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Field Education Reflection #1
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“Then the Lord said to Joshua, ‘See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in” (Joshua 6:2-5, NIV).

The wall around the city of Jericho served as a final obstacle for the Israelites to gain entrance into God’s promised land. This was a land of “milk and honey;” a land promised 500 years before to Moses, and a land that the Israelites were given as a covenantal gift and promise. While God’s plan to demolish the wall—marching around the city in silence—seemed banal and certainly inconsequential, the faith of the Israelites combined with the grace of God proved an insurmountable force that caused the wall to crumble.

In modernity and during this tumultuously political time, the construction of walls has been repeatedly threatened to secure the United States’ borders. This promised wall will allegedly provide safety and security to the American people, fearful of our neighbors to the south—those with brown bodies who utter a different language. Yet the biblical text teaches us that the God we serve is no respecter of socially constructed borders that alienate and isolate. As Walter Brueggemann notes in his book *Disruptive Grace*, the God of Scripture is “known to be a resilient and relentless advocate of and agent for justice, which

entails the complete reordering of power arrangements in the earth.”¹ That is to say, the God of scripture is a God for all peoples, and is continually transforming, reconciling, loving, and seeking dialogical relationship with creation. This God, furthermore, seeks faithful servants to facilitate this divine reformation, and the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM), the host agency of this summer’s field education, embodies such a role.

The Migrant Ministry, formed in 1920, began by offering direct aid to migrant workers in a variety of forms: by providing food, clothing, day care, health care education, and ample water supply. By the 1960s and 70s, when farm workers began organizing themselves under Cesar Chavez’s leadership, the National Farm Work Ministry (NFWM), birthed from the Migrant Ministry, became a national organization that not only served as a liaison between faith communities and the workers themselves, but also as a source of advocacy for worker equality, freedom, justice, and respect. NFWM continues to actively support and advocate for workers’ rights, freedom for collective bargaining, worker empowerment, safe working and living conditions, and ethical public policy.

Additionally, NFWM, being a faith organization, operates with a variety of core spiritual gifts: service, leadership, teaching, and faith. NFWM is a service organization. Historically, NFWM identified and still identifies itself as a beacon of support to individual workers and other worker organizations that support farm worker rights. For instance, NFWM is actively engaged with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), which provides union membership to H2A workers in the visa program (documented and legal farm workers).

¹ Walter Brueggemann and Carolyn J. Sharp. *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

NFWM also serves as a leader in farm worker advocacy. Given the lengthy history of NFWM, the ministry has for years been on the forefront of workers' advocacy, protest, collective bargaining, and policy formation. The ministry also serves as a conduit for ecumenical organizations to collectively support the farm worker cause. What's more, the ministry couples its leadership with teaching—specifically in academic and religious settings. This teaching provides exposure, education, and knowledge to individuals not familiar with the plight of the farm worker, but also provides a background on the systemic intolerance, marginalization, oppression, and persistent “othering” directed at migrant farm workers in this country.

Undergirding all the operations at NFWM is the impenetrable faith in a God that sees and emboldens the lowly and oppressed, the downtrodden and abused. It is through this source of faith that the ministry has been in existence for almost a century. This faith is a life-giving force. Through this faith, those who have worked for the farm worker cause in the past and have died along the journey serve as a “great cloud of witnesses” to the current sojourners. It is also through this faith that current ministry leaders persist with endurance, fortitude, and strength.

One can witness this active faith in the youth and the young adults in the movement. They are anxious about the world and determined to stand for justice in a variety of places and spaces, addressing local and global abuses, being ill-content with complacency. There is an urgency to respond. This response is filled with passion, but also with an ethical conviction that refuses obliging to institutional principalities and powers. It is upon this foundation of passion, tenacity, and conviction that the future of the ministry and

movement stands. Furthermore, it is through this inclusive definition of community and “church” that the future of organized religion stands.

Therefore, the themes of “community,” “inclusivity,” and “a God that sees no boundaries” permeate through this field education experience. It is with immense curiosity and theological pondering that I enter the world of NFWM. It is in this new and exciting community that I expect the Spirit to wait. It is also through the depletion of boundaries, through the exposure of socially constructed and fictitious borders that I believe God unites. For “where two or three are gathered,” our Lord promises to join and to bless us. Come, holy Spirit, come.

God, our refuge and our strength,

You show us, in your Word, that you often side with the poor and oppressed; please open our hearts to your call: “To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly,” not only with you, but with our brothers and sisters of Creation. Through the farm workers’ hands that feed us, help us to remember that You nourish us each day and that your manna sustains us all the days of our lives. We ask this through Christ, who fed 5000, and who gave us a meal to experience and remember in his presence often, through grace and mercy.

Amen.