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.

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>.
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?

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.

The Algonquin leader Big Thunder said, “... for you reap whatever you sow.”

If we sow non-violent solidarity, what is returned to us?

In Galatians, “... for you reap whatever you sow.”

If we sow courage, what is returned to us?

“... for you reap whatever you sow.”

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?

If we sow non-violent solidarity, what is returned to us? If we sow non-violent solidarity, what is returned to us?

If we sow exploitation, what do we reap?

If we sow greed, what do we reap? If we

Surely, a ten minute break from the relentless sun and the long rows is the least they are due. Lord, have mercy.

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 never to 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 every-where whose determination and cour-age in the face of power humbles us. Amen

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.

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