

# Justice, Peace and Life

May 2016

*“There is no legitimate reason for treating farmworkers inequitably... It is unacceptable for farmworkers to be denied the basic labor, safety and health protections other workers enjoy.”*

*-New York State Catholic Conference*

## 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 New York 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.

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.

To draw attention to this issue, farmworkers and their allies are marching from Long Island to Albany (**that’s 200 miles!**) from May 15 until their June 1 lobby day at the state capitol. Learn more [here](#) and please keep the marchers in your prayers.

**Join your voices with theirs: CONTACT YOUR NEW YORK STATE SENATOR in Albany and ask him/her to sponsor and support the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.**

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!

This bill has been proposed for over a decade, but most farmworkers aren’t U.S. citizens so they can’t vote and don’t have much political power. Remember their labor the next time you eat apples, cabbage, sweet corn, or milk produced in New York State. Show your solidarity with them by advocating for their rights.

### ***Now and At the Hour of Our Death...***

Our Diocesan Public Policy Committee has chosen **Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS)** as one of our education issues during the current legislative session.

In the coming months, *Justice, Peace & Life* will continue to raise awareness on the many reasons to oppose legislation to legalize PAS in New York.



#### **Reason #3: Some terminally ill people recover and get well**

Medical science is not infallible. Sometimes people deemed close to death end up living long fruitful lives. The option of PAS could snuff out that possibility in those cases.

#### **Reason #4: All humans have dignity, even the sick and dying.**

“No matter where you are in your life, you are still human and you have the dignity of being human. Babies are helpless but they have human dignity. People with terrible handicaps, scars, amputations, mental illness — they still have human dignity. No one and no sickness can take your human dignity away from you. You are still someone’s spouse, someone’s parent, someone’s child, someone’s loved one. No matter what happens to you, you are still you. No one can take that from you, no matter what.”  
-Jane St. Clair

[30 Logical Reasons Against Assisted Suicide](#)



## *Commemorate Laudato Si' Week*

One year ago, on June 18, Pope Francis released his encyclical **Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home**. The Global Catholic Climate Movement is inviting parishes across the globe to commemorate the one-year anniversary. Click [here](#) to learn about their online conference and [here](#) for videos for kids and other resources for Laudato Si' week.

*Parish ideas for the week of June 12-19 and beyond:*  
**Ask** your pastor to include the teachings of Laudato Si' in his homily that week.

**Facilitate** a reading group using our Diocesan Laudato Si' [Adult Study/Discussion Ideas](#)

**Organize** a series of faith formation sessions based on the Global Catholic Climate Movement's online course [videos](#) on the encyclical.

**Educate** parishioners to reduce their use of **air conditioning** this summer by opening windows in the evening when the outside temperature is cooler than inside, then closing them in the morning when the outside temperature starts to rise.

**Ensure** that your parish is serving only **Fair Trade** coffee, which provides a fair wage for farmers in the Third World and is grown using environmentally friendly agricultural practices. Ask for it in the grocery store or purchase from SERV [here](#).

#### **Justice & Peace Ministry Staff of Catholic Charities:**

**Monroe** 585-546-7220 Marvin Mich ext. 7021; MMich@cfcrochester.org / Ruth Marchetti ext 7099; RMarchetti@cfcrochester.org

**Chemung/Schuylers/Tioga** Kathy Dubel 607-734-9784 ext. 2135; KDubel@dor.org

**Cayuga/Ontario/ Seneca/Tompkins/Yates** Laurie Konwinski 607-272-5062 ext. 12; LKonwinski@dor.org

**Livingston** Tabitha Brewster 585-658-4466 ext. 13; TBrewster@dor.org

**Steuben** Lynda Lowin 607-776-8085 ext. 217; LLowin@dor.org

**Wayne** Peter Dohr 315-331-4867; PDohr@dor.org

**Diocesan Life Issues Coordinator:** Suzanne Stack 585-328-3210 ext. 1304; SStack@dor.org