

STANDING IN THE GAP

There are as many as two million farm workers in the U.S., the majority of whom are undocumented. Imagine yourself in a strange country, unable to speak the language, housed far from the public eye, dependent



on a labor contractor, afraid that the authorities will find you out and send you home.

You are too intimidated to speak up for even your most basic of human rights – the means to wash toxic pesticides from your body and clothes, clean water to drink in the fields, a fair wage. You have come thousands of miles in the hope of making enough money to sustain your family back home. You have been encouraged to come, to keep profits high and Americans' food relatively inexpensive.

So few who benefit from your labor value your work. You are overlooked, almost invisible; without voice, you are easily exploited.

But you are also strong, determined and rooted in faith. And in solidarity with others, you find hope, and at times, even victory.

Each victory of the farm worker movement is not merely a justice won. In that brotherhood and sisterhood, dignity is held on to and self-determination regained. Solidarity is the only way to overcome a system bent upon human exploitation.

“The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery. They oppress the poor and the needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice. I looked for one among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap” Ezekiel 22:29-30

On the picket line forty years ago, the courage of Coachella Valley grape workers stirred the spirits of those called to join them. The pursuit of justice is still shared by farm workers and their allies alike, nurtured by faith,



perseverance and action through various organizing campaigns around the country.

For nearly forty years, the National Farm Worker Ministry has been standing with farm workers in the gap. We are grateful for the opportunity to be a vital part of the farm worker movement and we invite you to join us.



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The National Farm Worker Ministry supports farm workers who are organizing for equality and justice. It educates people of faith and their institutions about the conditions facing farm workers in this country, and activates them to stand with farm workers in their struggle for justice.



Contact **NFWM** for action updates, boycott news and a shopping guide for Union Label Food Products to purchase. For additional worship resources go to <www.nfwm.org>.

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School Sisters of Notre Dame SHALOM
North America, 2005

• PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

HARVEST



OF JUSTICE

TABLE PRAYERS

honoring 40 years of solidarity
with farm workers.

TABLE PRAYERS honoring those whose labor nourishes us.

our GOOD EARTH

2005 marks the 40th anniversary of the historic table grape strike, begun by farm workers in the Coachella Valley, CA. In April 1967, one and a half years after it began, the United Farm Workers signed the first ever farm worker contract with a grower.



The Lord said in Galatians, "... for you reap whatever you sow."

If we sow greed, what do we reap? If we sow exploitation, what do we reap? The Algonquin leader Big Thunder said, "That which we put into the ground, Mother Earth returns to us." If we sow courage, what is returned to us? If we sow non-violent solidarity, what is returned to us?

On this day, some forty years hence, we give thanks for the courage of those first farm workers who stepped out on to the picket line to face strikebreakers with bats and chains. We celebrate the men and women of faith who stood shoulder to shoulder with the grape workers.

We give thanks for those times when we have seen justice returned to the farm worker. We give thanks that the hope sown forty years ago is alive still today. Hallelujah and Amen

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee's seven year struggle in North Carolina resulted in the first ever union representation for H2A temporary "guest-workers" in the US.

In Exodus we read, "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

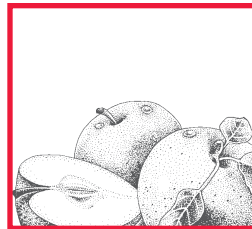
Farm workers are invited to set our tables with food, but shouldn't we also invite them as our guests to sit with us?



Shouldn't we invite them as equals among us, not only as immigrants to be exploited for their labor?

We offer thanks to you, God, for the measure of justice which has been won for the guest-workers we invite here. We offer thanks for this food and ask your blessing on our fellow sojourners working in the fields. Amen

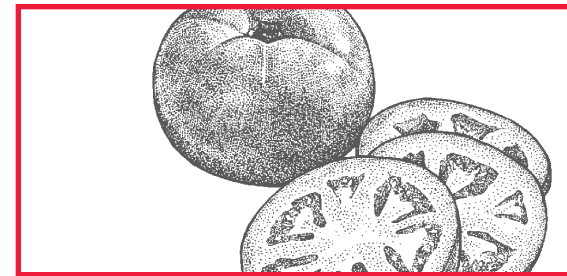
One of the rights won by farm workers in the 2004 FLOC contract is the right to one half day off after seven consecutive days of work.



Lord God, you tell us that where one or more are gathered together, there you are. You are present in every orchard, in each field and packing plant, along every trail through the desert. You call us to be there, too. You call us to stand beside farm workers when they join together to fight for their rights.

Help us, Lord God, to remember that however long the struggle for justice, the rewards last longer ... blessing whole families and communities, one generation and the next. Thank you for being with us, always and everywhere. Amen

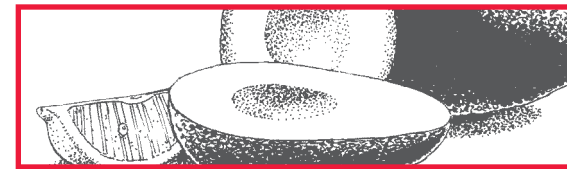
In 2004, Oregon farm workers finally won the right to two ten-minute paid breaks and a half hour paid lunch break per work day. Only five states give farm workers the right to paid breaks.



Let us give thanks for the meal before us. We marvel at the variety of colors, textures, and tastes. We anticipate being filled and nourished.

If we remove from our full plates each item contributed by a farm worker's labor, what is left?

The labor of farm workers fills our plates. Surely, a ten minute break from the relentless sun and the long rows is the least they are due. Lord, have mercy.



"Every time we sit at a table at night or in the morning to enjoy the fruits and grains 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

Pay rates had not risen for Florida tomato pickers for more than twenty years. A few hundred farm workers in the forgotten small town of Immokalee set out to change that. They took on the fast-food giant Taco Bell and forced the corporation to sign an agreement with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.

O God, help us never to think of fast food as easy food without counting the cost to those whose labor feeds us.

O God, help us to never taste a tomato without trusting again in your grace which "casts down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly."

O God, bless the farm workers everywhere whose determination and courage in the face of power humbles us. Amen

