

From our Executive Director, Bill O'Brien:

Building Partnerships Across Michigan: We Have New Diocesan Partners -- STATEWIDE...!

Yes, the Hispanic Ministry Coordinators in the Dioceses of Grand Rapids, Saginaw, Lansing and Gaylord are participating with our Summer 2021 COVID Promotion Campaign. What is this all about? Back in March, SNL received a CDC grant from Alianza Americas to conduct a summer 2021 outreach campaign to farmworkers and other essential workers in Michigan, promoting vaccines. Sounds simple?

Well, some really great people decided that they would like to collaborate -- in part so that across the state, as Catholics concerned about farmworkers and other immigrants, we could work together, get to know each other, and ultimately have a strong network of support for farmworkers and other essential workers. SNL Officers hope that the summer activity will produce more Circles of Support in other parts of the state.

We have been given a target goal -- conducting surveys of 2000 people statewide -- how do they feel about the vaccine? To date, halfway through the project, we have over 1600 surveys completed, many of them taken at local Spanish Masses.

From July through September, we will increasingly focus on getting onto farms and into processing plants. We will have tables set up at regional Latino grocery stores. We will be going out with diocesan teams to migrant camps. We will be pressing County Health Departments to join us as we connect with farms and processing plants.

We are learning a lot about farmworker-oriented pastoral and social development work from the Diocesan colleagues:

- Jose Astua (Diocese of Grand Rapids, Hispanic Ministry Dept.);
- Gladys Munoz (Justice and Peace Advocacy Center in Traverse City);
- Fr. Wayne Dziekan (Gaylord Diocese Hispanic Ministry Coordinator);
- Sr. Val Knoche IHM (N-Macomb Vicariate Hisp. Minister)
- Deac. Librado Gayton (Saginaw Diocese Dept. of Hispanic Ministry)
- Ms. Susana Chapa (Lansing Diocese Hispanic Ministry).

We meet weekly, along with Amy Ketner and Kim Pulka (St. Mary Student Parish Ann Arbor); Maggie Walsh (W-Michigan Catholic Charities); Maricela Ortiz (St. Clement and Agape Center in N-Macomb). Maricela Ortiz represents us to the weekly gathering of Alianza Americas partners participating in this project.

Of course, we will find out many other things that are going on with farmworkers -- including abuses and needless suffering. Hopefully, we will be strong enough and united enough to contribute to a statewide Catholic voice of advocacy for the workers.

Please keep this project, and our emerging statewide team, in your prayers.