



March 24, 2006

**A FAIR HARVEST: RELIGIONS RESPONSE TO IMMIGRATION ISSUES,
AN INTERFAITH RELIGION SPECIAL TO BE BROADCAST
SUNDAY, APRIL 23 ON THE CBS TELEVISION NETWORK**

A FAIR HARVEST: RELIGIONS RESPONSE TO IMMIGRATION ISSUES, an interfaith religion special, will be broadcast, Sunday, April 23 (8:00-8:30 AM, ET; 5:00-5:30 PT) on the CBS Television Network.

This is a special religious program about fresh attempts to achieve dignity for migrant farm-workers. In the years since the CBS Reports special, Harvest of Shame (1960) pointed out the slave wages and deplorable working conditions of migrant workers, there has been steady but very slow progress to right the wrongs. Still even today, most farm-workers, mostly foreign-born, are paid about as much as they earned 30 years ago. On the national level, attitudes and laws regarding migrants change from one administration to the next.

The broadcast deals principally with a story in southwest Florida (Immokalee) about a group of tomato pickers from Central America and Haiti who organized their own workers' coalition. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers staged hunger strikes, marches across Florida and many other unsuccessful attempts at bringing attention to abuse of workers, very low pay per pound of tomatoes picked and other issues. When the growers and owners would not ever speak with them, they hit on the idea of boycotting Taco Bell, which buys 10 million pounds of winter tomatoes from Florida growers. Local churches came on board and national church organizations followed, helping the Coalition to organize "truth marches". This gave exposure to the workers in settings across the country to state their case, present a human face, and encourage church members to avoid buying from Taco Bell. The boycott caused Taco Bell (owned by the Yum Brands) little financial damage but a good deal of bad press. They responded with a modest \$100,000 a year to be sent to the farmers for distribution to the pickers who pick Taco Bell tomatoes. This actually doubled their wages from 1.3 cents a pound to 2.3 cents and brought their two-ton a day yield to perhaps \$90 from the \$50 they had earned before. Their next move was toward McDonalds, which buys perhaps several times as many pounds of tomatoes from south Florida as Taco Bell; if it agrees to another penny a pound migrant wages could "skyrocket"- relatively speaking.

Another story touched upon is the Mt. Olive Pickle Company in North Carolina. With help from the National Council of Churches, local councils and the Catholic Diocese of Raleigh cucumber pickers in the Mt. Olive area succeeded in getting a boost in wages for the cucumbers they pick for Mt. Olive, which is a national brand and supplier of pickles.

To discuss these stories and some proposals being made for national immigration legislation, we hear from Rev. Bob Edgar, of the National Council of Churches, and Rev. George Anderson, an editor of the Jesuit magazine, AMERICA, who add their perspectives on the issues and the need for greater public understanding and effective legislation.

The migrant farm-workers dignity and fairness issues are vividly presented by: Robert Mendez and Eucebio Rodriguez, two Guatemalans in their early 20's, both full-time pickers and part-time union activists for the Coalition. In addition we hear from Lucas Benitez, a picker of oranges and tomatoes for 13 years before helping to found the Coalition. Adding their experience are Father Joe Clifford, pastor of St. Columbkille Catholic Church (Ft. Myers); Rev Jim Boler, (Sanibel Is.) UCCC; Rev. Noelle Damico, liaison between the national Presbyterian Church and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers; and Bert Perry, of the National Farm-workers Ministry.

John P. Blessington is the executive producer of the special; Ted Holmes is the producer. It is produced with the cooperation of the National Council of Churches, The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and a consortium of Jewish and Muslim organizations.

* * *

Press Contact: Jeremy Murphy 212-975-4577 jeremy.murphy@cbs.com