

MINISTRY ON THE MOVE

Each year Texas Presbyterians contribute a little more than \$3,000 to the Texas Council of Churches—or about three cents per person. Here's the story of one way in which these contributions are used.

Dust chokes the air and spreads a carpet of red over the seats and broken windows in stifling contrast to sticky, slippery mud outside. On the first three rows a dozen thick-haired youngsters, clustered next to the center aisle, shake and slap one another on the back in spasms of laughter.

It's movie night at Midway Gin near Slaton, in the West Texas cotton country. C. N. Wylie, elderly minister of the First Presbyterian Church (United) of Slaton has opened the former Midway Community Church building for the first time in nearly a year. He has

set up a movie projector and screen and handed out rags to five young Latin American boys who attacked the red dust with vigor, transferring at least half of it from the pews to the air.

By 7:30 four or five adults, a few teenagers, and a lively bunch of children—30 of them in all—are seated throughout the little room. These are migrants, come from the towns of the Rio Grande Valley to pull the late-opening cotton of the South Plains. Rains that have kept them away from the fields for a week have also kept the crowd small for this first movie night, opening the Texas Coun-

cil of Churches' migrant ministry program at Slaton.

Mr. Wylie shows three films—the ancient Abbott and Costello short subject (in English), a Social Security reel (in Spanish), and The Birth of Christ (in English). Between reels Joe and Angel, a young Latin American couple from the Presbyterian mission in Slaton, read scripture, and Miss Kay Managanag, a Migrant Ministry staff worker from the Philippines, leads hymn singing.

Beginning the first week in October and lasting until the harvest ends in mid-December, the Migrant Ministry conducts movie nights, children's schools, kindergartens, welcome centers, downtown weekend centers, and bracero programs in labor camps near seven West Texas cities.

Largest of the programs is in Lubbock, where 22 co-operating churches of the Lubbock Ministerial Alliance and the United Church Women provide money, supplies, facilities, and volunteers to carry the work of the Christian church to families on the move.

Co-ordinating force for all the Texas Migrant Ministry work is the two-person permanent staff employed by the National and Texas Councils of Churches. Miss Betty Whitaker, the director, maintains her office with the Texas Council in Austin and oversees the entire program. John Robertson, a Presbyterian from St. Andrew's Church in Houston, is area program coordinator.

He moves with the program, which moves with the migrants—from winter visitation work in the Valley to the spring onion harvest in Northeast Texas, to West Texas vegetables in early

Right now in Lubbock, for example, programs of the Ministry are being carried into labor camps for Texas migrants and two bracero (Mexican nationals) camps. In addition, a welcome center is maintained at the farm labor information office, and a downtown weekend center provides a place of rest, relaxation, and recreation for some of the 15,000 migratory workers now pulling cotton in Lubbock County.

Objectives of the Migrant Ministry are evangelism, Christian education, and recreation. Along with these three as an essential means of contact goes social work—home visitation, distribution of supplies, and referrals to health and welfare agencies.

Evangelism is aimed at all churches in general and no church in particular. Likely candidates for church membership are referred to the Ministerial Alliance or other co-operating groups in the area which the migrant calls his home. During January, February, and March, the Migrant Ministry staff does home visitation work for the local churches.

Probably the most tormenting problem of the Migrant Ministry at this time is its inability to do more work in depth. "Usually all we can do is scratch the surface," said Miss Whitaker. "We desperately need more trained volunteer workers from the churches, particularly ones who can speak Spanish."

The need of which Miss Whitaker spoke was starkly evident during a day with Miss Vasquez in Lamesa.

Miss Vasquez's day began with a two-hour kindergarten



The mistrust and even fear with which migratory workers sometimes receive the attentions of outsiders is reflected in the face of this boy as Migrant Ministry staff member John Robertson talks to him. The boy's mother, who is holding him, had just gotten him dressed up to have his picture taken.

There they sang songs outdoors in Spanish, then moved into the braceros' barracks. A tape-recorded Spanish religious program, which included popular Mexican music, drew the attention of 40 to 50 of the men, perhaps half of those living in the barracks. But when Miss Vasquez began a narration in Spanish to accompany color slides on the life of Christ, virtually every man in the barracks moved up close to see and hear. Many asked for the

Miss Vasquez told him that she represented the Protestant churches working together.

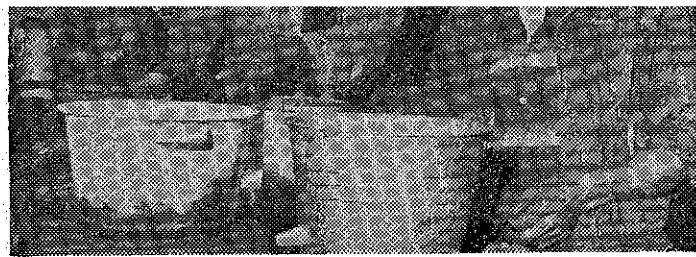
"We want to know where you are leading us," he replied. "It is fine to give us the Bible with the Spanish, but who will explain it to us? We can read it, but we will not understand unless someone explains it to us."

He said that when he goes back to Mexico he will not have opportunity to have the Bible



They call it "stoop labor." These three Mexican braceros worked as a team to pull six rows of cotton at once in a Lamesa cotton field.





Supper for braceros, usually tortillas, beans, and rice, is prepared individually by each man. After supper, braceros in this Lamesa camp met in their barracks for a program given by the Migrant Ministry.



With the cookies all gone, these well-dressed boys from Lamesa's public labor camp turn their interest to the photographer. They've just completed refreshment time at the kindergarten operated by volunteers. Most of the children from the camp spend the days in the fields because there's no one to look after them when kindergarten is over.



Mrs. Carey Southall of St. Mark Presbyterian Church reads a story during the children's program at one of the Lubbock farm camps. At her left, holding a child, is Miss Kay Managbanag, Migrant Ministry staff worker who co-ordinates programs in the Lubbock area.

Central Texas for cotton in late summer, and to West Texas cotton in the fall.

Extra staff is hired for the seasonal rush, and most of them for the current year have been Presbyterian. Miss Gloria Guerrero of Victoria's Second Presbyterian Church, Sofia and Mary Jimenez of the Mexican Presbyterian in Taft, and Austin College Student Ernesto Cano helped during the peak seasons on the Gulf Coast and in Central Texas.

Right now only two seasonal workers are employed. They are Miss Managbanag, a Presbyterian, and Miss Eunice Vasquez, daughter of a Methodist minister, from Piedras Negras, Mexico. Miss Managbanag coordinates the program around Lubbock, and Miss Vasquez directs the work in Lamesa.

Work of the Migrant Ministry, when contrasted to the opportunity, is very small. Last year the entire program made 12,748 contacts, many of them repeats, within a Texas migratory labor force of 150,000. Yet, in terms of the work a two-person staff can handle, the accomplishment is large—magnified many times by the help of volunteers.

The kindergarten, conducted by Miss Vasquez and two volunteer ladies from First Presbyterian Church (United) of Lamesa, gave 18 children instruction in English and the Bible, fed them cookies and punch, and provided recreation.

After an afternoon of writing reports and planning the evening's program, Miss Vasquez accompanied Mr. Robertson and five teenagers from the Lamesa Church of the Nazarene to the bracero camp at White's Gin.



The strong hands of a laboring mother are outlined sharply against the blanket of her youngest son.



The water supply for several families serves as a drinking fountain for one little girl. The building behind the girls contains 20 rooms for 20 families.

Outside after the program, the spokesman for a group of eight or ten braceros begged Miss Vasquez to stay a little longer for questions. Carefully phrasing his Spanish to make sure that he gave no offense, he said: "It is not that I am not content with your coming. But I want to make a question of you about all of this. Who are you? What do you represent?"

tant, even if there is a Protestant church available. "If you will give me your name and address, I will write to a Protestant minister in your town," Miss Vasquez offered. "Andale, Andale (hurry, do it now)," the bracero urged, "Andale, andale!"

Miss Vasquez could refer the bracero to a minister in Mexico, but she could do nothing more for him in Lamesa. The next night she would be at another camp, carrying her program to five camps in all and visiting each only once a week. And with only one Spanish-speaking minister in Lamesa co-operating in the Migrant Ministry, there was little likelihood that she could set up a volunteer Bible study group which would reach very many.

Among the problems of the Migrant Ministry is, of course, a shortage of money. In Texas the program receives about \$10,000 a year from the National Council, \$4,200 from the United Church Women, and \$2,500 from the Texas Council. Local churches provide most of the local expenses in their areas.

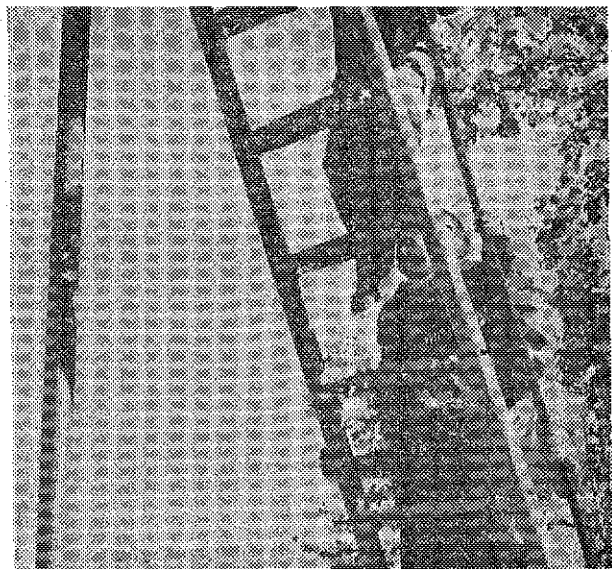
The Presbyterian (U.S.) churches which participate directly in the Lubbock program are First, Westminster, and St. Mark.

Others in the state are El Campo First; Victoria First, Grace, and Second; Robstown First and Trinity; Corpus Christi Parkway and Westminster; and First Churches in Port Lavaca, Taft, Sinton, Taylor, Temple, Brownsville, McKinney, Harlingen, McAllen, Weslaco, Edinburg, and Raymondville.

The Ministry owns three cars—station wagons—which they have named "Harvesters." These are the church-on-wheels for the ministry-on-the-move. To an extent, they become symbols of the church to laborers who see them first in the Valley or coastal Bend, then in Central Texas, then West Texas.

One migrant observed the Harvester and its staff worker in so many different areas of the state during the crop season that he was moved to comment:

"I sure wouldn't want your job. You have to move around too much."



It's a long way down for a little girl on a big slide during the Lamesa kindergarten play period. This kindergarten is held at a labor camp which is far above average in facilities.



For this daughter of a Lamesa-based migrant family, contact with the Christian church during her lifetime probably will depend upon the effectiveness of the Migrant Ministry.