

# CMFN SEMBRADOR

WALKING TOWARD THE KINGDOM WITHOUT FEAR

*Catholic Migrant Farmworker Newsletter Fall 2022*



## In this newsletter:

- A message from our Director
- Testimonies from Migrant Farmworkers: A Pastoral Encounter

## *A message from our director...*

“Many people have already related the events that have taken place among us, writing down what we were told...” [Luke 1:1-2]

Testimonies are the source of our Gospels proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ among us and so are today's testimonies from farmworkers and those who accompany them.

The following testimonies give voice to the need to leave one's family, crossing borders as strangers in a strange land to work, and the hopes and dreams for their families together with the difficulties and injustices suffered.

Then there are the testimonies of the church community's response to welcome, protect, promote and integrate [Fratelli Tutti 129] the agricultural laborer.

Enjoy these testimonies and let their voice invite you to become a CMFN friend and active accompanier of the 2.5 million men and women essential workers among us.

Bendiciones,

*Fr. Tom Florek, SJ*





## Responses that touch our hearts:

The stories we have heard invite us to join in solidarity to be bearers of hope.

### WHY HAVE YOU LEFT YOUR COUNTRY TO COME HERE?

- Because there's a need in my family to pay for the university for my daughters and sons. All my children are in school and to help my dad.
- I am here because in my country the economic situation is very difficult. The market price of farm products is the same today as it was thirty years ago. One can't live on the harvest the farm can produce in six months. Also, the Free Trade Agreement affected us in Guanajuato, Mexico. Our vegetable crops didn't have a market. We lost everything because we weren't able to sell what we grew.

### WHAT'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH?

- I'm a greeter and an usher. I also belong to a prayer group.
- I'm a Eucharistic minister. I also belong to the Knights of Columbus and am in charge of the greeters.

### WHAT'S YOUR DREAM?

- To continue working to help not only my family but others. I'm learning about the Word of God and about helping others.
- My dream is to have a house for my family and that my children go to school and do well in this country.

### WHAT IS YOUR HOPE?

- My hope is to provide an education for my children, that they may have a better life.
- My hope is that the government approves a migrant reform legislation so we can come out of the shadows and that we are able to have a license to be able to drive my children to school without fear that we'll be stopped by the police, and to have a valid social security number in order to work with dignity.

### WHAT ARE YOUR DIFFICULTIES?

- Not having my documents and a social security number. And because I don't have a SS number my job doesn't pay well. I prefer to make less than to be dishonest working under an alias.
- My difficulty is not having health insurance or social security that allows me to work, and not having a driver's license. Also, we are not able to save in a 401-K for our retirement. I'm worried for the future of my family.

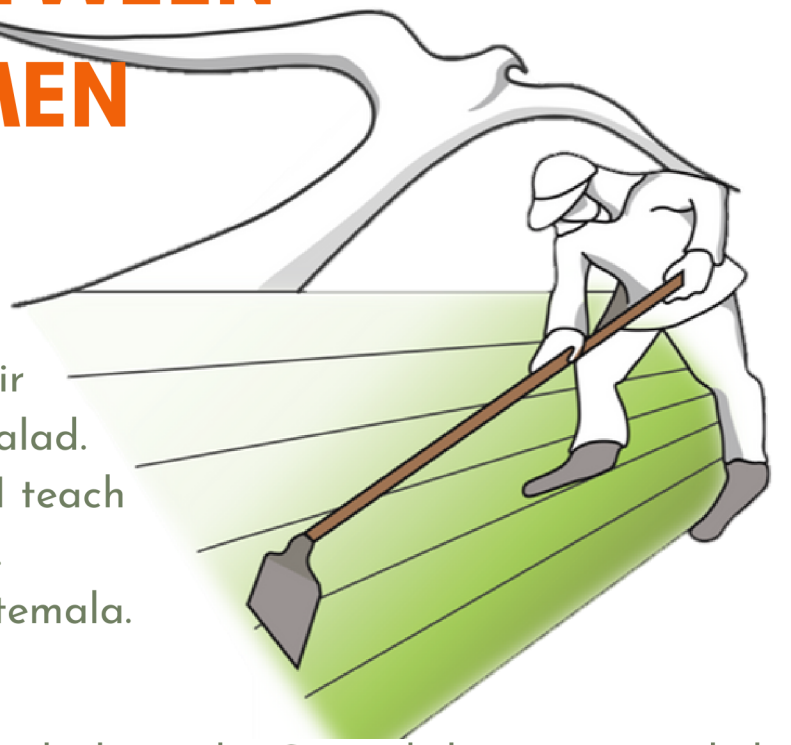




# AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN TWO YOUNG MEN

## *I DIDN'T KNOW*

I held my breath as I watched Mynor and Jason take their seats across the table from each other. They had just filled their plates with homemade tamales, rice, beans, mole, and cactus salad. They sat together because I told them to. Jason was in a class I teach at an agricultural university. This dinner was part of their final. Mynor was a recently arrived unaccompanied minor from Guatemala. Both have given me permission to share their story.



Prior to this dinner in class, we discussed everything we learned about the Spanish language and the culture of Hispanic workers in US agriculture. My students are the children of the owners of greenhouses, dairy farms, orchards, etc. that employ Spanish-speaking workers. Immediately, Jason and his friends were negative about the dinner. Public comments included: "Why do we have to have to eat with them?" "I don't want to talk to illegals." "I'll just come with ICE." "I won't go at all."

So, watching Mynor and Jason sit together made me question what I was doing. The 20 students and 23 agricultural workers from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras all with varying abilities in English and Spanish began to eat together and try to make conversation. The Mexican woman who made the tamales laughed as a couple of students tried to bite the corn husks and told them in Spanish how to eat the tamales while she showed them. They quickly got it and enjoyed their food.

Mynor and Jason had their phones on the table and their food half-eaten pushed aside. They used their translation apps to communicate and were also watching a music video. Both finished their food, cleared their places, and excused themselves because they were both going to different dairy farms to milk cows for the next eight hours.

When I opened the students' written finals I again held my breath. Jason's first line was very clear, "I am sorry. I didn't know." With permission, I share the rest.

I didn't know that this experience would impact me so much. I was wrong and I apologize. Everyone at the dinner was so kind and helpful. No one laughed at us or our Spanish. Everyone really appreciated that we tried the food and tried Spanish. How many times have I laughed at workers who didn't speak English?

But, I am shocked about Mynor. Thank you for putting us together. I didn't know a 15-year-old could come here alone. He worked more hours than I did that night. Did you know he went to his high school in the morning after he got off work? He went home, showered, ate, took a 40-minute nap, and went to class. I slept until noon. All night we sent messages to each other in bad Spanish and bad English. We sent links to the music we liked. I sent pictures of my farm and he sent pictures of his home and family in Guatemala. I didn't know people could be so poor, work so hard and still be so positive and have goals. He came here with nothing. He told me you gave him food and clothes because he had nothing. Now he goes to school and wants to help his family.

Mynor told me about coming here. I didn't know people walked for hours and then hopped on a train, which is really dangerous. He held on in the pouring rain. He laughed about it and put smiley emojis!! He tried to cross the border three times and couldn't make it. On the fourth time, they were captured by ICE after walking 30 hours in the desert. ICE yelled at him, pushed him, and made him stay in a freezing room for days with really no bathroom and old food. I didn't know they could do that. Then, his uncle paid for his plane ticket here and you registered him for school. I couldn't do that. He said he didn't go to school for a couple of years because his parents needed him to work. Now he is milking cows at night, going to school and learning English. I don't know how he can do it.

Mynor is 15. He supports himself. He pays rent and buys and cooks food. I thought people came here to take jobs and get benefits. But, Mynor is working. He shouldn't. He should be a kid. Now he is always working, taking care of himself and sending money home. **I didn't know any of this.**  
**Why didn't I know?**

~ Jenny Fisher





# From the desk of Fr. Jesus Flores



The migrant communities together with the Church of Rochester New York walk together as pilgrims: Itinerants on the move harvesting crops in various venues. They are personas and families that have decided to establish themselves in a place where they faithfully work for an owner, and there they grow and their children attend schools.

The number of migrant workers has increased, especially those with H2-A visas. They are generally men from Mexico who are contracted seasonally for only one owner.

The migrant and contracted farmworkers are a workforce that vitalizes the agricultural economy of the rural counties. The work venues include fruit, especially apples, vegetables and vineyards that produce wine.

Agricultural workers who are residents work seasonally in fields and need to find other employment in winter. Some work in dairy farms and others in construction.

It takes a pastoral missionary who has the capacity and the freedom to accompany the migrant population. The accompaniment requires the desire and ability to find the invisible workers and begin a relationship of trust with them. It requires understanding their reality and the capacity to evangelize via solidarity measures, friendship, information and faith gatherings: liturgies, retreats and popular religious practices.

Then as relations develop especially among the permanent residents of the region, the task is to build community. Little by little the mission begins to promote leadership formation and making links among the dispersed communities. These immigrant communities are a seed for all rural communities.

We have formed an accompanying and collaborative missionary team. We encourage each other. We have more than ten years of organization and adapting services that are supported by the Diocese.

Personally, I have seen the increase of migrants at the US - Mexican border. I was born in Nogales Sonora and ordained for the Diocese of Hermosillo. There we came to know migrants coming from Central America. I now have lived twenty years in Up State New York.

During the most recent years which include the pandemic, our missionary commitment has brought us close to the farmworkers in the fields, orchards, vineyards and dairies. We've helped establish five communities made up of families and individual migrants who get together with the Anglo community to share their culture, their common catholic identity and to socialize. Each of the communities is coordinated by a local leader.

**These are our many faces, from:  
Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mexico,  
Venezuela, Ecuador, and Haiti...**





# Our Faith on the Road

*by Veronica Rodriguez*

Migrant farmworkers come to our diocese every summer to work in the crop fields such as asparagus, strawberries, blueberries and many others. There are a total of approximately 300 camps in the nine counties of the Diocese of Kalamazoo. Although migrant farmworkers arrive in all nine counties, the vast majority arrive in Allegan, Berrien and Van Buren counties. These counties are the ones closest to the lake and where most crops are grown.

We have had the great privilege that, since the beginning of our diocese, the mission has been to accompany the farmworkers during the summer so that they know that the Diocese of Kalamazoo is here to support them in whatever they need and that they are not alone. It doesn't matter if they are Catholic or not, our mission is to accompany and support them.

Every summer, through the Office of Hispanic Ministry, priests and religious sisters are brought to strengthen this ministry of accompaniment and to visit each of these 300 camps. In addition to the diocesan group, several parishes have volunteer groups who also visit the camps. Visits are made once a week.

The visits are no more than an hour, so as not to extend the already-long workday and are simply meant to offer a little conversation and allow volunteers from the diocese to get to know the families and the men who have come to our diocese. These conversations are very enriching, and several of the volunteers have expressed that many times one learns and receives more than what we offer.

It is a time to meet Jesus in the midst of each one of our migrant brothers and sisters who, with all their difficulties, great fatigue and sometimes shortcomings, are the happiest and most grateful people with God. This is where, through such a small action, our faith, and the mission that God has entrusted to us to accompany, evangelize and be evangelized is strengthened. A simple game to pass the time, some reading or Bible talk, or simply being there to listen has a greater impact than one can imagine.

I invite you to not take a vacation from your faith, but rather, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, wherever we are, to be open to meeting that stranger who, by walking and accompanying us, strengthens our faith.

May almighty God guide and grant the necessary words to each of the persons who will be visiting and accompanying our migrant brothers and sisters.

---

## BECOME A MISIONARY IN YOUR OWN HOME

Many times you think that being a missionary involves traveling to a different country, but what if you were a missionary in your own country or, better yet, in your own diocese? And what does migrant ministry entail?

Games, readings, Bible studies and more are provided for adults, children and youth, or the opportunity to just simply be present, listening to the people.

The visits are done once a week and last about an hour.





## *Human Life & Dignity Ministry*

In the Diocese of Raleigh, there are multiple lines of effort that have grown organically in order to welcome the migrant and refugees by Christians and other people of good will. For some parishes, the crops are visible from the sanctuary, and many of these Churches have developed relationships with the farmers and landowners who welcome visits from the community to our brothers and sisters in the fields. There are also partnerships between these parishes and other parishes, that do not have migrant workers in their surrounding area but who do have a vibrant ministry that collects donated articles like clothes, hygiene items, and prayer aids. The main purpose of the ministry is not to supply food or items, but rather to fellowship with our brothers and sisters and accompany “Jesus in the fields.”

These charitable works have also grown into works for justice, as genuine charity always does (cf. Pope Benedict, *Charity in Truth* §6). For decades, the Diocese of Raleigh has supported the North Carolina Congress of Latino Organizations, a membership-led organization that builds power among Latino institutions to advance social, racial and economic justice. In addition, the Diocese is helping to expand justice through support for the Campaign for Migrant Worker Justice which seeks to organize migrants in the Carolinas so that their voices can be heard and provide input to achieving a more equitable agricultural system.

These ministries and activities have grown organically from Christians who recognize that justice is the primary way of charity, and that we promote the building of society not merely by rights and duties, but through relationships of gratuitousness, mercy, and communion. “Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships...it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.” (Benedict § 6).

*by Deacon Joshua Klickman, MA*





## I LOVE THE LAND THAT GIVES US LIFE

BY ANGELICA MURILLO



This is a short summary of my life as a farmer in the United States. I am Angelica Murillo, Mexican, originally from La Sandia, Guanajuato. Like most of the world's migrants, we left our beloved town in search of better living conditions in 1959. I currently reside in San Luis, AZ. I worked in the fields for 40 consecutive years. I love the land that gives us life and I love it when I remember the work I did in the fields. It was beautiful to work outdoors among the green plants and the fruits that feed us, although sometimes those memories are also accompanied by a certain sadness when remembering the abuse and mistreatment that we received from some supervisors who were getting rich at the expense of the humble farmworker. This was the reason why Mr. Cesar Chávez began his fight in favor of the farm workers. His parents also suffered injustices; their land was taken from them. They were very difficult times.

When I started working there was no rest, we practically ate in the furrows, because if not, they would scold us; We traveled to work in trucks without proper seats, boards were placed across for sitting. These were times of suffering, but also of hope. Thanks to God and to Mr. Cesar Chávez and his fight for workers' rights, the situation of many people improved.

In 1979, the struggle was very difficult for us, but we won, I say it with great pride because I was in that march, it was when unemployment and fairer treatment for the farmworkers was won, among other things. Mr. Chávez's motto was one of NON VIOLENCE. As of that date, as I said before, the situation for us, farworkers, began to improve, sadly he went before us, he died at a very young age. Rest in peace, Mr. César Chávez!



## Our Mission

To promote the formation of welcoming church communities by advocating social justice, dignity, and respect for all in order that we may be a missionary church.

[cmfnsembrador.org](http://cmfnsembrador.org)