

“The Cost and Joy of Discipleship” : Forty Years of the National Farm Worker Ministry



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Background:

In January of 1971, leaders of state Migrant Ministries that had been providing charity and service to migrant workers since the 1920s met in Atlanta to discuss the future of their ministries' relationship to the growing farm worker organizing movement. At that meeting, they founded the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) with a commitment to organize faith communities to support the campaigns of farm worker organizations. In the forty years since then, NFWM has continued to support farm workers' struggles for justice and empowerment.

The Project:

In honor of its 40th anniversary as a national organization and 90 years of solidarity with farmworkers, NFWM conducted oral history interviews with major supporters around the country. We hope that these interviews will help us look forward to the future of faith community support of the farm worker movement and also inspire others to join us.

This Guide:

We have created a discussion guide that you can use with a small group to reflect on the issues raised through the clips from these interviews. Either print out this document and follow along with the "The Cost and Joy of Discipleship" page online or use the links in this document to view the audio slideshows.

Please click an image below to hear a short audio excerpt from an interview, and click on the person's name to read and learn more about her or his story.

From “Lady Bountiful” to farm worker activism

[Suzanne Darweesh](#), former staff person of California Migrant Ministry and long-time board member of NFWM, explains the consequences of early shifts in the priorities of the farm worker ministries during the 1950s and 1960s.

Los Angeles, California

- What is the difference between what Suzanne calls “the Lady Bountiful” approach and community development?
- Why might some churches in Corcoran not have supported the Migrant Ministry’s participation in community development?
- How do you and your community’s approaches to justice work reflect these two different approaches?



Cesar Chavez and the mission of NFWM

[Olgha Sierra Sandman](#), long time Migrant Ministry worker and board member of NFWM, describes her conversations with Cesar Chavez when he came to a gathering of the Migrant Ministries in 1970. NFWM was founded just months after this meeting with an explicit commitment to organizing faith communities in support of Chavez and the United Farm Workers.

Chicago, Illinois

- Olgha remembers that Chavez said that “the growers resisted with all their might and all their power and all their dollars the change that [the farmworkers] wanted to bring.” Why and how might growers have resisted this change?
- Does your faith tradition tell stories of similar situations of struggles for power? What happens in them?
- Why was it important to Chavez to have contracts between growers and a labor union rather than simply changes in the laws?



“God is on the side of the oppressed”

[Ed Brandt](#), Lutheran minister and chairperson of the Oregon Farm Worker Ministry, discusses what he learned from being arrested for his active support and presence with farm workers who were organizing with the Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN).

Portland, Oregon

- Why was it important for Ed to be present with farm workers who were trying to organize, even if it meant that he might get arrested?
- What does Ed mean when he says, “God is on the side of the oppressed?”
- Where do you see similar expressions of this idea in your own faith tradition?



The cost of discipleship

[Bert Perry](#), longtime NFWM organizer in Florida, recounts how her husband lost his job managing a Winn Dixie because of her outspoken support of farm worker unions and criticism of the most powerful players in the agricultural industry.

Deland, Florida

- As Bert notes, the UCC’s statement of faith mentions “the costs and joys of discipleship.” Where in your faith tradition can you find the expression of a similar sentiment?
- What types of “costs” and “joys” have you experienced in your own efforts to bring justice in your communities?
- What “costs” would you be willing to suffer for justice in your communities?



“What it means to have a joyful faith”

[David Wildman](#), Executive Director for Human Rights and Racial Justice of the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Global Ministries and NFWM board member, explains what the peace movement and also middle class Christians in particular can learn from farm workers who struggle for justice.

New York City, New York

- Hebrews 11:1 suggests that, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” How does the faith described here relate to the one David imagines?
- David claims that both the peace movement and many middle-class Christians have a lot to learn from the farm worker movement. Who else do you think has something to learn from farm workers?
- How have you seen evidence of anything like the “middle class captivity” that David describes in your own communities?



An intergenerational movement

[Dominique Aulisio](#), a recent graduate of the University of Central Florida and early member of the Youth and Young Adult (YAYA) movement within NFWM, describes how meeting Dolores Huerta and NFWM’s Lariza Garzon led her to become a student organizer in support of farm worker campaigns.

Orlando, Florida

- Why was it have been important for Dominique to meet Dolores Huerta and learn about her decades of work for farm worker justice?
- What have you learned from earlier generations’ struggles for justice in your communities?
- What do you do that you would like future generations to remember and learn from?



Perseverance in support of the boycott

[Dave Austin](#), public health professional and leader of the Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship's Farmworker Support Action Team, discusses some of the methods and challenges faced in supporting the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's five year boycott of Mt. Olive pickles.

Durham, North Carolina



- Why might Dave and other supporters continued to act when they felt like their efforts were merely “a drop in the bucket of public opinion”?
- In what areas of your life might you need similar perseverance in the practice of your beliefs?
- Bill Bryan was Methodist, and the decisions of the United Methodist Church and other denominations to support the boycott were controversial but ultimately very important to FLOC winning the boycott. What role should faith communities play in consumer campaigns?

“This is our house”

[Lucy Boutte](#), Catholic lay leader and California organizer for NFWM, describes her experience at a 13- day United Farm Worker campaign in Sacramento in support of the Fair Treatment for Farm Workers Act in the summer of 2011. The bill was vetoed by Governor Brown, though he later helped to negotiate a compromise amendment to California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

Los Angeles, California



- Why might the legislator's hospitality and Lucy's claim that “this is our house” have been surprising to farm workers?
- What role should communities of faith play in such efforts to pass legislation that would protect farm worker rights?
- How do you actively participate in democracy?

“Not an outsider”: Local organizing

[Sam Trickey](#), professor of Physics and long time NFWM board member, reflects on how his own cultural background gives his voice a particular power in advocating locally for farmworker justice.

Gainesville, Florida

- What makes Sam’s voice of support an important element of the farmworker movement?
- How does your particular life situation make your voice uniquely powerful in advocating for justice?
- When and how do you use that voice?



Carrying stories across the country

[Alexandria Jones](#), former NFWM state organizer for North Carolina, describes the power of being able to connect workers organizing in California with workers in her own state through sharing their stories with one another.

Greensboro, North Carolina

- In 1 Corinthians 12:26, Paul discusses the ‘body of Christ’ and claims that “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” With this in mind, how would you describe Alex’s role when she shares workers’ stories with one another?
- What stories inspire faith in you? How did you hear them?
- How do you also act to share peoples’ stories with others who might not otherwise hear them?

