

The First Presbyterian Church of Albion began offering English classes to farm workers with the goal of helping the Hispanic population better integrate with our community. Our children are friends through school, sports, etc. But the parents do not seem comfortable joining in groups together. Our idea was to provide activities to bring the adults together. Sharing dinner has been a great success. Meals are provided by Church members each night of class. We have had several “cooking lessons”, some when the students teach us how to prepare Mexican dishes and some where we demonstrate how to cook American foods that the students have requested. I have learned that red means hot and green means hotter when tasting foods the students have prepared. The classes have taken on a social feel due to sharing a meal and the idea of us/them no longer applies during class. I don’t know who has benefitted more from this program, the students or our congregation. We share our cultures to teach each other about things that are different but have discovered so many similarities. Our Church dining room is full of conversations, laughter, and growing friendships.

Classes are held Tuesday and Thursday nights from 5:30 – 8:30 during the growing season when we have up to 18 students. When our seasonal workers return to their homes and families, we meet once a week or even every other week depending on student schedules. We hope to have a Welcome Event when workers return in March and have had a Good-Bye party at the end of the harvest season. Students have been given Bibles at the party each November. Students were invited to attend our Christmas concert and tickets were available to them free of charge.

BOCES provides a tutor for the classes. Our relationship with the Orleans-Niagara BOCES has been extended to hosting afternoon GED classes in our Fellowship hall. Some of our students will be ready to move from ESL to GED soon. We are becoming an “Education Church”, transforming one of our Sunday School rooms into an adult classroom.

A mission project has come from our relationship with the students, many of whom come from the Oaxaca region of Mexico. Although the government of Mexico provides free elementary and lower high school (middle school) education, students must provide their own transportation, uniforms, school supplies, and even textbooks. Oaxaca is one of the poorest areas of Mexico and many families cannot afford to purchase the required school materials. Our congregation donated \$600 to purchase school supplies for over 25 children. Another \$200 was donated at Christmastime.