

Supporting the Hands that Feed Us: Justice for Farmworkers

Agriculture is a multi-billion dollar industry in New York State, made possible by the labor of tens of thousands of workers tending orchards, harvesting fruits and vegetables, milking cows and caring for livestock. The majority are immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. They perform exhausting, often dangerous, labor for low wages. Labor laws in our state specifically exclude these farmworkers from the basic worker rights of overtime pay, a guaranteed day of rest per week, and the right to bargain collectively.

This inequality dates back to the New Deal. Southern legislators would only agree to President Franklin Roosevelt's proposed labor reforms if two groups of workers were excluded: farm labor and domestic help, jobs held primarily by Blacks in the South of the 1930s. The segregationists couldn't stomach the idea of granting equal labor rights to African-Americans. Decades later, New York State law, copied from federal law, continues to reflect this Jim Crow-era prejudice. From the beginning these exclusions did not have an economic basis. They came into being because of the **sin** of racism in our country.

For many years, faith organizations from around the state, including the NY State Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Catholic Diocese of Rochester, have stood in solidarity with farmworkers by supporting legislation called the **Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act**. This bill would end the exclusions and give farmworkers the same rights afforded other workers—not special rights, but simply equal rights.

Why do we care about this issue?

We care because we believe in the **preferential option for the poor**. That is, our Church teaches, based on Jesus' message in the Gospels, that **the needs of the poor have to take precedence over the wants of the privileged**. We have to take our side with the poor, the marginalized, the immigrant, the vulnerable, because that is what Jesus did. Are we willing to do this, even if it means paying more for our groceries so that both farmers and farmworkers can make a decent living?



Photo Courtesy of New York Apple Association
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We care because, as Catholics, we believe in **workers' right to organize**.

In 1891, workers around the world were living in dire poverty while enduring degrading conditions in the factories and mines of the Industrial Revolution. That year Pope Leo XIII wrote his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("Of New Things") to respond to the suffering and social upheaval of the times; in it he stated clearly that workers have the right to organize for their own good and the Common Good. Throughout the 120 years since that teaching, the Church has reaffirmed this tenet of Catholic social thought many times.

If farmworkers could secure the right to redress grievances collectively in the workplace, they would be less vulnerable to unsafe conditions and to poverty wages. This would also help to "level the playing field" for employers who already treat their workers well and pay them fairly.

We need you and your parish to be part of the Justice for Farmworkers campaign, and the time is NOW:
CONTACT YOUR NEW YORK STATE SENATOR in Albany
and ask him or her to sponsor and support The Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act
See reverse side to learn how →

How to show your solidarity with farmworkers:

Call the NY State Senate switch board at **518-455-2800** and ask for your state senator's office. If you don't know who your state senator is, the operator will look that up for you and then connect you to the right senator's office. Tell the staff member who answers the phone that you are requesting the your senator sponsor and support the **Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act**. Take two minutes and make a difference!

Drones and The Right to Life *presented by Mary Ellen O'Connell*

Thursday May 30, 7:00 –8:30 p.m.
St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry
120 French Road, Rochester, NY 14618

Live-streamed videoconferencing available at:
St. Margaret Mary Church, Apalachin
Catholic Charities, Elmira
St. Joseph's School, Auburn



Mary Ellen O'Connell is Research Professor at the Kroc Institute for Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, and has served as a professional military educator for the U.S. Department of Defense.

She has extensively studied the international law implications of military attacks by unmanned drones, focusing her research on international legal theory, international law on the use of force, and dispute resolution.

In his 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth"), Pope John XXIII shared his vision of a path to peace, linking human rights with God's dream for us. In 1983, the Bishops of the United States wrote their pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* addressing the threat of nuclear weapons to all life. In our times, we must consider our own progress towards creating a peaceful world, and particularly the moral implications of current war-fighting technology.

Don't miss this opportunity to learn from an expert in order to form your conscience on this issue.

Reservations will help us ensure seating for all

Go to St. Bernard's online registration form at this link:

<http://www.stbernards.edu/upcoming-courses/register-now-online-registration-forms/continuing-education-special-events/event-registration/>

Contact the Peace & Justice staffer from your county (see below) with questions about the videoconferencing sites

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