

SALT & LIGHT

Contact: Ruth Marchetti, rmarchetti@dor.org, 585-546-7220 ext. 7099

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COOKIES AND CONVERSATION

Save room for dessert and learn more about the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act. Join us on Thursday, February 7 from 1:00 - 2:00 pm, in the Gathering Space at St. John of Rochester Church, 8 Wickford Way, Fairport for a conversation with West Cosgrove of Rural and Migrant Ministry's Liturgia Center in Lyons, New York.



This gathering would be appropriate for parish staff and social ministers who want to have a good grasp of the issues before Public Policy weekend. Parishioners who would just like to know more are also welcome. RSVPs will help us know how many cookies to bake, but are not required.

CATHOLICS SUPPORT FARMWORKERS

Today the New York State Catholic Conference posted a Memorandum of Support for the new Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act, S.2837 Ramos / A.2750 Nolan. For a printable copy of the memorandum go to www.nyscatholic.org/2019/02/farmworkers-fair-labor-practices-act/. Here is the text:

The Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act would address a number of the exemptions in New York's labor, public health and workers compensation laws that currently prevent farmworkers from accessing rights and privileges available to other workers. The New York State Catholic Conference supports this bill and strongly urges its long-overdue enactment by the legislature.

"For years, the Catholic Church has advocated for equal rights and fair treatment for farmworkers," Timothy Cardinal Dolan, archbishop of New York, has said. "It is a human rights issue."

Farmworkers are excluded from many of the laws that establish worker protections, including overtime pay, employer contributions to the unemployment and workers' compensation funds, and public health protections including sanitation and housing standards. In addition to ending these exclusions, this bill would grant them collective bargaining rights and would require that farmworkers be given a 24-hour day of rest in every calen-

dar week which, whenever possible, would coincide with the laborer's traditional day for religious worship.

In December 1999, legislation was enacted eliminating farmworkers' exemption from the minimum wage laws. However, in the 20 years since, we have made no additional progress in achieving worker equality for these individuals on whom we depend for the food that we eat.

There is no legitimate reason for treating farmworkers inequitably. They are not seeking special treatment; they simply ask that they no longer be excluded from the same rights and protections enjoyed by the rest of society.

By recognizing the rights of farmworkers and the unique contributions of agriculture, New York can develop policies which bring economic fairness, safety, and dignity to the production of agricultural goods from which we all benefit.

THIS WEEK'S EVENTS

Creation Care Gathering

Creation-care ministries meet quarterly to share ideas and provide support. We will meet on Thursday, February 7 in Meeting Room 4 at St. Joseph's in Penfield, 43 Gebhardt Rd (enter through the front entrance between the church and the school by the St. Joseph statue). We'll share updates and plans for celebrating Earth Day. New attendees always welcome.

"A Perspective on the Migrant Caravan: Religion, Civil Society, and the Politics of Naming"

February 6, 2019, 7 PM

Downtown Presbyterian Church*

121 North Fitzhugh St., Rochester

The Central American migrant caravans of 2018 and 2019 have brought renewed attention to the contemporary refugee crisis in the Western hemisphere. Yet they have also brought stigma to the word "caravan" and a debate over the appropriate forms of political engagement on the part of migrants and their allies and advocates. Sponsored by ROCLA

"I address a strong appeal from my heart that the dignity and safety of the worker always be protected."

Pope Francis,
Regina Caeli, 4/28/13

FARMWORKER PRAYER

The Farmworker Prayer

By Cesar Chavez

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;
So I will know my people's plight.
Free me to pray for others;
For you are present in every person.

Help me to take responsibility for my own life;
So that I can be free at last.
Grant me courage to serve others;
For in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience;
So that I can work with other workers.
Bring forth song and celebration;
So the Spirit will be alive among us.

Let the Spirit flourish and grow;
So that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died of justice;
For they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hate us;
So we can change the world.
Amen.

SHARING THE JOURNEY WITH FARMWORKERS

Last Sunday I joined a group from St. Joseph's, Penfield in attending the 2:00 pm Mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Marion. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the mission church of migrant ministry in the Diocese of Rochester, housed in the former St. Gregory's Church. It's not a large church and on Sunday it was packed to overflowing as the congregation celebrated the traditional feast of the Presentation of the Lord. All the beautiful Baby Jesus statues that had been on display in homes since Christmas came to church to be carried in procession and "presented" before being stored away until next year. The church community is a haven, a little bit of home, for deeply faithful people who live a fairly isolated life in our rural farming communities.

Our group had been invited to join the celebration after expressing the desire to "Share the Journey" with our fellow Catholics in the farmworker community. We were warmly welcomed and fed abundantly. We look forward to future meals and conversations with our new friends.

The past 20 years or so have seen profound suffering

in the farmworker community as immigration has increasingly become a tool for political benefit. Workers who used to come to the U.S. seasonally to work before returning to their homes in Mexico and other poor southern nations, could no longer freely cross the border without huge expense and risk of their lives. More workers established families here, sometimes bringing wives and children across the border. Waves of increased enforcement saw raids on farms and industries, sometimes resulting in young children being left stranded by arrested parents, arrests at children's sporting events, in parking lots of grocery stores or medical clinics or at intersections likely to be crossed on Sunday afternoons on the way to church. These are all things that have happened in our neighboring Wayne County.

Right now, arrests and deportations seem more targeted and less random. This gives people more freedom to attend Mass or buy groceries, but is little comfort for the families who have lost members to deportation. Often the deportee is a longtime community member and beloved parent whose only crime was coming back across the border to be with family after an earlier deportation.

The reality is that many of the farmworkers our agricultural industry depends on are undocumented, making them even more vulnerable to unjust wage laws. You can help by supporting this Sunday's advocacy.

HOMILY REFLECTIONS

Jesus lived in an agrarian economy; many people made their living by supplying food for others. In this week's Gospel, Jesus recruits his first apostles from the rough men who labor at fishing. They weren't educated or at all well-to-do, but they recognized a miracle when they saw one and quickly answered Jesus' call. Those who have little are often the first to recognize God's presence. Wealth and an abundance of possessions can distract us from our ultimate dependence on God.

Farmworkers have been deprived of equal protections for too long. Is it because, unlike Jesus, we fail to recognize their God-given dignity?

Today when God asks "Who will stand up for justice for my people?", we can answer, "Hear I am, Lord."

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