

Open House to celebrate MMI's new digs *The event marks Mercy Ministries' move to First Baptist Church in El Rio*

If you haven't yet had a chance to see Mercy Ministries International in action, then it's time to get out your calendar. On Saturday, June 6, MMI will celebrate the grand opening of its new base of operations, located at First Baptist Church in El Rio, on the corner of Collins and Cortez streets.

Beginning at 11 a.m., the festivities are set to include music, food and remarks from Ventura County Supervisor John Zaragosa — as well as the opportunity to learn more about MMI's programs and vision in the communities of El Rio and Nyeland Acres.

The Open House takes place on a normal food distribution day for the Food Pantry program, allowing visitors to witness firsthand what Mercy Ministries is doing in El Rio. Guests will also have a chance to tour MMI's Kid Power Tutoring Center's new computer lab.

For more information, log on MMI's Web site at www.mercyministriesinternational.com.



MMI Volunteer David Blanchette helps a student with homework at the Kid Power Tutoring Center.

More than a handout

The Blanchettes find joy in meeting people's needs through Mercy Ministries

One way to share Jesus with people is to stand outside on a street corner with a Bible in hand and talk to those who pass by.

That's OK, but it's never really been Jennifer Blanchette's style. She prefers a different approach: demon- **Continued on page 2**

FOCUS ON VOLUNTEERS

“For the least of these...”

Volunteering in the El Rio Food Pantry helps keep the Klein family's faith active

Spend a Saturday morning at the El Rio Food Pantry, and you're bound to run into the Klein family. Matt, a tall, dark-haired guy, is often the one directing traffic. With cheerful enthusiasm, he helps to coordinate the process of dividing donated food into bags of dry goods, produce and cold items. His wife, Nancy, brings out milk from the freezers or divides freshly baked bread into distribution-ready sacks — whatever is needed. And usually there is at least one of the Klein's four children — Tyler, 21, Chloe, 18, Jackson, 13, and Tanner, 11 — along to help.

The Kleins have been volunteering in the Food Pantry for the past six months. But their involvement began prior to that, on an ordinary morning last October during their family devotional time.

Every morning, Nancy says, they read a passage from the Bible and then pray together about how it applies to their lives. On that particular morning, the passage came from Matthew 25:31-46, in which Jesus tells his disciples that what they do “for the least of these” — feeding the hungry, satisfying the thirsty, showing hospitality to strangers, caring for the sick — they are actually doing for him. **Continued on page 3**

More than a handout...

Continued from page 1

strating who Jesus is by helping those around her.

“While everyone has a need for Jesus, sometimes the way for them to meet Jesus is by meeting their needs,” she says. “A long time ago, I realized that my calling was to help people. I get a lot of joy from helping people.”

So on Saturdays, Jennifer comes to the El Rio Food Pantry to help bag up food for distribution or to sort through donated clothing to give away. And twice a month, on Wednesdays, she volunteers as a tutor at the Kid Power Tutoring Center, helping kids with their homework assignments. Her 13-year-old son, Andrew, or her 10-year-old daughter, Sarah, is often at her side. Her husband, David, also volunteers, serving as an interpreter and tutor.

“Our lives are wrapped around it, it’s just the way God has it,” Jennifer says.

The Blanchettes began volunteering with Mercy Ministries International over a year ago, when the food pantry and tutoring programs were just getting off the ground. It seemed a perfect fit, as it involved helping people whom the Blanchettes were already encountering in their daily lives: David, a high school Spanish teacher, was in the midst of his final capstone project at Ventura College on Mixtecos, the ethnic group that makes up the majority of MMI’s clients. And Jennifer, an ultrasound technician, often works with pregnant Mixteco patients who live in the neighborhoods that MMI serves.

Volunteering with MMI offered the Blanchettes the opportunity to reach out to these people in a way that was more than just a handout, Jennifer says. Over the last year and a half, despite the language barrier, they have gotten to know by name many of the clients MMI serves, and have even prayed with some of them. “It’s not just ‘here’s your food,’” Jennifer says. MMI is “in the heart of the community, making a connection, developing relationships.”

Being a volunteer is really easy, Jennifer says. At the Tutoring Center, she often works with just one or two students, going through homework assignments with them just as she might do with her own kids. And at the Food Pantry, she is able to volun-



MMI volunteers Jennifer [far right] and David Blanchette [middle] help sort clothing to give away at the El Rio Food Pantry.

teer in a way that fits in with her schedule. For example, if she has a busy Saturday planned, she’ll work a few hours at the early shift, packing up food. If she and David want to get in some early surfing, they’ll come in around 9 a.m. to help with the distribution.

Even kids can get involved, she says. Volunteering with MMI has allowed the Blanchettes the opportunity to demonstrate to their children what being part of the body of Christ is all about, Jennifer says.

“We have so much in America, my kids have so much. For them to be able to see the people in El Rio and how they live, for Sarah to give out the Christmas presents and put the toys in them, and see how happy those kids were to get it... It helps our kids appreciate what they have — without taking them to Africa,” Jennifer says.

“We’ve all been super-blessed and we don’t have to go on some short-term mission trip to do it,” Jennifer says. “It takes me five minutes to get there, it’s right in your backyard. You feel like you’re really giving back to the community.”

Diaper Duty

One of the ongoing needs of the El Rio Food Pantry is diapers. Did you know that infants need up to 12 diapers per day? And toddlers about 8 diapers per day? An adequate supply of diapers can cost over \$100 per month. In low-income households, babies often spend the entire day or longer in a single diaper, because the family cannot afford to buy an adequate supply. Inadequate diaper changing increases the risk of numerous health problems, including diaper rash. It may even be link to an increased risk of hepatitis.

Please help us by donating a box of diapers to the food pantry. We need sizes 1-2, 3 and 4.

**Mercy Ministries International
would like to express our
gratitude to:**

Bethany Chapel in El Rio

*Thank you for your hospitality over
the past 18 months!*

“For the least of these...”

Continued from page 1

The words cut to the heart, Nancy says. They realized that the Lord wanted them to become more active with their faith — to *do* for others. “[Jesus] was very specific about ‘whatever you do for the least of mine, you did for me. And whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me,’” Nancy says. “We suddenly felt very afraid that we were lacking in that department... It felt like, shame on us, we aren’t doing anything.”

That same week, a friend of the Kleins introduced Matt to Bob Harper, pastor of the Ventura Vineyard. The two men met for breakfast, and it wasn’t long before Bob was sharing with Matt about Mercy Ministries and the El Rio Food Pantry, Nancy says. They decided to check it out, and have rarely missed a Saturday since.



Volunteering at the El Rio Food Pantry is “super easy,” says MMI volunteer Nancy Klein [far right]. And it’s lots of fun too. “Our joy is two-fold,” Nancy says. “Knowing that the Lord is using us to help reach those in need of food and clothing, and especially knowing that we’re touching Christ by aiding those with such great need.”



On a recent Saturday, volunteer Matt Klein [right, wearing a hat] helps coordinate volunteers preparing for food distribution at the El Rio Food Pantry.

“We go whether we can stay very long or not,” Nancy says. “It started as a commitment; now, we love it and hate to miss. I don’t know why I would say we enjoy it so much — it’s just that I feel good when I’m there, kind of like being the Lord’s hands and feet.

“This just fit what we were looking for,” Nancy says.

Over the last several months, the food distribution on Saturdays has evolved to be very volunteer-friendly, Nancy says. For the first several hours, volunteers work together to bag all of the donated food and separate it into boxes to be distributed to families. “It’s just fun, it’s really fast-paced,” she says. “There always a different, ever-changing group of people. Anyone could come and enjoy themselves.”

Her favorite part of every Saturday is when the volunteers gather at the beginning of their time together to pray. “[I just think] how awesome God is to have blessed us with this food,” Nancy says. “It is amazing.”

A special word of thanks...

Mercy Ministries would not exist without the contributions of its many volunteers. As this newsletter is dedicated to volunteers and contributors, MMI would like to also recognize the following volunteers who have been with us since the beginning:

El Rio Food Pantry

Denise Aguilar
Pat Burke
Ben Downing
Nita Downing
Alonzo Garcia
Ruth and Basil Hubiak
Ariana Ruiz
Carmen and Victor Sanchez
Marly Weisheit

Kid Power Tutoring Center

Catherine Anderson
Megan Hunsberger
Dena Owens
Darrel Weisheit

Want to join us?

To become a volunteer at the Kid Power Tutoring Center or the El Rio Food Pantry, call 805.228.4894 or log on to our Web site at www.mercyministriesinternational.com.

A Tree Grows in El Rio

A letter from Executive Director Steve Tanner

Jesus used parables to talk about the kingdom of God. In Matthew 13:31, He tells the parable of a small mustard seed that grew and flourished and became a great tree, providing a great canopy of shade for the inhabitants below and a safe haven for the birds above. This parable similarly describes Mercy Ministries in El Rio. We started out small — very small! And we are still small, but we are growing in strength, knowledge and experience as we seek to unfold our vision of a Mercy Center in El Rio.

A new base of operations — Mercy Center

In April, we changed locations, moving from Bethany Chapel to First Baptist Church in El Rio. We are very excited, as this move allows us to occupy our own space and keep rooms set up the way we need them. For example, we are in the process of setting up a computer lab that will become an integral part of our tutoring program and other educational programs we want to implement. One such program is an early reading intervention class for kids in kindergarten through second grade. This program is especially significant for children who are learning English as a second language!

We now also have space to host medical/dental clinic days and classes for adults on topics such as parenting skills, starting a business and working with office software. We can host special summer fun days for kids in the community. We are forever indebted to Bethany Chapel for helping launch initial programs started, but we are thankful for the new space as we continue to grow and expand.

Thanks to our volunteers

One thing is for certain: The growth that we have experienced over the past year would not have been possible without our volunteers. We have chosen to dedicate this edition of the newsletter to our volunteers and contributors because Mercy Ministries would not be what it is without them. Both of our existing programs — the Food Pantry and the Tutoring Program — are now almost completely volunteer-run.

And we have fun! Many of our volunteers have become “regulars” and we have developed a sense of being a community of helpers. We are doing what God wants us to do — love our neighbors and each other — and we experience His joy as He loves people through us. For many of our volunteers, working with Mercy Ministries has become a regular source of spiritual food and drink which I think is clearly distinctive of being a Christian 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

So I want to thank all of our volunteers. You are making it happen. You are the Father's hands and feet. You are expressing the Father's heart. You are exalting the name of Jesus in this community. And I believe that we are having an impact greater



Rosalee Gonzales is one of the many volunteers who contribute to MMI.

than other nonprofits in the area that are completely funded by grants and government funds.

I also want to express my gratitude to our contributors. Since the last newsletter came out in January, we have received some key contributions that have allowed us to move forward. These include two additional refrigerators, as well as a stand-up freezer. We are getting help to make our new location more secure. We have received eight computers, printers, copiers and so on. Donations like these are moving us forward.

More help is needed

Yet, we still need more in the way of financial contributions. MMI's board and I are firmly committed to being a Christian 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. We not only intend to deliberately operate based on Christ's teachings, but we also intend to explicitly exalt his name. What this means in terms of funding is that we may *not* have access to government funds and grants from many sectors. There is no question about this — we have already experienced it. Praise God! But it means that we are more dependent on financial contributions from individuals in the wider body of Christ who believe in our mission, in our programs and in our faith commitments.

So I hereby want to make an appeal for more financial support from individuals. We can only grow the programs we have planned and make the kingdom impact we are praying for with regular, committed, monthly financial support. These contributions do not have to be large. On the contrary, I believe we can build our support with many small monthly contributions. The more such contributions we re- **Continued on page 5**

Letter from the Exec. Director...

Continued from page 4

ceive, the more viable our core programs remain. This model provides us with immunity from large financial contributors, such as government agencies or private grant funds, who don't share our faith commitments. It also helps us to better weather hard economic times, such as the one we find ourselves in today. In recent months, I have personally witnessed two other local nonprofits having to significantly roll back their operations because they depended so heavily on large grants that did not get renewed. During the same period of time, we have grown because we depend on small, faithful monthly contributors.

So please consider supporting us at \$25 or \$50 a month or at \$83.34 a month ($\$83.34 \times 12 = \$1000.08/\text{yr}$). If you do the math, you will see how quickly it adds up. Such contributions will give us the needed money to operate openly in the name of Christ.

What I am learning

I am learning daily to deliver this whole ministry to Jesus' feet. This is His work, not mine or anyone else's. I am learning to allow Him to lead. I keep working everyday to talk to people, make new contacts, complete our move to First Baptist, work our existing programs, explain and develop our vision, and so on. But this whole effort belongs to the Lord. It's His project, and we are seeking His kingdom. So when things seem to be "status quo," I am learning to just wait. When a big door opens, I say to myself, "OK, we're going this direction!" I am also learning to ask God how to pray for our programs. I believe He wants to show us how our work fits into His larger vision for El Rio.

Blessings,
Steve Tanner
Executive Director, Mercy Ministries International

With monthly contributions from many, Mercy Ministries can make a big difference in El Rio and Nyeland Acres. Over the next several months, MMI is seeking to meet the following goals for financial support:

300 people x \$25 per month = \$7,500 per month
100 people x \$50 per month = \$5,000 per month
100 people x \$83.34 per month = \$8,334 per month

Add it all up, and this equals **\$20,834 per month and \$250,008 annually**. Such financial support would allow MMI to employ an education program director, drivers and purchase software to implement reading intervention and other programs.

To become a monthly supporter, log on our Web site at www.mercyministriesinternational.com. Or contact us at 805.228.4894 or at Mercy Ministries International, P.O. Box 3009, Ventura, CA 93006-3009.

Please join us
For a night of 'CLEAN' comedy at
The Ventura Harbor Comedy Club
Benefiting

Mercy
 MINISTRIES

When - May 31st at 7:00PM
Arrive at 6:30PM for theatre seating
Cost - 25.00 per person

Reservations - Contact Ventura Harbor Comedy Club at 805-644-1500
or Kathy Tanner / Ventura Vineyard at 805-372-3990
Two beverage minimum with or without alcohol

FEATURING
Randy Lubas & Robin Cee



"G"
 Rated
 21 Years of
 Age and
 over
 please



For information regarding sponsoring a benefit of your own please contact
 Greg Gustafson at 805-328-9088 or email Greg at venturaharborcomedyclub@yahoo.com

Ventura Harbor Comedy Club *Ventura's premier comedy club*

Need a guest speaker for your group or congregation?

Mercy Ministries can help!

Mercy Ministries International came into existence because of the realization by a number of individuals that they could do more together than any of them could do independently.

We continue to exist because of our continued partnership with many churches, community groups and service clubs. So, how can we keep in touch with this network of supporters and friends?

This newsletter is obviously one way. Our Web site (www.mercyministriesinternational.com), and the Ventura Vineyard Web site (www.venturavineyard.org), are others. But we want you to know that we also cherish the opportunity to meet with supporters in more interactive ways.

We are always seeking opportunities to speak to churches, service clubs or other organizations about the needs of El Rio and Nyeland Acres, how MMI is trying to meet those needs, and, most importantly, the ways that you can be involved.

To arrange a speaker for your group, please contact Kathy Tanner at 805.402.7249.



Mercy Ministries International
P.O. Box 3009
Ventura, CA 93006-3009



"We exist to provide life-essential services that restore dignity and hope to people in need."

In this Issue: Focus on Volunteers; Get set for MMI's Grand Opening celebration; Letter from Exec. Director Steve Tanner; Update on Kid Power Tutoring Center

Save the Date:

MMI plans second annual fundraiser dinner

Mark your calendars now: The second annual Mercy Ministries International Fundraiser Dinner Gala, "Enriching the Soil," is coming up, and you don't want to miss it! Set for the evening of **Sunday, October 4, 2009**, the event features an elegant dinner, live entertainment, silent and live auctions, remarks from community leaders, a guest speaker, and more. More details to come — stay tuned to www.mercyministriesinternational.com.

Do you shop online?

Did you know that you can support Mercy Ministries with every purchase? Simply log on to www.goodshop.com, type in Mercy Ministries International as your charity, and search for the store of your choice from over 700 retailers (Amazon, Wal-mart, Barnes & Noble, Petsmart, Staples, Toys R Us and many more!). A portion of your purchase will go directly to MMI, to be used to minister to the communities of El Rio and Nyeland Acres.

Why Mercy Ministries?

- 1. Because Jesus said, "Love your neighbor."**
- 2. Left unchecked, hunger and illiteracy breed frustration and hopelessness, leading to anger, violence and subjugation.**

"We exist to provide life-essential services that restore dignity and hope to people in need."

Board of Directors:

Jim Owens, President
Bob Harper
Paul Janowski

Executive Director:

Steve Tanner

MMI is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Log on to our Web site at www.mercyministriesinternational.com or contact us at 805.228.4894.