
Advent Liturgy

National Farm Worker Ministry Resources

Note: Please adapt this lectionary resource for your denominational and local church context. These resources and the structure provided should be re-worked for your ministry; please add hymn locations should you choose to utilize the same ones.

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Prelude/Opening Music

My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less (Edward Mote)

Church/Community Announcements

Subject to local context.

Hymn

Hope of the World (Georgia Elma Harkness)

Responsive Prayer

Worship Leader: JOY TO THE WORLD! THE LORD HAS COME!

Congregation: HE HAS COME, INDEED!

Worship Leader: MAY GOD BRING HOPE TO US IN THIS CHURCH TODAY, AND ESPECIALLY TO FARM WORKERS, WHO ARE LABORING IN DESPERATE CONDITIONS THIS VERY MORNING.

Congregation: LORD, FORGIVE US FOR OUR LACK OF RECOGNITION. WE BESEECH YOU TO CONTINUALLY CARE FOR THOSE WORKING IN THE FIELDS.

Worship Leader: GOD, WE ASK FOR YOUR FAVOR FOR THOSE UNPAID AND DISADVANTAGED FARM WORKERS WHO ARE IN TUNE WITH THE RYTHYMS OF THE SOIL, WHO WORK TIRELESSLY TO PREPARE THE CROPS FOR OUR TABLES, AND WHO OFTEN CANNOT AFFORD THE VERY FOOD THEY PRODUCE FOR US.

Congregation: GOD, PLEASE BRING JUSTICE TO FARM WORKERS.

Worship Leader: WE ASK FOR TANGIBLE PROVISIONS FOR THE FARM WORKERS WHO WORK THE LAND ON OUR BEHALF. ON THEIR BEHALF, WE ASK THAT YOU PROVIDE FARM WORKERS ADEQUATE RESOURCES AND JUSTICE THIS MORNING. LORD, IN YOUR MERCY...

All: HERE OUR PRAYER. AMEN.

Reading of Lectionary Scriptures

*Readings are from **Isaiah 64:1-9**, **Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19**, **1 Corinthians 1:3-9**, **Mark 13:24-37**. The emboldened Scriptures have allusions to farms and injustices; whoever is preaching can either use these texts as a starting point or use the sample sermon below.*

Prayer

Worship Leader: LORD, WE PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR WORD. MOLD IT WITHIN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS, AND USE IT TO HELP US BETTER UNDERSTAND FARM WORKERS AND OTHER MARGINALIZED PEOPLE GROUPS.

ALL: AMEN.

Homily/Sermon about Farm-Workers

Below a homily/sermon, which one may or may not adopt for their congregation. Please elaborate and study the Scriptures more, in order that they can best fit your local church context and tradition. It really is starting exegetical work and needs to be developed more clearly for your context.

“The Hope of Advent for Farm Workers”

At our Thanksgiving feasts and parties this past week, we ate possibly unaware of the hard laborers who prepared our vegetables. For us, eating was just a simple action. In our time of joy and relaxation, many of us enjoyed time off and family. Few of us had to spend months seeding, nurturing or pulling the crops from the fields. Often our food is grown and raised by farm workers. What is unfair about this situation is that the farm workers who harvest our fruits and vegetables are not adequately compensated. The physical and economic injustices that farm workers experience often manifest without our awareness or concern. Wendell Berry writes, “We are all, to some extent, the products of an exploitative society, and it would be foolish and self-defeating to pretend that we do not bear its stamp.”¹

Scripture often speaks to the rights of oppressed workers. The Psalmist from today’s Scriptures seems to have a very similar viewpoint to farm workers today. They are seeking freedom from oppression! Often they feel as though they are not fed nourishing bread, but instead are forced to eat “bread made of tears” (Psalm 80:5 CEB). According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, “30% of all farm workers had total family incomes below the poverty line.”² Farm workers can rarely afford the vegetables and fruits that they grow for us. Moreover, they have to pay companies back to rent shacks (often they are in dangerous living conditions), or compensate “coyotes” (persons who help undocumented workers enter the country). Farm workers, many of whom are undocumented, live in the constant threat of physical

¹ Wendell Berry, “The Unsettling of America,” in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. by Norman Wirzba (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2003), 249.

² As cited on NFWM.org website (<http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/low-wages/>).

abuse, firing, diseases from working with pesticides, and government persecution.³ Many farm workers live and work under oppression.

The farm workers who grow our crops and food understand the Psalmist's pleas in chapter eighty. They ask for restoration (vs. 3, 7-19)! Farm workers know the pain of "being at odds with our neighbors," to be ridiculed by enemies, and to feel ignored (vs. 5-6). In our prayers today we have asked God to bring justice to the oppressed. Like the Psalmist, we cry out with farm workers, asking God to offer its right hand (vs. 17); the right hand of God, is an image from Exodus 15, a song about the liberation of the Israelites. In the asking of God's hand of justice, the Psalmist also cries out, saying, "Revive us so that we may call on your name" (Psalm 80:18 CEB).

But, there is still hope. The facts do not end with these disheartening issues. Nay, as we enter this season of Advent today after Thanksgiving, we are a witness to the proclamation of hope. This first Sunday of Advent, after all, is dedicated to celebrating hope. Reading the Psalmist's words offer us an example of this hope that we have. Psalm 80:8-19 describes a vine that God took out of Egypt (vs. 8), planted it (vs. 9), and allowed it to grow greatly (vs. 10-11). However, like the Israelites who were conquered and sent into Exile, the branches were torn down. The Psalmist, on behalf of Israel, pleads for God to revive the vine (its people). In the midst of the pain and tribulation, Israel is not completely made devoid of God. Instead, they hold onto the hope that God will revive and restore Israel (vs. 18-19). The connection between the vine and farm workers seems quite appropriate, largely because of the agrarian imagery. Like Israel, farm workers (and arguably, other oppressed people groups) hold onto the hope that their vine will be restored; that they will be freed from dangerous conditions, harassment, unfair practices, and wages which are too low to live adequately.

Ultimately, in their relation to the Psalmist, our hope is that farm worker justice will be supported by Christian communities. Like the hope of Advent, we have hope through the power of the resurrection that God can bring true justice to farm workers. Gustavo Gutiérrez asserts, "God's Kingdom and social injustice are incompatible."⁴ Therefore, the Church is responsible to seek justice alongside the marginalized. N.T. Wright suggests:

What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God's future. These activities... are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom.⁵

Together, with the hope of God, the Church and farm workers will see justice realized in the fields across our country and beyond. We know that this first Sunday in Advent should be full of hope, hope of freedom and love. We ask that God will act like a potter, as Isaiah anticipates in the reading this morning (chapter 64), who knowingly forms its people and the oppressed. Our prayer today is that God will hear the cries of the afflicted in the fields move our hearts to work together with those who labor for a better life for all people.

³ More information and statistics can be found on the NFWM website: <http://nfwm.org/education-center/library/>.

⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings*, ed. by J. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 239.

⁵ N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, The Resurrection and The Mission of The Church* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne Inc., 2008), 192.

Responsive Prayer to the Homily/Sermon

Worship Leader: LORD, WE ARE DISCOURAGED AND DISGRUNTLED BY THE PAINS OF OUR NEIGHBORS. WE SEE THEIR PAIN.

Congregation: LORD, BRING THEM LIBERATION AND RELIEF.

ALL: ON THIS FIRST DAY OF ADVENT, BRING JUSTICE TO THE FIELDS THAT FEED OUR NATION AND LIFT UP THE DOWNTRODDEN AS THEY SPEAK OUT AGAINST INJUSTICE.

Communion/Eucharist According to Your Tradition

Tie this practice into the homily/sermon with the help of farm workers. If able, use local grapes and wheat to enhance the images of the cup and the bread, in relation to farm workers.

Hymn

I Shall Not Be Moved (John Benson)

Responsive Prayer

Worship Leader: IN THE FACE OF INEQUALITY AND PAIN, THE LORD ASKS US TO HOLD FIRM.

Congregation: WE ARE TO STAND WITH GOD'S PEOPLE.

Worship Leader: MAY GOD EQUIP US TO STAND WITH FARM WORKERS. LORD, GIVE US A VISION OF LOVE AND FREEDOM FOR ALL PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS.

All: AMEN.

Benediction

Bless the people in the church with encouragement to get involved with farm worker rights and issues that affect their food and their neighbors. Hand out shopping guides (<http://nfwm.org/take-action/union-label-shopping-guide/>); for wallet size versions, please contact nfwm@nfwm.org). Encourage parishioners to read more of our materials and to pray for farm workers.

Additional Ideas

Read Segments or Whole Speeches of Cesar Chavez to Your Congregation

Speeches are available at:

<http://www.chavezfoundation.org/cms.php?code=001008000000000>.

Perform a Church-Wide Activity

- Hold an educational seminar about farm worker rights and historical issues (specific campaign histories can be found at: <http://nfwm.org/education-center/campaign-packets/>).
- Plan a church-wide feast with congregants to educate about and honor farm workers (see <http://nfwm.org/2009/06/planning-a-harvest-of-justice/>).

Use Alternate Songs About Farm Workers

Pick and sing various songs in numerous languages to connect with the music of farm worker movements; please see <http://nfwm.org/education-center/faithbasedresources/farm-worker-songs/>.

Bibliography

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- Wright, N.T. *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, The Resurrection and The Mission of The Church*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne Inc., 2008.
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