600 workers in the camp have traveled to America from Mexico, Haiti and Jamaica. They spend two to four months harvesting crops for about \$70 a day. Hesse says that is more than most of them can make in a month in their home countries.

"In Jamaica there is not enough work for the people," says Colin Waisome, a veteran migrant worker from Jamaica. "A lot of us come to America so that our families will be better off. We work, save and go back to our families. The money is a great help."

Lonely and away from family, many workers find that spending money is as easy as making it in America. Some waste

Since Harvesters of Hope arrived many of the migrant workers say things are changing for the better. "The Spirit of God is moving upon this place," said one worker.

An hour before the service started, the Hesses canvassed the camp, shaking hands and inviting workers to the service. As they approached a picnic table where a group of Haitians were playing dominoes, the men looked at them suspiciously until Daniel, speaking in his best French, invited them to the service. Most of

the men smiled and nodded, and one man walked over to Daniel and engaged him in a conversation about the Lord. As the Hesses turned to leave, two of the men promised to attend the service.

As they do each night, the Hesses greeted workers as they came to Bunkhouse 13. When Uriah Clayton, a Jamaican, approached, Sheryl handed him an \$8 pair of reading glasses.

"This is more than a gift," Uriah told Sheryl as tears welled up in his eyes. "Now I can read my Bible."

Since 1997, the Hesses have seen almost 700 workers give their lives to Christ and have given away more than 1,000 English, Spanish and French Bibles in camps like this one.

baptism in the Holy Spirit. A few workers came forward to receive, but none were filled. However, a few days later one of the workers was filled with the Holy Spirit while riding in the bus to the orchards.

“I just don’t know what we would have done without the power of the Holy Spirit,” Hesse said. “These are the people that need to fill the Father’s house.”

When Waisome, the Jamaican worker, came to the camp in 1985, there were only a few workers who would gather for corporate devotions, he said. But since the arrival of Harvesters of Hope, many workers are coming into a real, enduring relationship with the Lord.

“When I go to the prayer meetings at night I feel the presence of God,” he said. “[Harvesters of Hope] let me realize that God is not only in Jamaica. He is here and everywhere.”