

Introduction To Audio Interviews

By Pat Hoffman - May 2007

The following taped interviews were done in 1985-86 to capture stories for the book, *Ministry of the Dispossessed*, about how the farmworker movement impacted churches and particular church leaders. I also wanted to examine the role of the Rev. Wayne “Chris” Hartmire and the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM) in the stunning response of denominations, almost all of which finally supported the United Farm Workers’ (UFW) consumer boycotts of grapes, lettuce, Gallo Wines, Schenley liquors, DiGiorgio’s S&W canned goods, and other recognizable labels associated with agribusinesses who were growing grapes or lettuce. An astonishing accomplishment.

Most denominations in the 1960s and 1970s were not known as hotbeds for union support. These interviews help reveal how these denominations came to take action in a union organizing fight. Clergy and lay members talk about how life changing it was to stand on picket lines with farmworkers and to spend hours leafleting at their neighborhood grocery stores urging customers to not buy grapes or lettuce or whatever it was that month, that week.

Denominational executives share candidly what influences brought them to rally their churches behind the UFW and the difficulties that support entailed. A Catholic sister talks about the assumptions she had growing up in the San Joaquin Valley and how her assumptions were changed by her encounter with the UFW. Catholic and Protestant clergy and religious offer their stories about going to jail with farmworkers.

Cesar Chavez, Jerry Cohen, Marshall Ganz and other UFW leaders reflect on the role of the churches in support that came quickly, without strings and certainly without condescension. The Rev. Jim Drake offers important and sometimes humorous stories from his experiences as the NFWM’s key man working full-time with the UFW.

Nearly all of the interviews include reflections on Rev. Chris Hartmire’s key role in bringing the resources of the churches to the UFW’s struggle for justice. Two interviews with Hartmire provide information on how he saw the role of the NFWM and of the church leaders with whom he worked.

When the opportunity came along to offer these interviews on the website I was thrilled at the chance to give these stories to a wider public. However, I deeply regret that I could not locate a few of the interview tapes. A list of all of the interviews (some by phone and not recorded) and many of the stories can be viewed in the book itself, either on this website under Out-of-Print Books or by purchasing the book from NFWM@nfwm.org or from some on-line booksellers.

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