

Joel Hiraldo – Our Charles Town Race Track Chaplain

Joel is from Puerto Rico where he began his career as a jockey in 1995. In 2001 he became a minister. In 2004 Joel moved his family to Charles Town and rode here. In 2006 Joel chose a different path; he began a ministry for the Spanish speaking community. Since its inception, the Spanish Ministry has grown and is now bi-lingual with two volunteer teachers from Jefferson County who provide translations. Joel and his family give of their time to the Ministry.

In 2013 Joel was hired full-time, by the Charles Town Race Track Chaplaincy Support Services, Inc. as the Race Track Chaplain to minister to the employees of Penn National Gaming and to the horsemen. He calls this job a blessing and loves his job.

Known to all as Chaplain Joel, his job is varied, including walking the barn area, counseling backstretch personnel and praying with jockeys and the starting gate crew before the races for a safe night. He provides transportation and spiritual counseling to those in need. He works through the HBPA, the local churches and Community Ministries and is able to assist needy individuals in getting food, clothing, living facilities, medical help, glasses or dental assistance. He has classes for the preparation of baptisms, comforts those who have lost a loved one and presides at funeral services.

Penn National Gaming has provided the Race Track Chaplaincy with a building where Sunday services are held at 8:30 a.m. and the door is open to all who work at the track or anyone from the community that wants to attend. The Chaplaincy brings families together through events such as the Children's Christmas party, Easter party and the annual family picnic.

When asked to share his thoughts on fewer days of racing or no racing at all, Chaplain Joel said, "It would be a very sad thing. We would have more people with less work or out of work, who would be unable to provide for their families."

