

## **Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ Resolution May 2007**

### **In Support of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Burger King Campaign**

*Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. – James 5:4*

*You shall not withhold the wages of the poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. – Deuteronomy 24: 14-15*

God's concern for the poor is at the heart of our Christian ethic of economic justice. Our biblical heritage teaches us that caring for the poor, the least, the orphaned, the widowed, and the stranger are central to our understanding of God's mercy and our willingness to welcome Christ among us. As people who follow the example of Jesus by lifting up the image of table as a primary understanding of Christian life, fellowship, and stewardship, we must humbly acknowledge and confess that those who harvest the bounty of food for our tables are often unable to feed their own families due to unjust wage structures.

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Labor describes farm workers as "a labor force in significant economic distress" facing "low wages, sub-poverty annual earnings, (and) Significant periods of un- and underemployment" with earnings and working conditions that are "either stagnant or in decline,"<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS, farm work is the second most dangerous occupation in the US (after mining) and farm workers suffer from the highest rate of toxic chemical injuries of any workers in the US;<sup>2</sup>

WHEREAS, we all eat and thus are all dependent upon the work of farm workers while, too often, they cannot afford to feed themselves;

WHEREAS, the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ has a long history of support for farm workers in their quest for justice and dignity including support for past boycotts of Taco Bell, Mt. Olive Pickle Company, Campbell's products, lettuce, and table grapes; and the McDonalds campaign;

WHEREAS, the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ has endorsed the efforts of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to extend a new model of corporate responsibility, exemplified by the historic contract between Taco Bell/YUM Brands and the CIW, and the April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007 agreement with McDonald's USA, throughout the fast food industry;

WHEREAS, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers believes that large corporations which buy Florida tomatoes must deal responsibly with the workers who pick them and change the shameful "sweatshop" pay and working conditioned suffered by the men and women who pick their tomatoes;

WHEREAS, Burger King is a major purchaser of Florida tomatoes, buying for thousands of restaurants across the country;

WHEREAS, Burger King, Inc. has publicly rejected the CIW's offer to work together to ensure fair wages and safe conditions for the workers who pick its tomatoes, instead announcing its own solution for farmworker poverty and human rights abuses to "retrain" disgruntled farmworkers for employment at Burger King restaurants.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ call upon our members in all our settings to communicate with and encourage Burger King to join Taco Bell and McDonald's as leaders in true corporate social responsibility by working with representatives of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and other members of the Florida tomato industry to effect substantive action to improve the wages and working conditions of the farm workers who pick the tomatoes that go into Burger King's products;

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Conference Minister of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ, individual members and local churches express their concern for farm worker justice in letters and calls to Mr. John Chidsey, 5505 Blue Lagoon Dr., Miami, FL 37126. PH: 305-378-3000 FAX: 305-378-7262

May 2007

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. 2000. "The Agricultural Labor Market – Status and Recommendations." Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor.

<sup>2</sup> Farmworker Factsheet , The Farmworker Health Alliance, NC; and National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, "Report On The Mt. Olive Pickle Boycott By The Farm Labor Organizing Committee and Migrant Farm Worker Conditions In North Carolina And In the United States," <http://nccusa.org/publicwitness/mtolive/conditions.html>