

STATEMENT OF THE CALIFORNIA CHURCH COUNCIL  
ON THE  
DELANO GRAPE STRIKE

Adopted by:  
The Board of Directors of the California Church Council  
in a regularly called session – March 7, 1966

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

—Luke 4: 18-19

The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ entails involvement with people and their life in the world; involvement often leads to controversy, as Jesus discovered. Controversy often leads to misunderstanding and suffering. It is through this creative process that God uses us to work out His will.

As Christians we cannot assume a position of non-involvement or neutrality in the presence of social injustice which reduces the dignity and well-being of any of God's children.

Fortunately, growers have long shared in the ministry of their local congregations. Seasonal farm workers have rarely experienced the love and understanding of the Church except through the Migrant Ministry. We are grateful that the Church's total ministry has been broad enough to embrace people on both sides of the conflict in Delano.

For more than twenty years the California Migrant Ministry has been the only agency of cooperative Protestantism working specifically with farm workers. It has sought to minister in the name of Jesus Christ to this alienated group in society. Always it has striven to serve the whole person in the total context of his life. We have tried to broaden our concern beyond a ministry which treats only symptoms resulting from economic injustice. This attempt has led to a confrontation of the root causes of poverty and alienation. For over five years we have been training our Migrant Ministry staff in the skills of community organization to help people organize themselves around their own felt needs and interests.

The National Council of Churches and the Councils of Churches in Northern and Southern California who work together through the California Church Council have been on record for many years in support of collective bargaining as a means towards just relationships between employers and employees and responsible participation in our

common life. Therefore, we support the right of growers and workers to organize themselves for the realization of their collective objectives. We recognize the distress a labor dispute places upon both workers and growers. We feel that the economic structure and the entire state-wide community is responsible for the poverty of seasonal workers in an otherwise affluent society.

Once the people in Delano with whom we were identified in our Migrant Ministry made their own decision to strike, we committed ourselves to remain with them through their trials and to support them in their search for justice and dignity. We feel that farm workers need the support of the Church to realize their rightful place in our society because historically they have been poor, weak, disorganized and unrepresented in economic and political decision-making.

Since growers have long been assisted in many ways through government programs, such as the Department of Agriculture and the University Extension Service, and since farm workers have been specifically excluded from most social legislation passed to benefit American Labor (NLRA, Unemployment Compensation, minimum wages, etc.), we recommend that the farm workers be included in the broad spectrum of social benefits and especially in the collective bargaining protection of the National Labor Relations Board Act.

The California Church Council is aware that through its agency, the California Migrant Ministry, it is the only arm of the Church especially called to be the spokesman and advocate of the farm worker and that it must stand with the worker until such time as he can achieve a status in society commensurate with other American workers.

The California Church Council commends the able director of the California Migrant Ministry (Rev. Wayne C. Hartmire) and his dedicated staff for their role in this difficult situation. They have made a vital witness and have been a strong force for non-violence.

The California Church Council calls on the Mayor and other officials of Delano, the Governor of California, the National Labor Relations Board, and others to help bring about negotiations between growers and their workers.

We desire to keep communication open between the Migrant Ministry and growers, public officials, denominational bodies and local congregations, and seek the concurrence and support of our constituent churches in our efforts in the field of community development, our involvement in the efforts of the farm workers in Delano to achieve recognition of their basic rights as American workers, and in our continuing search for ways to help the growers begin to communicate as equals with the democratically chosen representatives of their workers.

We believe as Christians that our commitment to Christ in this situation has brought us a new opportunity to witness in our world.

