



SESSION ONE ~ FOOD: A SACRED EXCHANGE

PARTICIPANT'S HANDOUT

Theme:

Food is basic to life, and those who provide it enable us to live. Sharing food, the means to life and livelihood, is what a community does. Breaking bread implies that those of us who receive the food pledge ourselves to justice for those who provide it.



Opening Prayer

*My plate, empty now, will soon be filled with precious food. In this food, I see the presence of the entire universe supporting my existence. Many beings are struggling for food today. I pray that they all may have enough to eat. Amen.*¹

Farm Workers' Reality

- Each year, two to three million farm workers and their families labor in United States' fields.²
- Eighty-five percent of US fruit and vegetable crops are still harvested by hand.³
- North Americans spend a smaller percentage of expenditures (13%) on food as compared to other industrialized nations (Britain: 18%, Japan: 20%, France: 20%).⁴
- The average farm worker earns less than \$10,000 a year⁵ and it is estimated that up to ten percent of US farm workers are forced to work without pay in "debt slavery."⁶
- Most major US labor laws (such as those governing minimum wage, overtime, workers' compensation and protection when joining unions) are different for farm workers or exclude them altogether. Most workers are immigrants who, without legal protections, fear firing or deportation if they complain.

Biblical Reflection

Luke 11:2-4, Matthew 26:26, Isaiah 58:6-7

Suggested Follow-up Actions

Reflect and Serve

- For a week, as part of table grace, reflect on all the foods farm workers have helped bring to your table.
- For one day, eat no food that a farm worker had a hand in producing (e.g. eliminate fresh, frozen and canned produce).
- Fast for a meal or a day and donate the money you save to a farm worker organization.
- Glean on local farms through the Society of St. Andrew and donate the food to farm worker families or a food bank (www.endhunger.org).

Advocate and Act

- Support living wage laws in your community so low-wage workers can afford to feed their families.

Learn More (See full citation on Resources page.)

- Read *Food and Faith*, edited by Michael Schut.
- Visit www.nfwm.org for more information on farm worker conditions or Agricultural Missions (www.agriculturalmissions.org) for information on global agricultural issues.

"Every time we sit at a table to enjoy the fruits and grain and vegetables from our good earth, remember that they come from the work of men and women and children who have been exploited for generations."

—Cesar Chavez, Co-founder, United Farm Workers of America

1. From Thich Nhat Hahn. 2. Thompson and Wiggins, *The Human Cost of Food*, 2002. 3. NC Farmworker Health Alliance Factsheet, "Facts About North Carolina's Farmworkers," 1997. 4. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Agrifood Trade Service, from Country Profiles (<http://atn-riae.ag-ca>). 5. National Agricultural Workers Survey, US Department of Labor, 2000. 6. Coalition of Immokalee Workers, 2003.