

DISTRICT NEWS

Special Helpers Spread Christmas Cheer

Farmworker families throughout Florida were visited by a special Santa this year.

Stew Gaylord, Lutheran Services-Florida/Lutheran Disaster Response Volunteer Coordinator, delivered dinner boxes and gifts to farmworker families in Immokalee, Belle Glade, Labelle and other areas. The dinner boxes were filled with ingredients for a complete Christmas dinner for a large family — including candies, nuts and other extras as well as a Publix or Winn-Dixie gift card to be used to purchase a turkey, ham or other items.

Those distributions were made possible by the generosity of Florida congregations and individuals.

Members of Grace Lutheran Church-Winter Haven provided 78 of the more than 120 dinner

boxes — filed according to a list provided by Gaylord and put into identical boxes. Grace members also contributed 70 children's presents, wrapped and labeled with gender and size or age.

"I also received a check for \$1,000 for Pastor [Bob] Selle to use for Immokalee Christmas needs," Gaylord added. "I sent the idea to several other churches and some of those called to have me pick up gifts of food or toys to add to the collection."

Selle, the executive director of Amigos en Cristo, a ministry of the Southwest Florida Outreach Council, is involved in establishing a Lutheran presence in Immokalee. Gaylord delivered all of the children's gifts contributed by Grace members to Selle to distribute.

Other gifts were delivered by the truckload to farmworker communities. Among those donors making the deliveries possible were members of a Davenport parish, an act Gaylord calls his "Christmas story for the year."

He explained, "I received a call from Jorge DeBaptiste, a Haitian Baptist preacher in Davenport who I aided during last year's storms. Besides having volunteers work in that small, impoverished community, at Christmas last year I took him shoebox gifts and food boxes, since many were still without work."

The week before Christmas, continued Gaylord, "Pastor Jorge asked me to stop by Sunday after church. I did. He had all the kids line up, each with wrapped shoebox gifts, and by age they loaded my truck with 44 shoebox gifts. They said the gifts I brought last Christmas showed that there were those that cared about them. Now that they are working and recovering from the storms, they wanted to give me gifts to give to others to show that they care, too."

"It was a special moment!"

Santa Stew Gaylord shown with some of the farmworker children who received Christmas gifts.



ST. PAUL LUTHERAN Church & School-Lakeland, FL, hosted its first Boar's Head Medieval Christmas Festival December 9-11, 2005. More than 2,000 people attended the presentation during its three-day run. St. Paul Lutheran School's PTO sponsored a Boar's Head Festival float in Lakeland's Christmas parade. Shown here are some of the cast members — including Lady Gloria Klockziem (front center), St. Paul's music minister. □



Zion Reaches Out To Community

Many needy families in the Fort Myers, FL, area were able to celebrate Thanksgiving because of the generosity of members of Zion Lutheran-Fort Myers.

"It all began back on October 30," recalled Joe Guagliardo of Zion Lutheran. "Each year in preparation for our Thanksgiving food drive, we have what we call our 'Grab it and bag it' program."

Working with a local grocery store — this year it was Sweet Bay — Zion volunteers attach lists of needed food basket items to grocery bags. Congregation members are asked to purchase the items on the list, and bring them to the church at least two days before deliveries begin.

"Financial donations are also accepted, and funds are received from Thrivent Financial," Guagliardo added.

The day before the Thanksgiving baskets are to be delivered, Zion students and adults organize the grocery donations. "Whatever we're short of we purchase and get donations from our local Sweet Bay supermarket, purchase ten-pound bags of potatoes and the turkeys," said Guagliardo.

On Sunday, November 19, the students and adults filled 100 grocery bags and began the deliveries to needy families.

"It's a great opportunity for students and adults to work together while impacting our community," Guagliardo concluded. □



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Zion volunteers pack grocery bags with donated items for the Thanksgiving basket deliveries.