
Farm Worker Awareness Student Ministries Program

National Farm Worker Ministry Resources



Note on Adapting this Material: Please adapt this resource for your denominational and local church context. These resources and the structure provided should be re-worked for your student ministry. Please contact the NFWM if you have any questions, concerns, or comments.

Note on Formatting: This material is set up in a particular way, but does not need to be arranged as such if your regular student ministry gathering looks different. The approximate run time of this gathering, following this format is about one and a half hours. We suggest that you give 10-15 minutes on either side of your youth gathering to welcome and interact with your students.

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Introduction to the Theme

Gather your students together to begin the ministry meeting.¹ Encourage them to put their cell phones away and to speak respectfully through this program. You may use the prompt below to introduce the topic.

This evening we will be learning about farm workers. When we think of farms, we usually just assume that it's a vast area of arable land that has red barn, that all of farm animals (i.e. cows, pigs, sheep) living on it are docile and domesticated, and that the process of growing food happens by a father and his sons. In reality, farming is a multi-million dollar business of which thousands of immigrant laborers are employeeed. Many of these immigrant workers are underpaid, ignored, and exposed to pesticides. What we are going to uncover today is what it is like to be a farm worker, and how their stories relate to the Exodus narrative in our Bible.

Teaching Activity

Supplies Needed:

- Scale
- 10-20lbs. or oranges
- Box/bucket for oranges

Game Instructions:

The object for this activity is to show how exhausting the labor for farm workers is in comparison to other, and to show issues with child labor violations. Make a large circle (space allowing) and line up the oranges in small clumps. Then, have a youth who volunteers (or whom

¹ Dan Lambert, *Teaching that Makes a Difference: How to Teach for Holistic Impact* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 138-180. Lambert's text is very helpful in understanding how to engage multiple learning styles. This curriculum attempts to involve students who all have different styles of learning. Teaching in student ministries ought to engage every learning style.



is pre-selected) hold a box at the beginning of an orange line. When you tell them to begin, the student will try to fill his bucket or box with all of the oranges.

Next, have other students guess how much the student (who represents a farm worker) should get paid for the oranges (you may share with them how much an orange costs per pound). To get oranges, a farm worker must climb a ladder to fill a 90lb. sack to fill a 900lb. box on the ground. After students take guesses, reveal that often farm workers only receive 85 cents per pound, and even if they could do this eight times in an hour, they would only make \$6.80 for eight hours.² Likewise, the reason that a child was asked to try this activity was because they were needed to make enough money for their family, even though the United States has strict child labor laws. On top of this, children and farm workers are subjected to poisonous toxins, pesticides, heat, and are often not given access to water.

Pass out the oranges from the activity and have students eat them as a snack; if there is still an abundance give them to students to take home (this may even prompt further discussion there!). Instigate a discussion amongst your student group by asking these questions:

1. Who here already has a job and what do you do?
 - a. Of those who have a job, who here makes over minimum wage?
 - b. How does your physical labor in your job compare to those of farm workers and their children?
2. In school you've probably read a lot about *The Great Gatsby* and the ideals of the American Dream. Do those feel like a reality for you? What about for people who work in the fields?
3. A lot of farm workers' children do not have access to education and often face language barriers? Do the people you work with have these social privileges?
4. Do we know where we get the food we eat? If not, what are the problems with eating fruits, vegetables, and other crops that come from large manufacturers?

Scripture Reading

Have a student read Exodus 1:8-14 and Exodus 3:1-12. These narratives set the stage for teaching about farm workers. At the end of this packet is a section titled "Scripture Readings," should you desire passages to print out. Feel free to change the passage into a translation you are used to.

Optional Literary Reading

Should your students be reading from Shakespeare, read from Othello, to tie together what they are learning in school into your youth programming.

² "Additionally, it's possible for a farm worker being paid by piece rate to make less than the minimum wage. For instance, the piece rate for orange juice in Florida is 85 cents per 90-pound box of oranges. Average productivity for a worker is 8 boxes per hour, which means that during an 8-hour workday, a worker will produce 64 boxes of oranges (or 5,760 pounds of oranges!). According to the 85 cents piece rate, a worker would receive only \$6.80 an hour, which is significantly less than Florida's \$7.31 minimum wage (as of 2011)." To learn more about low wages, visit our website: <http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/low-wages/>.

“Who steals my purse steals trash; ’tis something, nothing;
’twas mine, ’tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.”³

Prayer

You’re encouraged to pray Cesar Chavez’ prayer as its wording ought to help set up the lesson with a sense of social justice, related to the coming lesson plan.

Oh merciful God,

“Show me the suffering of the most miserable, so I will know my people’s plight.
Free me to pray for others; for you are present in every person.
Help me take responsibility for my own life; so that I can be free at last.
Grant me courage to serve others; for in service, there is true life.
Give me honesty and patience; so that I can work with others.
Bring forth song and celebration; so that the Spirit will be alive among us.
Let the Spirit flourish and grow; so that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice; for they have given us life.
Help us love even those who hate us; so that we can change the world.
Amen.”⁴

Homily/Sermon

You may use the following words verbatim or simply use the following as an outline. Should you like to make this into a reading for you students to do together, we suggest that you print extra copies of this program and to pre-select who could read them to your group.

One of the most powerful stories in Christian Scriptures is that of the Exodus. It is a story that begins in the book of the same title, that really only comes to a close in Joshua 5, when the Israelites begin to eat the crops of Canaan. The Exodus is a gorgeous narrative: it tells readers that God is active in bringing freedom. In fact, this wonderful story has been and can keep being read into the movements and churches seeking liberation today.

The primary example of re-reading the Exodus narrative into future events is in the book of Joshua. Chapters four and five tell of Joshua, who effectively becomes the new Moses figure, crossing the Jordan River with the Israelites and reconciling the whole nation through the mass

³ William Shakespeare, *Othello* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2004).

⁴ Cesar E. Chavez, “Prayer of the Farm Worker’s Struggle,” *Cesar E. Chavez Foundation*, accessed on November 21, 2014, http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/ModelCurriculum/Teachers/Lessons/Resources/Documents/EXR1_Prayer_of_the_Farm_Workers_Struggle.pdf.



circumcision. When Joshua finishes crossing the Jordan River with Israel (Joshua 4-5:1),⁵ his leadership becomes linked with the crossing the Reed Sea (Exodus 14-15).

The story of the Exodus eventually becomes associated with numerous social justice movements within Christianity.⁶ The African-American church, living in literal bondage in the Antebellum South and later under segregation, adopted the rhetoric of wanting to leave Egypt. The leaders of the Abolitionist groups and later the Civil Rights movement used the imagery of trying to leave Egypt. Similarly, Oscar Romero, an Archbishop in San Salvador, who spoke out against his government's violent human rights abuses said in his final sermon, "Every country lives its own 'exodus'.... It is the same old story. God, however, wants to save the people by making a new history."⁷ The power of the Exodus is that it brings hope for those who experience similar oppression.

And today, with our focus on farm workers, we read portions of the Exodus narrative afresh. Farm workers really seem to have much in common with the Israelites. Exodus 1:13-14 CEB states:

So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. They made their lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work.

Those who worked the fields for Pharaoh and the Egyptians have the similar plights of farm workers today, who both have essentially been enslaved through unfair systems. Farm workers today are underpaid, often undocumented, and living in squalor conditions.⁸ Sadly, these farm workers often cannot even afford to feed their families the same crops that they tend and pick. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, "30% of all farm workers had total

⁵ When the Israelites cross the Jordan River, the mass circumcision that follows happens at Gilgal (or "Circle" in the CEB) northeast of Jericho) (Joshua 5:9). This seemingly odd story is really trying to communicate the importance of reconciliation and intercessory acts; if you look at the lectionary for when Joshua 5 is read, it is paired with 1 Corinthians 5:6-21, Psalm 32 and Luke 15.

⁶ The concept of the Exodus has also been co-opted by non-Christian groups. Bob Marley and the Wailers even drew upon the imagery of this biblical book in their song "Exodus" as they raised awareness against the British colonialism and domestic oppression of his religion, Rastafarianism. It goes to show that such a memorable story has great social and historical influence.

⁷ Oscar Romero, "The Last Sermon," *The Church and Human Liberation*, March 1980, accessed on November 17, 2014, <http://americanempireproject.com/empiresworkshop/chapter4/TheGreatestThreatToChristianityIn2000YearsLiberationTheologyAsFirstPoliticalReligionThatUnitesTheNewRight/TheLastSermonOfArchbishopOscarRomero.pdf>.

⁸ More information and statistics can be found on the NFWM website: <http://nfwm.org/education-center/library/>.



family incomes below the poverty line.”⁹ The tobacco and food industries use them to perform hard labor without equitable benefits. Farm workers can find themselves scared of the Egyptians, the men and women who work for large American corporations. They have been harnessed by the pseudo-American Dream and are enslaved to the food systems that make us privileged persons well fed.

Sadly, as we see this oppression, we find ourselves as the Egyptians. If you notice in the biblical text, the Egyptians are the ones having disgust for and enslaving the Israelites; it is not specifically Pharaoh. This is significant, as it seems that those of us who are not farm workers are not the righteous and suffering people. By buying foods from supermarkets or tobacco from the local convenience store, we act as unknowing oppressors. Agrarian poet 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.”¹⁰ Fortunately, with our new knowledge, and with God’s blessing, we are able to move from the Egyptian’s role to one more noble, that of Moses.

In also reading Exodus 3, we see how God offers hope and freedom to Israel. Though the next ten chapters are full of their suffering and plagues, they eventually are freed in chapters 14 and 15. In Exodus 3, God reveals its name, YHWH, and its vision for change by stating (3:7-9 NRSV):

I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

The inspiring vision of freedom ought to incur a response of joy and jubilation. However, Moses begins to show “reluctance to accept the divine summons”¹¹ Like the Israelites’ pleas for freedom, farm workers’ have been heard by God. And now, we have heard them. In learning about their hard labor conditions and their oppressed nature, we have the opportunity to respond without reluctance. We are able to spread their voices and concerns.¹²

⁹ As cited on NFWM.org website (<http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/low-wages/>).

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to Hebrew Scripture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 96. Coogan continues to suggest that this reluctance makes Moses into a typecast prophet.

¹² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (30th Anniversary Edition)*, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2005). Amplifying the voice of farm workers comes out of the Freire Model.



Unlike Moses, who mopes around and keeps making excuses, we can partner with organizations like NFWM, FLOC, or others to support farm worker justice. Moses, who was later helped in Exodus by Miriam and Aaron, works in conjunction under God, to bring freedom to his people. Thus we have the chance to care for farm workers through financial giving and by raising awareness amongst our peers and other church members to further spread the voice of farm workers, who often are only heard by God.

Offering

Instead of taking a regular offering (or in addition to), take a donation for the NFWM. Help your students to give their tithes to take seriously the call to love their neighbor and to advocate on their behalf. In understanding the call of the Exodus narrative to care for others, this offering allows for our ministry to continue to do this.

Musical Worship

Have a group of students or leaders, who regularly are involved with musical praise at your church (and/or student ministry functions), sing and play the any of following songs (several of which are well known already in youth ministry settings). If you would prefer to utilize your regular worship songs and use one or more of these a special songs or during the offering, you are encouraged to do so. Should you desire to use alternate songs, please see our section at the end of this ("Additional Ideas").

Let My People Go (Matt Redman)

Pastures of Plenty (Woody Guthrie)

Go Down Moses (Anonymous – Antebellum Negro Spiritual)

Solidarity Forever (Julia Ward Howe and William Steffe)

We Shall Overcome (Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan, Pete Seeger)

Exodus (Bob Marley)

Communion/Eucharist

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. Knowing that certain denominations and local church bodies have certain ideals and procedures, a pastor or priest may be needed to officiate.

Debrief Conversation

To aid students in processing this educational program, move everyone back into a group and lead a conversation with these questions.



1. Since this is a new conversation for our group, how can we be advocates for farm workers? What do we do with this new information about those experiencing injustice around us?
2. How do you see your fresh fruit and vegetables differently at your dinner table?
3. What do we learn about God through this conversation about the Exodus and farm workers?
4. We have the ability to contact the NFWM to learn more from them. Do you have other questions about this subject (so that we can ask to talk more about it next week)?

Closing Prayer

Ask a student to read this prayer (before or at this time). After the prayer, wrap up your student ministry gathering as you normally do. Should you plan or desire to do something more, take an action-step from the following section ("Additional Ideas"), to inspire your students to do farm-worker advocacy work.

Student: God of Justice, hear the groanings of those in the fields. Turn your ear to the voiceless. Lord of the Israelites, whom you took out of Egypt, we ask for you to lead in the movements of farm workers; bring them freedom from oppression. Help us to amplify their voices, so that all people may hear their stories of oppression and justice. Amen.

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 Student-Ministry-Wide Activity Outside of this Gathering

- Put pressure on Prima to be accountable for its workers (more information on our website: <http://nfwm.org/2014/10/take-action-hold-safeway-accountable-selling-prima/>).
- 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 student-ministry-wide feast with congregants to educate and honor farm workers (see <http://nfwm.org/2009/06/planning-a-harvest-of-justice/>).
- Hand out shopping guides (<http://nfwm.org/take-action/union-label-shopping-guide/>; for wallet size versions, please contact nfwm@nfwm.org).
- Support the NFWM's advocacy mission by ordering t-shirts (<http://nfwm.org/harvesting-justice-together-t-shirt/>). Then, wear them as a student ministry group on a Sunday to gain attention for farm workers with your friends and other church-goers.
- Screen *Harvest of Dignity* with your group in the same meeting or in a following one. It can be found here: <http://pic.tv/harvest/video/harvest-of-dignity/>.
- Attend a movie theatre with your students to view *Food Chains*, which is bringing farm worker rights to national attention.



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/>.

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Scripture References

Exodus 1:8-14 CEB (Common English Bible)

⁸ Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn't know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, "The Israelite people are now larger in number and stronger than we are. ¹⁰ Come on, let's be smart and deal with them. Otherwise, they will only grow in number. And if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and then escape from the land." ¹¹ As a result, the Egyptians put foremen of forced work gangs over the Israelites to harass them with hard work. They had to build storage cities named Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread, so much so that the Egyptians started to look at the Israelites with disgust and dread. ¹³ So the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. ¹⁴ They made their



lives miserable with hard labor, making mortar and bricks, doing field work, and by forcing them to do all kinds of other cruel work.

Exodus 3:1-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.³ Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”⁵ Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”⁶ He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”¹² He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”
