

Spring 2023

NATIONAL FARM WORKER MINISTRY NEWS & VIEWS

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Message from the Executive Director

This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to Rev. Chris Hartmire and the legacy he left as part of our organization. The following are excerpts from remarks I made at Chris's memorial service in January. I met Chris in 2000 at a NFWM board meeting, and it was such an influential experience. I am humbled to follow in the footsteps of his leadership and others like him.



Rev. Chris Hartmire

Rev. Chris Hartmire, NFWM's first Executive Director, passed away on December 18, 2022. With a background rooted in Civil Rights, Chris came to CA to work with the state's Migrant Ministries. In time it was clear to him that, while providing basic needs for farm workers and their families was needed, it was not enough. He recognized growing efforts among farm workers to mobilize. Through encounters with Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Larry Itliong, and other organizers, he was called on to bring the faith community into the struggle as allies and so birthed the notion that an organization dedicated to that task was needed. Farm worker and church leader organizations met and in 1971, NFWM was born. The person chosen as the first leader of that organization, supported enthusiastically by Cesar Chavez, was Chris Hartmire, and he continued as the leader until the early 1980s when he went to work for Cesar Chavez at the UFW.

At the core of his being, Chris embodied the truth that all are created equal, and that in our society, for justice and peace to flourish, we must stand together. We must be in solidarity with each other, that the extravagant wealth of some comes at the exploitation of others.

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He believed that offering relief to others is no substitute for removing the barriers farm workers face to get relief for themselves. This was a key and profound transition that Chris promoted by moving from Migrant Ministries of charity to NFWM's work to focus on systemic change and advocacy. For people of faith to seek and demand human rights for all, and especially farm workers, was what Cornel West meant when he said "Justice is what love looks like in public." Chris lived that. He was persuasive. He was compelling, and he got others to join him - individuals, denominations, religious orders, and people of faith and conscience around the country. And they responded. They showed up, they brought others, and they joined the movement.

NFWM continues today to seek to embody that concept as we dedicate ourselves to the ongoing work of educating, equipping, and mobilizing for the farm worker movement. We are grateful for Chris Hartmire. His leadership, his integrity, and his authenticity got us started, and we're still here. Chris Hartmire, PRESENTE!

NFWM Bids Farewell To Four Board Members

Suzanne Darweesh is a long-time farm worker advocate. After seminary, she started in the movement as a Presbyterian intern for farm worker advocacy in California working with both Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez. This impacted her whole life. After settling in Orange County, she became a very vigorous and influential member of and eventually the leader of the Orange County Interfaith Committee to Aid Farmworkers (OCIC) following Jean Giordano. In this role, she has been an invaluable, indefatigable part of the NFWM board for many years and a consummate advocate for farm worker efforts. Suzanne will be moving to northern CA and will be followed in her leadership by Gerri McNenny, a recent retiree from Chapman University and a long-time member of OCIC. We welcome Gerri and say a fond goodbye to Suzanne although we know that wherever she is, she will continue to be an advocate for NFWM and farm workers everywhere.



Rev. Sekinah Hamlin was the board representative for the United Church of Christ. Sekinah brought a tenacity for farm worker rights, especially in the area of racism and economic oppression, and utilized NFWM staff for panel presentations about economic advocacy. Last year, Sekinah was a speaker at the CIW March in Palm Beach, FL, as well as at the Poor People's Campaign in DC last June. She has changed jobs, so she left NFWM early in 2023.

Clayton Sinyai brought the Catholic Labor Network (CLN) to NFWM in early 2020. During his time on the NFWM board, Clayton utilized NFWM staff for presentations to CLN, as well as providing CLN support for sign-ons and NFWM support for farm worker campaigns. Clayton is moving to a different position but will continue to promote farm worker campaigns within the CLN.

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea represented the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ on NFWM's board for almost 10 years. She has served the board as vice president, chair of the fundraising committee, and part of the Executive Committee. She has often sponsored NFWM in partnership with immigration efforts in the DC area and has taken part in many major mobilizations for farm worker partners along with supporters from her network. Sharon left the Disciples in late 2022 and is continuing her immigration work with Church World Service, an ecumenical ally organization that stands with the marginalized and immigrants. (See next page for a picture of Sharon carrying the NFWM banner.)

Mark Your Calendar: NFWM's Upcoming Events

Intro to Issues Affecting Farm Workers Webinar will be on June 12 at 2 pm/ET. Farm workers are the backbone of our \$200 billion agricultural industry, yet they are among the poorest and most vulnerable workers in the U.S. To turn this system around, farm workers are organizing to demand a seat at the table with the people and institutions that have the ability to change their inhumane working and living conditions. In this webinar, allies will learn more about farm worker challenges and how they can join workers across the country to help make lasting change. Visit nfwm.org in May for more information.



Harvest of Justice 2023: Racism & Farm Workers

officially launches on Labor Day, Sept. 4. However, all educational resources will be available on NFWM's website in early summer. The educational program features interviews with farm workers and organizers addressing the many ways racism impacts the daily lives of farm workers. The goal of the program is to raise consciousness and encourage NFWM supporters to take action alongside farm workers. Filming for the series took place in Washington, Oregon, and Florida with multiple farm worker partners. The videos are directed by Angela Hollowell with Rootful Media. Visit the "Resource Center" of our website this summer to use and promote the entire educational program.



"Art in the Farm Worker Movement" Exhibit was announced in January but had to be postponed. It will be moved to later this fall or early next year. This free exhibit from NFWM will feature farm worker art that either inspires farm workers and their organizers in their efforts to secure farm worker rights or art used in farm worker campaigns and education. Through the exhibit, NFWM hopes to raise awareness about farm workers overall, to join with farm worker partners and allies to host a Congressional reception for legislators, and to extend the exposure of farm worker stories to a wider audience in the D.C. Metropolitan area. Please stay tuned for more updates at nfwm.org. If you have any contributions, contact Julie Taylor at jtaylor@nfwm.org.



NFWM Winter Board Meeting Report

By Rev. Nathan Hosler, Ph.D., representative of Church of the Brethren

On January 27-28th, the board of NFWM met virtually to contribute to our common work as a faith-based organization committed to social, economic, and racial justice for farm workers. To do this work, NFWM educates, equips, and mobilizes member organizations and other faith communities, groups, and individuals to support farm worker-led efforts to improve their living and working conditions.

At the board meeting we heard, as we do at every meeting, from farm workers and farm worker organizers. We discussed plans for an upcoming art exhibition in Washington DC featuring artwork from farm worker associations. Again, I was reminded that NFWM has an unparalleled network of relationships at the nexus of religious bodies and farm worker organizing movements. With 28 member and 11 supporting organizations, we have nodes of relationships in many religious communities in the United States. These include, to name just a few present at the January meeting, the Catholic Labor Network, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Friends Service Committee—Florida, and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

These bodies are then made up of individuals with networks, relationships, and influence to shape public and policy narratives about the human rights and labor conditions of the people who make up a vital part of their food system. At the board meeting, we heard directly from Migrant Solidarity and the Milk with Dignity Campaign in Vermont, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, and the Equitable Food Initiative. These campaigns and organizations touch on and address different aspects of the food system with differing tactics in diverse places. While they bring diverse voices they speak to common experiences and struggle for justice and safety for farm workers. These common concerns touch all parts of the food system.

How does the changing nature of religious institutions alongside changes in labor and farm worker organizing invite us to adapt? How do we nurture a spirituality and strategy which recognizes and leverages strengths and networks? There is room to grow in strengthening these connections, but the network of relationships and institutions has incredible reach. How do we, together, foster these relations while deepening and extending awareness of NFWM and farm worker issues and organizing?

Fortunately, NFWM has an excellent staff who play a vital role in connecting and equipping our communities through resources, such as the Harvest of Justice materials, webinars like the one that accompanied the January meeting, and a newsletter with updates and actions. Immediately following the board meeting, the staff expanded to include Irene Arellano (see page 7) as Director of Farm Worker Advocacy. This significant expansion of the staff will greatly strengthen NFWM's ability to shape the public and policy narratives through the voices of farm worker partners and faithful witnesses of our faith communities around the country. Give generously to NFWM to support their staff and ongoing work. We look forward to connecting with you in the struggle for justice!



Farm Worker Partner Updates

NFWM was part of the **Farmworker Association of Florida's** General Assembly and celebration of 40 years on March 5th. Along with the Duke intern, NFWM's Executive Director was in attendance to receive a special recognition for the Ministry's long support. In the coming years, the Farmworker Association will focus on the following top priorities: Immigration/citizenship rights, driver's license regardless of immigration status, healthcare access, labor rights, and quality food access in schools and education.



On March 18th, Julie Taylor and Rose Green-Flores from NFWM joined the **Coalition of Immokalee Workers'** spring mobilization, a march in Palm Beach, FL. The theme for this march was "Building a New World" and highlighted the need for Wendy's, Publix, and Kroger to join the Fair Food Program. On March 15th, 125 marchers began the 50 mile journey from Pahokee, FL to Palm Beach. Four days later, around 500 people marched the final 2 miles to the neighborhood where the CEO of Wendy's lives. Pahokee, where the march began, is the site where a recent modern-day slavery case was exposed. CIW will continue to bring these realities to light and NFWM will continue to support both the Wendy's boycott and other efforts to bring companies into the Fair Food Program.

In April, NFWM sent a letter to Hannaford Foods' headquarters in Vermont to ask them, again, to sign on to the Milk with Dignity Program. **Migrant Justice**, a farm worker organizing group for dairy workers, created this program which is very similar to CIW's Fair Food Program, as a way to ensure that dairy workers who provide milk products in the supply chain for this company's stores will be treated fairly and safely. The first letter NFWM sent was in December 2020 with no response from Hannaford. This was our second letter, and we will continue efforts to put pressure on this grocery store chain. If you are located in the northeast where Hannaford operates, please contact our Director of Farm Worker Advocacy at 657-617-1078, so she can help you connect to public witness opportunities in that area as we expand our support.



Over 100 farm worker women from across the U.S. gathered at the U.S. capitol in April. **Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Inc.**, a farm worker women led coalition of 15 grassroots farm worker organizations across 20 states, convened in Washington, DC from April 15-18. Alianza advocates for the civil, constitutional, and human rights of our nation's more than 700,000 farm worker women and girls throughout our farm and food systems. NFWM participated in this convening for the first time ever with Irene Arellano, Director of Farm Worker Advocacy joining our farm worker sisters in person on our behalf. During the national convening, farm worker women engaged in workshops,

information sessions with federal agencies, and meaningful conversations with Congress members. Our advocacy centered around issues Alianza members have prioritized, such as ending gender-based violence in and out of the workplace, harmful pesticides, sustainable agriculture and environmental justice, nutrition and health, immigration reform, workplace exploitation, and the 2023 Farm Bill.

Farm Worker Partner Updates Continued

No matter how many changes in management, the fight for a **United Farm Worker** union contract continues for Ostrom Mushroom Workers! A Canadian company recently purchased the producer that has been actively embroiled in a civil rights and gender discrimination lawsuit brought forward by the state attorney general in Washington. When the company was sold, everyone was fired. One hundred and forty-one women workers were fired and replaced by H2A workers.

Other workers were offered different jobs for less pay and even fewer rights. Greenwood Mushrooms Sunnyside — formerly known as Ostrom Mushroom Farms — are using every tool in their arsenal to intimidate the worker committee on the ground. NFWM remains faithfully committed to accompanying these brave workers in their struggle for recognition and against further exploitation. Now more than ever, we need your help to send a clear message to management that it is time to negotiate with the farm workers who want fair wages and safe working conditions. Farm Worker Ministry is actively engaged in this campaign and connecting with NFWM on ways to support the workers.

YOU can join the efforts to win a union for farm workers in Washington: The next time you go grocery shopping, snap a picture of the mushrooms they have in stock. Make sure you can see the company name and where it was distributed in the photo. Send the picture to UFW@ufw.org along with the store name, location, and date. To learn more, please visit UFW.org/ostrom.



NFWM News

Thank you, Austin Spence, Duke Intern!



Austin was NFWM's Duke Divinity intern for the 2022-2023 school year. Austin will be stepping into more schooling through Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy program in addition to receiving his Master of Divinity through Duke. Austin hopes to positively impact the public sector by partnering with and advocating for communities in need, furthering his justice work learned during his time with NFWM.

During his time at NFWM, Austin worked with partner organizations to research and promote legislation that would have a positive impact on the day-to-day lives of farm workers, created educational videos on farm worker issues for social media, and was integrated into the routine of nonprofit work. Austin was able to travel to Florida for the 40th-anniversary convention of The Farmworker Association of Florida.

NFWM News Continued

Welcome Irene Arellano, Director of Farm Worker Advocacy!

In February, NFWM hired Irene Arellano for the new position of Director of Farm Worker Advocacy; she will strengthen our relationships with farm worker organizing groups and increase our impact on farm worker campaigns. Irene will also help us improve our educational and outreach materials.

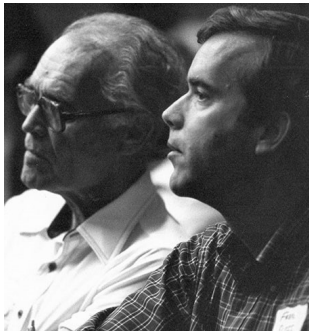
Irene Arellano is the daughter of Mexican immigrants and a descendant of farm workers. Irene grew up in the labor movement through a strong union household where she walked picket lines with her family in support of contract campaigns from a very young age.

Irene comes to NFWM after having served our country as the Campaign Director for the American Federation of Government Employees National VA Council's COVID Crisis Response Campaign. Before bringing the fight for racial and economic justice to our nation's VA hospitals, she organized students and workers throughout Orange County, Los Angeles, and Pennsylvania. In 2015, Irene earned a scholarship from Pennsylvania State University to pursue a Master's Degree in Labor and Global Workers' Rights. After graduation, she became a faith-rooted organizer with Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice. She worked on the living wage campaign for Disneyland Resort workers in 2018 before joining the National Union of Healthcare Workers.



When Irene's not fighting for workers' rights, she enjoys playing the drums, practicing martial arts, learning new techniques in combat sports, and spending time in the kitchen cooking and baking with her lovely daughter Alessandra. Irene recently celebrated a life milestone as she got married in April.

NFWM Remembers



¡Presente! Fred Ross Jr.

Fred Ross Jr. passed away on November 20, 2022. He was one of the nation's leading organizers and began his work at an early age in the lettuce fields of California. Fred Jr. was trained and mentored in organizing by his father, Fred Ross Sr., Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta. Ross was a humble and noble statesman, whose six-decade-long organizing career empowered poor and oppressed workers to overcome bigotry and exploitation through self-organization and collective action. His passing is a terrible loss for the farm worker movement, and he will be deeply missed.



¡Presente! Rev. Wallace Webb

Rev. Wallace Webb passed away on December 3, 2022. He lived his life as an honorable, compassionate, and honest man with a deep faith that led him to develop a lifelong conviction for justice and commitment to peace. Webb was a leader in the Pinellas Support Committee for NFWM. His leadership kept the group going for many years as a force for farm worker campaign support in Florida and financial support for NFWM's efforts around the country. He was a kind and generous soul who will be missed.

National Farm Worker Ministry

PO Box 10645

112 Cox St., Ste 208

Raleigh, NC 27605

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**TO SUSTAIN
THE WORK OF
NFWM, WE
NEED YOU!**



One role of the National Farm Worker Ministry is to shine a spotlight on farm worker requests, campaigns, and realities. It is a simple mission, but a hard thing to do as we compete for the attention of the wider public. But farm workers rely on the solidarity of consumers to urge legislators and corporations to listen to farm worker needs. NFWM is always looking for new ways to reach people who will support the farm worker movement. To do this, we need you.

We need you to support farm worker campaigns. Make a call. Send an email. Deliver a letter. Boycott Wendy's. Contact your Congressional representatives. Show up at a public demonstration. Pray or send good thoughts in the direction of farm workers. Invest in the work of the National Farm Worker Ministry and give generously. **Your investments enable us to have an impact, to try new things to reach new people, and to achieve our mission. Donate now at nfwf.org.**

NFWM

112 Cox St., Ste 208
PO Box 10645
Raleigh, NC 27605

919-302-9581
nfwf@nfwf.org
www.nfwf.org

Staff Team:
Irene Arellano
Amanda Bell
Meagan Fisher
Rose Green-Flores
Julie Taylor

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