

HARVEST OF HOPE: FAITH AND INCLUSION FOR FARMERS IN THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

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I. Introduction

Harvest of Hope:

Faith and Inclusion for Farmworkers in the Catholic Church in the United States

"Harvest of Hope" invites us to reflect deeply on **the invaluable work of farmworkers**. Through their effort and dedication, these men and women not only gather the harvests that feed the world, but also beautify our surroundings and teach us. Just as the farmer uses the sickle when the fruit is ripe, these men and women teach us that everything has its appointed time. Their tireless work, despite the difficulties inherent in rural life, not only reflects a strong commitment but is **also a living testimony of hope** (cf. Mk 4:26–29).¹

In this regard, the Catholic Church has recognized peasants as “privileged citizens of the Kingdom of God;” true “treasures hidden in the fields and furrows” (cf. Mt 13:44; Eph 2:19–20). Although their lives are often marked by poverty and the constant search for justice, their **communal spirituality, inspired by the mystery of the Trinity, gives them strength and a sense of belonging**. Through their daily work, they not only support their families, but also contribute significantly to the Church’s evangelizing mission, embodying a spirit of service and communion.

However, in this context, a fundamental question arises that challenges the church community: **How can the Church strengthen its pastoral care for the**

¹ 1The Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, 2025, is an opportunity to renew our hope in our migrant farming sisters and brothers in the United States, and to learn from their witness of faith and hope; cf. Rom 5:4–6.

farmers and more fully recognize their role within the faith community? Although **their faith gives them strength and joy in the face of adversity**, it remains essential to highlight their specific challenges, listen to their voices, and actively promote their active participation. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on concrete strategies that allow for the appreciation and dignification of their work, fostering their active participation in pastoral care and the Church's mission.

For this reason, this integration project proposes to explore **how the Church can respond effectively to the pastoral needs of agricultural workers and move toward greater inclusion**. The goal is to ensure that farmworkers are not seen merely as recipients of the Gospel message, but as full members and **active protagonists in the building of the Kingdom of God within their communities**.

To achieve this goal, the methodological approach combines **contextual analysis** with theological-pastoral reflection. First, the historical, demographic, geographical, and socioeconomic contexts **that shape the reality of agricultural workers** in Yuma County are examined, allowing the phenomenon to be situated within its most concrete context. Next, a proposal is presented grounded in **Sacred Scripture, the contemporary Magisterium**, the Church's social doctrine, and other theological disciplines that guide the ecclesial mission in contexts of vulnerability. Finally, through **ministerial discernment** and lived pastoral practice, paths of renewal are proposed that **recognize the dignity, central role, and active participation of farmworkers in the life of the Church**.

II. Contextual Foundations

A. **The Challenge Facing Pastoral Ministry** in the Face of the Invisibility of Rural People

The defined question / case study: How can peasant theology and spirituality inform the renewal of rural pastoral ministry in a specific diocese **to promote the effective inclusion** of peasants, overcoming existing prejudices and power structures?

This focal point centers on a specific ministerial reality that I have observed and that challenges me: the apparent invisibility or limited focus of ecclesial pastoral care toward peasant communities compared to urban or more “visible” pastoral ministries. This paradox not only highlights a gap in attention but also underscores the need for a profound theological and contextual reflection to rethink strategies for inclusion.

B. Demographic Background

During my service in the Vicariate of Yuma, I have had the opportunity to walk alongside many brothers and sisters who work in agriculture, many of whom are in temporary employment and face daily challenges—labor-related, social, and spiritual.

This scenario is part of the reality of the Diocese of Tucson, which, according to the 2025 Directory, serves a community of approximately 400,000 Catholics spread across a vast territory of nearly 43,000 square miles, through 77 parishes and 34 missions (Tucson I-II Directory).

The CARA report highlights that the Diocese of Tucson serves migrants from at least 11 countries and **seven types of itinerant and vulnerable communities**, including

agricultural workers. Through these ministries, the formation of leaders and the implementation of

concrete pastoral initiatives and **the provision of formative experiences for seminarians, as well as specific diocesan guidelines for this ministry.**²

Although these individuals are essential to the local, national, and international economy and are a living part of the faith community, their presence often goes unnoticed. Their pastoral, human, and spiritual needs are not always heard or addressed as they deserve.

Therefore, this project seeks **to bring their reality to light and promote a pastoral ministry that is truly close to them and committed to their needs. The aim is to bring them out of the shadows,** to understand their circumstances from a holistic perspective—that of the author, that of other pastoral agents, and, above all, that of the workers themselves, and to ensure a support system that dignifies their lives. This approach responds to Pope Francis' invitation to live out **synodality: a Church that listens, dialogues, and walks with its people, from the margins toward the center** (Preparatory Document for the Synod, 2021).

This committed perspective has been enriched by my participation in pastoral visits to farm fields organized annually by the National Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees, and Farmworkers (PCMRT/USCCB) in various dioceses across the country. Through these experiences, I have heard firsthand the testimonies of men and women who live this reality. Although **their stories reflect the pain of poverty and marginalization, they also reveal their faith, their admirable resilience, and their unwavering love for their families and for the land they cultivate.**

² Mary L. Gautier, P. Gaunt y Mark M. Gray, «Migración y ministerio en la Iglesia católica: un estudio de la Diócesis de Tucson», Centro de Investigación Aplicada en el Apostolado (CARA), www.diocesetucson.org/diocesan_directory.html, pp. 221-223.

To address the reality of pastoral ministry among agricultural workers, it is essential to contextualize their situation within a **historical framework of exploitation**. The introduction to John Weber's book offers a critical lens through which to understand this trajectory. Weber explains how, even in moments of supposed celebration such as the 1968 Hemisfair, a "heritage fantasy" was constructed that concealed the systematic exploitation of Mexican and Mexican-American labor in South Texas.³ This official narrative stood in stark contrast to the reality of the slums and the profound vulnerability of this population.

The author details the consolidation of a "transborder caste" system, in which **migrant labor was essential for agricultural growth, yet at the same time was denied rights and treated as "powerless and insignificant."**⁴ The elites implemented complex strategies of "forced mobility and immobilization" to control these workers, drastically **restricting their capacity for agency** and negotiation (Weber 6). Crucially, this model of disenfranchisement extended beyond the South Texas region and influenced labor relations at the national level.⁵

What I have seen confirms that this is not an isolated issue, but rather a reflection of **a greater challenge facing the Church**: how to be a mother and teacher to all, especially to those who have remained furthest from the Church. For this reason, I believe we need a pastoral approach that is inspired by peasant theology and spirituality, capable of recognizing, integrating, and defending the dignity of those who have lived on the margins for so long.

³ Weber, *From South Texas to the Nation: The Exploitation of Mexican Labor in the Twentieth Century*, 2-3

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

C. Geographic and Socioeconomic Context

Yuma County, Arizona, is a region known for its immense agricultural wealth. Its vast lands, covered with vegetable fields, date palms, and citrus groves, produce a significant portion of the vegetables that end up on tables across the country. To understand the magnitude of this production, let's look at the key data. According to the Yuma Fresh Vegetables Association in its "Yuma Ag Statistics" section, some 180,000 acres are dedicated to agriculture⁶. Since crops are often planted and harvested several times a year—twice, or even more—the actual cultivated area exceeds 230,000 acres. This is made possible by constant irrigation from the Colorado River. The use of wells is avoided because groundwater typically has a high salt content, making it unsuitable for these crops.

However, agriculture in the state of Arizona faces major challenges, especially water shortages. Although Arizona has historically been recognized for its good water management, with important laws such as the 1980 Groundwater Act or the Drought Contingency Plan signed in 2019, it now faces an increasingly urgent crisis. The Colorado River, on which millions of people and vast agricultural areas (including Yuma County) depend, is losing flow due to climate change and overuse. The levels of Lake Powell and Lake Mead are dropping rapidly, which is a clear sign that the crisis is no longer a future concern, but a present one.

This calls for **a fundamental rethinking of how water is managed in the state**. In the coming years, Arizona will face some very important decisions: updating the Groundwater Code (2025), renegotiating the Colorado River operating agreement (2026), and responding to the falling water levels in rivers and rural wells, caused by uncontrolled pumping. If action is not taken soon, thousands of people and the balance of the environment will be at risk. That is why taking care of water today also means taking care of the future of our communities, agricultural work, and the environment⁷

⁶ Yuma Fresh Vegetables Association, "Yuma Ag Statistics", Yuma Fresh, yumafreshveg.com/.

⁷ Water for Arizona Coalition, "Securing Arizona's Water Future", <https://www.waterforarizona.com/>. 8

Based on YFVA data in “Employment Numbers,” **agriculture in Yuma County remains the region’s primary economic driver.** One in every four jobs is directly related to farming. **More than 20,000 agricultural workers, many of whom cross the border daily from San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora, make this work possible.** The vegetable harvest runs from August to April, followed by the melon harvest from May to October. This means that work in the farm fields never stops. Local residents, migrants, and those working through the **H-2A program make up a diverse and specialized workforce, whose efforts sustain both this county and the food supply chain across the country.**

In fact, the demand for H-2A workers in Arizona’s agricultural sector reflects a national trend. Between 2017 and 2022, the number of H-2A workers certified by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) increased by 64.7%, reaching more than 370,000. More than two-thirds of the country’s counties utilized these workers by 2022, including this county. Thanks to them and a robust processing network, the region bears **witness to the nation of the unseen effort that sustains work essential to us all.**⁸

Faced with this reality, the Church cannot remain indifferent. The Catholic bishops of the United States, moved by this concern, have published pastoral letters in which their position is clear. In their document, “For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me

⁸ AGDAILY Reporters, “Report: Challenges and Trends of H-2A Workers in Agriculture”, <https://www.agdaily.com/news/report-challenges-and-trends-of-h-2a-workers-in-agriculture/>

Food,” they emphatically state that feeding the world is not merely a practical necessity, but a Gospel call. As they emphasize in this text: **“Agriculture is the way in which farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers provide a decent life for their families and help feed a hungry world. It is not simply another economic activity.”**⁹ Therefore, **caring for and dignifying agricultural work is a fundamental commitment to faith, justice, and humanity.**

Despite all they contribute to the country’s economy, farmworkers face very difficult situations. Many live far from their families for long periods, which profoundly affects their emotional and mental health. Added to this is constant exposure to dangerous pesticides. Each year, nearly 550 million kilograms of these substances are used in the United States, and it is estimated that more than 300,000 farmworkers are exposed. Exposure to pesticides can occur by touching plants, eating without washing hands, being near sprayed areas, or drinking contaminated water. No pesticide is harmless; over time, they can cause everything from skin irritations and respiratory problems to damage to internal organs and even death in severe cases.¹⁰

need. This situation not only highlights the adverse conditions faced by these workers, but also underscores the urgent need to recognize and value their efforts from an ethic of solidarity that honors their dignity, their labor rights, and their contributions.

⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Porque Tuve Hambre y Ustedes me Dieron de comer: Reflexiones Católicas sobre los Alimentos, los Agricultores, y los Trabajadores Agrícolas,” <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/upload/Porque-tuve-hambre.pdf>, introducción,

¹⁰ Coppa, Girardot y Richman, “Unseen Hands: The History of Migrants Workers”, Student Research Series. Vol 12, no. 5 (Fall 2013): Instituto for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame,

III Theological and Pastoral Framework

Building on the contextual foundations of pastoral practice in Yuma County, where the social, cultural, and spiritual realities of agricultural workers are outlined, it is necessary to illuminate this practice from a theological perspective. The following chapter introduces the theological-pastoral framework that gives meaning to accompaniment, offering the doctrinal principles that underpin ecclesial action in contexts of vulnerability.

Pastoral ministry is grounded in the conviction that faith is not merely a spiritual dimension, but an intrinsically transformative force that mobilizes the Church toward encountering the most vulnerable. In this context, working with agricultural workers and their communities—often marked by invisibility and limited pastoral attention—requires a solid theological framework grounded in the principles of **kerygma (proclamation of the Gospel), metanoia (conversion), koinonia (communion), and diaconia (service).** These concepts not only reflect the essence of Christian life, but also **underpin a committed pastoral ministry capable of responding to the realities of exclusion, injustice, and the peasants' quest for dignity.**

This approach finds support both in the teaching of the Church and in the life of the early Christian communities, as described in Acts 2:42–47:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. (...) All the believers were united and had everything in common; they sold their possessions and distributed them to everyone according to each person's need." This passage illustrates how koinonia, diakonia, and metanoia arise

from the kerygma, **highlighting a pastoral approach where faith translates into concrete actions of justice and solidarity.”**

How can these biblical principles inspire a pastoral renewal that not only accompanies but also strengthens rural communities and promotes a Church that is more committed and open? This is precisely the question guiding this project, as it seeks paths that embrace inclusion and dignity. In this same vein, Pope Francis’ invitation in **Evangelii Gaudium** resonates:

“an evangelizing community (...) knows how to go out, take initiatives without fear, go out to meet others, seek out those who are far away, and reach the crossroads to invite the excluded” (EG, 24).

A. Biblical Sources:

1. Old Testament

The relationship between faith and farm work has deep roots in Scripture, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, where agricultural imagery is used to illustrate both the Covenant and the Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, the work of sowing and harvesting transcends the simple agricultural task to become an expression of the relationship between human beings and God. From the very beginning, in Eden, man is entrusted with the mission of caring for and cultivating creation (Gen 2:15). The three main feasts of Israel—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering (Ex 23:16–26)—demonstrate how the agricultural cycle is directly integrated into the Covenant with God, for the people’s faithfulness brings blessing upon the land. Prophets such as Hosea exhort “to sow in righteousness and reap in faithfulness” (Hos 10:12), while the Psalms promise that, though we sow in tears, we will reap with joy (Ps 126:5).

2. New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus uses images from the countryside to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom of God. **In the parable of the sower (Mt 13:3–9; 18–23), the seed represents the Word of God, and its fruitfulness depends on the disposition of the heart that receives it. This parable invites us to reflect on how each person receives the message of the Gospel.** In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus describes the Kingdom as a seed that grows in a mysterious way, without human intervention (Mk 4:30–32). **These images underscore the transformative power of the Kingdom,** which begins humbly but has a significant and lasting impact.

The Apostle John delves deeper into the idea of spiritual fruitfulness by affirming that sacrifice is necessary for life to flourish: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). This passage connects Jesus’ self-giving with the fruitfulness of the Kingdom, showing that sacrifice is essential for spiritual transformation. James complements this teaching by stating that **“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who work for peace” (Jas 3:18).** Here, **sowing is not only a metaphor for spiritual action, but also a call to build relationships based on justice and peace.**

Taken as a whole, the New Testament expands upon the vision of the Old Testament, showing **that sowing and reaping are not merely physical acts, but also spiritual ones, reflecting the dynamics of the Kingdom of God and the transformation it brings to the lives of believers.**

3. Essential Dimensions of the Christian Evangelization Process.

Kerygma: (From the Greek κήρυγμα, **proclamation**): the fundamental proclamation of Jesus the Savior, of his death and resurrection, which constitutes the core of the Christian faith¹¹

This proclamation—the kerygma—finds powerful expression in the words of St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And as long as I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). This statement is not a theological theory, but **the living testimony of a radical transformation brought about by a personal encounter with Christ**. Paul, formerly a persecutor of Christians, experiences the kerygma as a truth that pierces him: Jesus died and rose again for him, and that love leads him to embark on a new path, sustained by faith and filled with hope.

As Aguilar explains, Paul’s argument in Galatians 2:19–20 revolves around the idea that, by uniting through faith with the crucified Christ, the believer also dies to the power of the Law, and is reborn to a new life in God.¹² Paul does not propose an irresponsible abandonment of personal existence, but rather a free and conscious openness to the love that has redeemed him: the Christian makes room for Christ in his life, yet remains responsible, knowing that it is Christ’s love first that makes this new beginning possible.

Thus, the kerygma is not an abstract concept, but **an experience that transforms the heart**. In **Evangelii Gaudium**, Pope Francis reminds us that **the proclamation of the Gospel cannot be separated from social reality**. To proclaim the kerygma is to affirm God’s dream: a world without exclusion, where everyone lives with dignity (EG, 77). **Faith is not only a personal matter, but a**

¹¹ “Kerigma”, Diccionario Bíblico, Bibliatodo, <https://www.bibliatodo.com/diccionario-biblico/kerigma>.

¹² José Enrique Aguilar, y Felipe de Jesús Legarreta, introducción a Pablo: Romanos y Gálatas, 214.

a transformative force that drives us to heal wounds and work for peace.

Authentic charity seeks to address the root causes of suffering by fostering a full social commitment (cf. EG, 180).

a. Metanoia: Original Word: μετάνοια, ἡ—repentance, turning away, a change of mind¹³.

Metanoia is a conversion born of an authentic encounter with Christ, capable of

radically transforming a person's life. Examples such as Zacchaeus or the good thief on the cross (Lk 23:42–43) reflect how this encounter changes the course of entire lives. However, conversion is not only personal; it also transforms communities. At Pentecost (Acts 2:38), the response to the kerygma gave rise to a fraternal community.

Today, this **conversion is also embodied in farmworkers, in their reaffirmed dignity and in their resilient hope in the face of structures that marginalize them.** In contexts such as theirs, metanoia manifests itself in the affirmation of that dignity. This reality demands an equally urgent conversion of the Church itself: an institutional metanoia that leads it to reassess its priorities and structures. Thus, peasants, the poor, and migrants will no longer be invisible, but will be recognized as a living part of the Body of Christ and valued by the institution.

b. Koinonia: n (koinonia) - Biblical Greek: **fellowship, communication, sharing, companionship**¹⁴

¹³ “Metanoia”, Diccionario Bíblico, Bibliatodo, https://www.bibliatodo.com/concordancia_biblica?s=metanoia&version=RV1960.

¹⁴ “Koinonía”, Diccionario Bíblico, Bibliatodo, https://www.bibliatodo.com/concordancia_biblica?s=Koinonia&version=RV1960.

In the Christian life, koinonia goes far beyond simply gathering together physically. It implies a living community, with deep bonds that touch the heart: sharing our faith, **walking together, and supporting one another in daily life**. In the Church, no one is alone; we are all part of the Body of Christ, called to care for one another. As St. Paul says: “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor 12:26-27).

Paul understood koinonia as a **spiritual communion and also as a concrete and active solidarity among communities**. An example of this was the collection for the needy in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Cor 8–9; Rom 15:26), a gesture of unity between Gentiles and Jewish Christians reflecting God’s divine providence: “God...will supply and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your generosity” (2 Cor 9:10).

This act not only **strengthens the communion among the Churches but also supports Paul’s apostolic mission**. Koinonia was also lived out in support for key ministries such as catechesis (Gal 6:6), and in mutual aid among communities¹⁵.

In the Diocese of Tucson, living out koinonia involves much more than just open doors. **It means welcoming farmworkers**, valuing and celebrating their traditions, prayers, and ways of living out their faith. This close-knit and flexible pastoral care strengthens the entire community by responding with sensitivity to realities that sometimes do not fit into traditional molds. In this context, **koinonia is also deeply expressed through the practices of popular religiosity**, which reflect faith embodied in daily life. Celebrations such as the Posadas, Three Kings’ Day, Day of the Dead, Vigils, and Patron Saint Festivals

¹⁵ Aguilar, y Legarreta, introducción a Pablo: Romanos y Gálatas, 249.

These are moments when the community gathers, shares, and reaffirms its hope. These events not only strengthen community bonds, but also give visible expression to a spirituality that arises from the people and finds in celebration, symbolism, and ritual a path to communion with God and among brothers and sisters.

c. Diaconia: The word "diaconia" comes from the Latin *diaconía*, which in turn comes from the Greek *diakonía* (διακονία), meaning **"service," "ministry," or "assistance."**¹⁶

In Christian life, diaconia is not simply helping; it is living the Gospel through service, with authentic love and constant dedication. As Jesus taught: "I did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45). Serving, then, is not an isolated act, but a way of life born of faith.

From the very beginnings of the Church, service has been essential. In Acts 6:1–7, the apostles established the ministry of deacons to ensure the care of all, especially widows and those most in need. Likewise, Saint Paul exhorts: "Serve one another in love" (Gal 5:13). This reveals that **serving is not something secondary; it is a concrete way of building community and unity in Christ,**

In pastoral ministry with rural workers, living out diakonia requires active solidarity: defending their rights, ensuring access to healthcare, supporting them in their daily struggles, and, above all, recognizing their worth and giving voice to their concerns within the Church. In this sense, as **Pope Francis rightly points out in Fratelli Tutti, our efforts toward migrants—like many farmworkers—can be summed up in four clearly pastoral verbs: "welcome, protect, promote, and "integrate" (Fratelli Tutti 129).** These principles illuminate the path of a Church that serves, not from a distance, but from a place of compassionate and transformative closeness.

¹⁶ "Diaconía", Diccionario Bíblico, Bibliatodo, https://www.bibliatodo.com/concordancia_biblica?s=Diaconia&version=RV1960.

What challenges and opportunities does pastoral accompaniment of the rural world present from the perspective of diakonia? This question challenges the way in which the Church accompanies the most vulnerable and calls upon her to offer a **service that is not merely a presence, but a profound transformation guided by dignity and concrete love.**

B. Patristic Sources

St. John Chrysostom and St. Ambrose of Milan To continue delving deeper into this theological-pastoral path, I turn to a source that has illuminated the life of the Church since its beginnings; the Church Fathers. In their teachings we find a wisdom that remains relevant today, capable of helping us understand what it means to care for the dignity of every person, to seek justice, and to protect creation and those most in need. Within this tradition, the voices of St. John Chrysostom and St. Ambrose of Milan resonate with particular force. Their teachings offer us invaluable insights for our mission: to accompany and integrate with respect, closeness, and commitment those who work the land day by day.

1. St. John Chrysostom: Mercy That Transforms

St. John Chrysostom, known as the “Golden-Mouthed” for his extraordinary eloquence, remains an inspiration for this theological-pastoral approach regarding social justice and the sacred rights of the poor. His legacy is marked by his courageous defense of the oppressed and his forceful call for a Church that does not settle for the status quo, but rather acts and transforms its surroundings.

A striking example of his commitment can be found in the account by Alfonso Ropero, from the Selected Works of John Chrysostom, in which he comments on one of his most notable sermons. Chrysostom publicly defended Eutropius, a corrupt official who, after falling from favor, sought asylum in the Church. Against intense pressure from the people and the emperor himself, Chrysostom protected him, defending his inalienable right to sanctuary.¹⁷

This act demonstrated not only his deep sense of justice but also his vast mercy. In his sermon, Chrysostom not only reflected on the transience of riches, but as Ropero points out, he made a moving appeal for mercy and forgiveness. For him, the Church is a maternal refuge that welcomes everyone, including those who were once its adversaries, demonstrating that its greatest victory lies in forgiving and protecting the helpless. His actions and words underscore that mercy transcends past faults and that the sacred space of the Church is open to all who seek shelter and redemption.

2. Saint Ambrose of Milan: Dignity as the Center of Creation

In the introduction to Saint Ambrose of Milan's work, *The Six Days of Creation* (Hexameron), Agustín López Kindler offers a profound interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis, which is of paramount importance for our theological-pastoral framework. His central teaching lies in the fact that all of Creation owes its existence to a triune God, whose word, the Word, is the Creative Principle. This fundamental truth, which affirms that the world had a beginning and a Creator, challenges any view that minimizes divine providence or the intrinsic goodness of creation¹⁸

¹⁷ Ropero, ed., *Obras escogidas de Juan Crisóstomo*, 40-44.

¹⁸ *Ambrosio de Milán, (Hexamerón)*, introducción de Agustín López Kindler, 10-11.

However, it is in the creation of the human being that Ambrose places the culminating emphasis. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, constitutes the pinnacle and the meaning of all of God's work¹⁹. This affirmation is not merely another element within his theological teaching, but a profound truth that allows us to recognize the unique and inalienable dignity of every person.

Ambrose's pastoral perspective is evident in his approach to grounding theology in the concrete experiences and needs of his communities²⁰. He is particularly concerned about the dehumanizing effects of the excessive pursuit of money and wealth, even in everyday aspects such as commerce²¹, which calls for deep ethical discernment. This teaching resonates today with the reality of agricultural workers, reminding us that the dignity of the person must prevail over profit and over any system that tends to dehumanize.

In summary, the voices of St. John Chrysostom and St. Ambrose of Milan continue to have much to say to us in our pastoral accompaniment. Chrysostom continues to call on us to raise our voices against injustice and to always stand with the most needy, extending mercy even to those who seemed unworthy. Ambrose, for his part, invites us to look at creation with eyes of faith and to recognize that every person is at the center of God's work. He reminds us that no system of exploitation can diminish the value of human life, and that we must never put money before decent work or life itself.

Together, they inspire us to live a bold ministry rooted in the Gospel, one that does not fear confronting the structures of sin that marginalize workers, while affirming their value

¹⁹ Ibid., 15, nota 11. ²¹ Ibid., 15, nota 13.

²⁰ Ibid., 15.

²¹ Ibid., 15, nota 13.

intrinsic and promotes their full integration and flourishing both within the community of faith and in society.

C. The Magisterium of the Church

1. A Prophetic Voice for Our Time

The **social teaching of the Catholic Church is an indispensable guide** for understanding and accompanying not only those who work the land, but all of humanity that shares life in society. From its earliest formulations, the Magisterium has insisted on the inviolable dignity of every person and on the preferential option for the most vulnerable. These principles are essential for shedding light on the daily challenges faced by those who, from the rural margins, continue to sow hope amid often adverse conditions.

The Social Doctrine of the Church highlights a central truth: every person possesses a dignity that no one can take away, since they have been created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27). This premise elevates human work beyond mere subsistence, transforming it into a form of collaboration with the Divine work. From *Rerum Novarum* by L'eon XIII (1891) to *Laborem Exercens* by St. John Paul II (1981), the Church has called for respect for workers' rights. This demand takes on a prophetic character in the face of the harsh conditions and unfair wages experienced by many agricultural workers, not only in Yuma County, but throughout the country. Therefore, pastoral work is called to be a voice that denounces injustice and promotes the inherent dignity of every worker.

Directly linked to this dignity is the preferential option for the poor and excluded. This is not an optional charitable gesture, but a deeply evangelical choice of faith, where Jesus himself identifies with the "least of these" (Mt 25:31-46). The Pope

Francis in **Evangelii Gaudium**, Pope Francis emphasizes this as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity” (198). This primacy compels us in our pastoral ministry to go beyond mere assistance, challenging us to transform the invisibility of farmworkers into a meaningful presence within the Christian community. This means actively promoting their dignity and full participation in the social and spiritual life of the Church. Even in the midst of their vulnerabilities.

Finally, **social doctrine calls for a holistic vision, in which the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are inseparable (Laudato Si’ 49).** The socio-environmental crisis is not an abstract phenomenon for rural workers; it manifests itself in direct occupational hazards, exposure to pesticides, and exploitation without fair regulation. In the face of the “throwaway culture” that denies the dignity of the most vulnerable (cf. *Fratelli Tutti* 19), pastoral ministry is called to be a prophetic and committed space, capable of making visible, protecting, and dignifying those who work the land. **This task is not merely a social responsibility, but an evangelical imperative that encompasses the care of creation and justice for those who cultivate it with hope and dedication.**

These principles complement one another, forming a solid and coherent structure. The common good calls us to ensure that everyone has access to a dignified life (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 26; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 164); solidarity requires us to recognize our interdependence and mutual responsibility (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 38; *Fratelli Tutti* 116); subsidiarity empowers communities to be protagonists of their own development (*Cuadragesimo Anno* 79; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 186); and distributive justice impels us to seek an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2411; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 176).

D. Theologians: A Reflection from the Perspective of Praxis and Commitment.

1. Gustavo Gutiérrez: Theology from the Perspective of Praxis

Gustavo Gutiérrez, in his work *Liberation Theology: Perspectives*, presents a key argument for understanding this theological approach: its true validity lies in praxis, not in theory. In line with his thinking, farmworkers represent a historically marginalized sector whose reality demands to be heard from a committed theological perspective. It is not enough to reflect on their situation from a distance; a transformative praxis is required that recognizes their dignity and their struggles. Liberation theology, as proposed by Gutiérrez, makes sense precisely when it is embodied in concrete individuals, whose rights have been systematically denied. According to the author, a genuine theology “must be verified by the practice of that commitment”²², which implies that theological reflection is not an end in itself, but a critical consequence of committed action, oriented toward the transformation of reality. Thus, Gutiérrez maintains that all authentic theology must arise from a commitment to the poor and oppressed, always verified in liberating praxis²³. In this sense, farmworkers are not mere recipients of assistance, but theological subjects who generate reflection from their experience of faith, work, and resistance. Within the framework of the Harvest of Hope, this perspective translates into accompanying those who cultivate the land and sustain the food system through their labor, recognizing them as a privileged theological space, where faith is embodied in the daily struggle for life.

2. Daniel G. Groody: Christ in the Migrant

²² Gutiérrez, de su obra *Teología de la Liberación*, 387.

²³ *Ibid.*, 387-388.

Daniel G. Groody, drawing on his theology of migration, offers a pastoral vision that transforms our work with farmworkers in Yuma. In interpreting Matthew ²⁴, he reminds us that Christ is present in migrants, especially those who suffer from hunger, thirst, illness, and exclusion in the farm fields.²⁴ Their suffering is a sacramental encounter, and accompanying them is not merely charity, but communion with the body of Christ.

Groody links this presence to the Eucharist, noting that there is no peace without justice, nor justice without social reordering. Therefore, the Church's mission involves transforming the structures that perpetuate forced migration and labor exploitation. To recognize Christ in the farmworkers is to commit to building the Kingdom of God here and now²⁵.

3. Leonardo Boff: The Cry of the Earth and of the Poor

Leonardo Boff urges us to pay attention to two inseparable cries: "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor"²⁶. His proposal in *Ecology: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* emphasizes that both human oppression and the devastation of nature stem from the same logic of domination. For Boff, caring for creation and fighting for social justice are not separate causes, but complementary and interconnected tasks. From this perspective, rural workers embody this dual cry, offering a privileged vantage point for reflecting on and living out the Gospel.

Based on Juan Carlos Scannone's analysis of Pope Francis's social ethics, this

²⁴ Groody, *Una Teología de la Migración: El cuerpo de los refugiados y el cuerpo de Cristo*, 319-20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 321-326.

²⁶ Boff, *Grito de la tierra grito de los pobres*, 17.

work—our pastoral work with agricultural workers—is grounded in a profound theological vision. Scannone helps us understand that the option for the poor, which Francis wishes to see at the heart of the Church’s journey, is a Christological imperative.

Agricultural workers, like the poor mentioned by the Pope, have “much to teach us,” and their suffering grants them a privileged place, for in their pain “they know the suffering Christ”²⁷. This elevates workers from mere recipients of aid to active and leading participants in the mission of the Church.

This perspective extends to global society, where Scannone uses the metaphor of the polyhedron. In this vision, the community of agricultural workers constitutes one of the “distinct faces” of this social polyhedron. Through their labor and solidarity, they not only resist the “throwaway culture” but act as “social poets,” creating new work and generating alternatives within their “popular economy.” **Scannone emphasizes that the creativity of these popular movements is what makes history and shapes a more just and humane future.**²⁸

Finally, this vision is guided by the “see, judge, act” method, a discernment inspired by Ignatian spirituality. In applying this method, we are called to look at the reality of agricultural workers with the eyes of faith, seeking in their lives the “true signs of God’s presence, or of God’s plans” for our time. In this way, **our pastoral work becomes a response to a divine call, where solidarity and the**

accompaniment transforms into conscious participation in the building of a more just and fraternal society.²⁹

²⁷ Scannone, *La Ética Social del Papa Francisco: El Evangelio de la misericordia según el espíritu de discernimiento*, 149-50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

The theological reflections of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Daniel G. Groody, Leonardo Boff, and Juan Carlos Scannone provide a solid foundation for my integration project, *Harvest of Hope: Faith and Inclusion for Peasants in the Catholic Church in the United States*. Their visions converge on a central truth: Christian faith is verified in praxis and in active engagement with the most vulnerable.

IV. Practice and Context: A Pastoral Ministry Rooted in the History of Farmworkers

After establishing the theological foundations that guide pastoral accompaniment in Yuma County, the next chapter delves into praxis. It reviews the concrete actions taken, seeking to integrate what has been learned to strengthen the commitment to farmworkers. Pastoral work with farmworkers in this county has grown and taken on a new form thanks to what has been learned in this process. The resources studied have helped to understand more clearly the complexity and urgency of this reality. Not only did they confirm what I already perceived about the difficulties these workers face, but they also showed how their situation is deeply connected to our faith and to the principles of the Gospel.

By learning about the history of migrant labor, especially through the work of John Weber, it becomes clear that the current conditions of farmworkers are not a coincidence. They are the result of a system that for decades has denied rights and a voice to those

cross borders to work. This story lends special significance to what our

²⁹ Ibid., 154.

brothers and sisters are experiencing today in the fields of this region, where the demand for H-2A workers continues to grow. In fact, Yuma is one of the counties with the most H-2A workers in the entire country, with nearly 8,000 people hired during peak season.³⁰ These workers are essential to agricultural production, especially in the cultivation of winter vegetables, which rely on this program for more than 90% of their workforce.

Yuma also holds symbolic significance; it is the birthplace of César Chávez, a leading figure in the struggle for farmworkers' rights, whose life and work became the most powerful symbol of the fight for farmworkers' dignity and rights—a figure who our pastoral work in a legacy of social justice and hope for the agricultural worker³¹.

Another key issue is water. In Arizona, water management is an urgent challenge that directly affects agricultural work and the lives of many families. Decisions regarding this vital resource not only impact the local economy—where agriculture is a primary driver and generates one in four jobs, according to the YFVA—but also directly affect the stability of thousands of lives in our diocese.

Against this backdrop, the fundamental truths of our faith take on new meaning. The kerygma—the Good News of Jesus who died and rose again (1 Cor 15:3–5)—is not merely a doctrine but a living hope that must be proclaimed and lived out precisely where it is most needed: in the midst of suffering, invisibility, and injustice. The resurrection is not merely a central belief,

but a promise of life and dignity for those who today face difficult circumstances (1 Cor 15: 20–22). And *koinonia*, far from being a mere ecclesiastical concept, reveals itself as

³⁰ Calderón, “Yuma County Farmworkers, Ag Leaders, Law Enforcement and Elected Officials Await Trump Border Actions” KAWC News, January 20, 2025, <https://www.kawc.org/news/2025-01-20/yuma-county-farmworkers-ag-leaders-law-enforcement-and-elected-officials-await-trump-border-actions>.

³¹ Garcia, from the *Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement*, 2.

an imperative of solidarity that calls the Church to be that community that embraces and accompanies, that leaves no one out, especially the smallest and most vulnerable.

A. Diversity and Cultural Resilience of Farmworkers

The chapter “Making Home,” written by Holt and Mattern in the volume edited by Thompson and Wiggins (2002), challenges the simplistic ideas often held about migrant communities. In regions like Yuma, the reality is much more complex and rich: There is a remarkable mix of cultures, and the majority of the workforce is composed of Latinos, nearly 90%, many of whom were born in Mexico or the United States, with Spanish as their primary language³². Although the study focuses on another region in the Southeast, it offers a useful framework for understanding the situation in this border environment where the constant arrival of H-2A workers, mostly of Mexican origin, contributes to an even more pronounced cultural diversity.

However, this is not just about statistics. The chapter also addresses the historical discrimination faced by Latinos, a reality that still persists in much of the U.S. Southwest. Despite these difficulties, what stands out most is the profound cultural resilience these communities demonstrate. In the face of difficult working conditions, they keep their traditions alive, reinvent their ways of life, and build networks of mutual support.

This manifests itself in many ways: participation in community groups, the use of traditional medicine, the distinctive flavors of their cuisine, the corridos that tell their

³² Holt y Mattern, “Making Home”. En *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers’ Lives, Labor and Advocacy*, 23-29.

migrant stories, and the festivities they celebrate with pride. All of this legacy constitutes a cultural treasure that should guide pastoral practice in the county—a practice that truly values and accompanies their identity.³³

For H-2A workers, who live far from their families and in temporary settings, these traditions and community networks are not only a source of comfort but also an essential resource for their well-being.

B. The Legal Framework and Agricultural Precarity

Understanding the realities faced by agricultural workers here involves analyzing how the U.S. legal system itself has contributed to their poverty and powerlessness. Greg Schell, in his essay titled **“The Exceptionalism of Farm Labor Under the Law” included in the same volume edited by Thompson and Wiggins (2002), reveals that, while the 20th century was witnessed a radical transformation in industrial working conditions, agricultural labor was and remains one of the most disadvantaged professions, due to extremely low wages and precarious working conditions, largely because of the deliberate exclusion of these protections³⁴.**

This “agricultural exceptionalism,” a result of the disproportionate influence of agribusiness, is directly manifested in various federal and state laws. As a consequence, agricultural workers in Yuma County—as in other regions

across the country face significant limitations: they are often excluded from the general minimum wage and overtime provisions, and they work under child labor regulations that offer less protection³⁵. Added to this is the lack of unemployment benefits, which

³³ Ibid., 30-34.

³⁴ Schell, “Exceptionalism Under the Law: How the Legal System Contributes to Poverty and Powerlessness”, en *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers’ Lives, Labor, and Advocacy* 149.

forces them into constant migration; a cycle that significantly impacts the seasonal workforce in this area³⁶.

While the H-2A program offers a legal pathway for temporary agricultural work and requires employers to provide housing, transportation, and guarantee a minimum wage (which in Yuma was at least \$17/hour in 2023), this program is not without criticism or challenges. Various studies reveal that H-2A workers frequently report instances of discrimination, sexual harassment, wage abuse, and violations of workplace safety standards.

A major obstacle is their limited access to effective complaint mechanisms, since their immigration status depends on the employer, making them vulnerable to retaliation or deportation if they dare to speak out³⁷. Furthermore, a significant portion of these workers, especially in southern states like Arizona, perform their work under conditions of extreme heat, exposing themselves to serious health risks.³⁸ Faced with this adverse situation, the Church's supportive accompaniment takes on vital importance.³⁹

C. César Chávez: Faith and Justice in the Fields

³⁵ Ibid., 146-148

³⁶ Ibid., 149.

³⁷ Economic Policy Institute, "New Survey Sand Report Reveals Mistreatment of H-2A Farmworkers is Common" The Coronavirus Puts Them at Risk", Economic Policy Institute, Economic Policy Institute. Institute, <https://www.epi.org/blog/new-survey-and-report-reveals-mistreatment-of-h-2a-farmworkers-is-common-the-coronavirus-puts-them-further-at-risk/>.

³⁸ AGDAILY Reporters, "Report: Challenges and Trends of H-2A Workers in Agriculture", 144.

³⁹ Schell, "Exceptionalism Under the Law: 144

The figure of César Chávez, a native of Yuma, Arizona, is central to understanding the struggle for justice among farmworkers and underscores the need for an active pastoral practice in the region. Matthew García, in ***From the Jaws of Victory*** (2021), highlights that unlike other industrial workers who secured labor rights during the New Deal, farmworkers were excluded from these protections. It fell to a new generation of activists, led by Chávez, to build the most successful labor movement in U.S. history: the United Farm Workers (UFW)⁴⁰.

Chávez, who came from a family of farmworkers and had experience as a community organizer, understood that collective action was key to achieving justice. Although he employed various strategies such as marches, fasts, and strikes, the boycott became his most powerful tool, connecting workers with consumers and achieving a significant impact on key markets in North America and Europe⁴¹. **The UFW transformed this tactic into a broader social justice movement, appealing to the public conscience and linking the working conditions of farmworkers**—primarily Mexican and Filipino— with the consumption habits of urban areas⁴². This approach revealed the power of uniting the struggle for social justice with labor organizing, revitalizing faith in American unions.

Chávez's story, with its achievements and internal leadership challenges—including his successes and the factors that led to the UFW's decline after 1970⁴³—offers essential lessons for

⁴⁰ Garcia, from the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement, 2

⁴¹ Ibid., 2, 7-8.

⁴² Ibid., 6-7.

⁴³ Ibid., 4-5.

pastoral ministry in Yuma County. It teaches the value of community organization, interethnic and multigenerational solidarity, as well as the **power of peaceful protest as a path toward justice**. The Church in this Vicariate is called to reclaim this legacy, promoting not only material well-being, but also the dignity, rights, and organization of agricultural workers, drawing inspiration from the spirit of resistance and service that characterized the early years of the movement. This legacy takes on even greater relevance in the current context of our region, marked by the growth of the H-2A workforce, which, although protected by a specific legal framework, continues to face vulnerabilities that demand vigilance and advocacy—clear echoes of the historic struggles of the UFW.

V. Pastoral Praxis: Vocation, Ethics, and Accompaniment

The previous chapter addressed the legacy of César Chávez and the impact of the farmworkers' union movement, positioning Yuma County as an emblematic place where faith, resistance, and organization are historically intertwined. Drawing on this living memory, the current pastoral ministry is called not only to remember, but to embody that spirit in its daily actions. With this impetus, Chapter V offers a concrete look at pastoral praxis in that county, rooted in the vocational call, the prophetic vision, and the practices that nurture the commitment to farmworkers.

A. Vocational Identity, Vision, and Practice

1. Vocational Identity

My pastoral commitment in this ministerial context is not limited to spiritual and sacramental care, but also focuses on the coordination of pastoral and justice initiatives

social work that supports agricultural workers in this border region. This work involves listening to and responding to the most urgent needs of these communities—from access to basic resources to the promotion of fair and dignified labor rights. I experience this calling as a direct expression of my vocation, rooted in the Gospel mandate to serve the “least of these” (Mt 25:40).

In this county, with its strong agricultural economy and a large population of agricultural workers, including approximately 8,000 H-2A workers during peak season (KAWC News), many injustices are also experienced. In this context, my pastoral role becomes a bridge between faith and social action. I contribute to my community by fostering greater awareness within the local Church about the reality of these workers, mobilizing resources, and promoting solidarity. My goal is for the Church in Yuma County to be a true home for them.

2. Vocation and Vision

My understanding of vocation is articulated as a call to deeply live the reality of farmworkers and to exercise a prophetic voice from that place. It is a commitment to making the invisible visible, dignifying what has been dehumanized, and raising a voice where silence has reigned. Research such as that on the “exceptional agricultural worker”⁴⁴, and studies on the exploitation of migrant labor⁴⁵ have reinforced this conviction: my vocation

⁴⁴ Schell, “Exceptionalism Under the Law: How the Legal System Contributes to Poverty and Powerlessness”, en *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers’ Lives, Labor, and Advocacy* cap. 5.

⁴⁵ Weber, *From South Texas to the Nation: The Exploitation of Mexican Labor in the Twentieth Century*, 2-3.

challenges the structures of injustice that have historically marginalized this population.

The image that guides my calling is that of a “sower of justice and hope in a challenging terrain.” That terrain is not only the physical desert of Yuma County, but also a symbolic desert: one that excludes, denies rights, and feeds on indifference. My purpose is to cultivate that space with the seed of the Gospel, translated into concrete gestures of solidarity and justice. This is a spirituality rooted in real life, which is not limited to comforting pain, but **dares to question and transform its causes**. I find inspiration in figures such as César Chávez, who powerfully embodied the power of a faith placed at the service of justice and the dignity of farmworkers.⁴⁶

This vision has been enriched by my academic formation, nourished by the study of Sacred Scripture, Catholic social ethics and migration, moral theology, Christian ethics, ecclesiology, the documents of the Magisterium, the Social Doctrine of the Church, among other disciplines. Each has contributed fundamental elements to deepen the connection between faith and justice and to understand more clearly the human face of a Church incarnated in contexts of vulnerability. This educational foundation has strengthened my commitment to a critical and hopeful spirituality, centered on human dignity and the preferential option for the poor as essential pillars of my ministerial mission.

3. Vocational Practices

⁴⁶ Garcia, from the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of César Chávez and the Farm Worker Movement, 2

To nourish and sustain my pastoral work with agricultural workers, I have incorporated various practices that are an integral part of my daily life. Daily prayer provides a space for encountering God; a moment of silence, listening, and gratitude in which I reflect and renew my sense of vocation, recognizing His constant presence in my life and in my work. Participating in the Eucharist strengthens me through the presence of Christ and deepens my sense of communion with the Church. Likewise, reading the Word offers me light and spiritual guidance for my pastoral journey.

I maintain an active attitude toward ongoing formation. Reading about migration, labor rights, and social justice—including the texts addressed in this project—broadens my perspective and nourishes my commitment. Participating in seminars and workshops related to community leadership and social justice allows me to grow in concrete skills and in the capacity for ethical and committed accompaniment. In addition, I engage in critical reflection on my practice through writing a pastoral journal and dialogue with mentors, seeking to learn from experience and clearly discern the steps to take.

Direct and constant contact with farmworkers and their families in Yuma County

is undoubtedly a source of inspiration and motivation. Their stories, their faith, and their resilience renew the meaning of my vocation every day. This accompaniment includes visits to the fields, participation in their community celebrations, and above all, attentive listening to their needs and aspirations. In this concrete closeness, the spirit of koinonia manifests itself with vitality.

Finally, I recognize that a sustainable ministry requires healthy leadership. For this reason, I prioritize adequate rest, time with my loved ones, and activities that

allow me to disconnect and recharge my batteries. Setting healthy boundaries is essential for preventing burnout, a common pitfall in such a demanding pastoral field.

B. Reflection on Personal Growth and Theological Development.

As I reflect on my pastoral practice in this agricultural region, I recognize that my studies at the Institute of Pastoral Studies (IPS) have been a source that has nourished this process of both personal and theological formation.

My studies have clarified and challenged my faith by confronting me directly with the reality of structural injustice. Before, my understanding of “justice” might have been more abstract; now, it has the faces and life stories of Yuma’s farmworkers. The analysis of “agricultural exceptionalism” (Schell) and the history of oppression forced me to reconcile a faith that preaches love with the existence of systems designed for exploitation. This has led me to a stronger and more hopeful faith that is not afraid to look into the darkness to seek the light.

As for my professional path, my studies at IPS have solidified and focused it, equipping a call to service that has been present in my life for quite some time. While my vocation was already a deep conviction, the IPS curriculum and the research for this integration project have provided me with the theological, ethical, and sociological tools that allow me to approach this ministry in a more strategic and well-founded manner. Not only did they confirm my desire to continue working with this population, but they also offered me a language and a framework to understand the complexity of their situation in Yuma County, from the precariousness imposed by the H-2A program to the dignity that endures in every daily gesture.

My studies at the Institute of Pastoral Studies (IPS) have provided me with the essential skills and competencies needed for the pastoral ministry entrusted to me. I have developed a greater capacity for critical social analysis, which is fundamental to unraveling the root causes of poverty and powerlessness in this region. I have also strengthened my skills in servant leadership and ethical discernment, which are crucial for guiding initiatives and making decisions in morally complex situations. The ability to integrate theology with pastoral practice—a central aspect of IPS training—allows me to address the problems of agricultural workers not only from a humanitarian perspective but also from a conviction of faith.

However, I recognize that there are still areas where I wish to continue growing. I feel the need to deepen my understanding of the migration and labor realities of Arizona so that I can more effectively guide and connect H-2A workers and undocumented individuals with the appropriate resources. Furthermore, I am driven by the desire to foster the empowerment of farmworkers themselves, so that they become the primary agents of change, which motivates me to continue learning about community organizing methodologies and participatory leadership development.

C. Professional Ethical Considerations

The ministry work I undertake in this region focuses on accompanying agricultural workers, which involves complex ethical dilemmas, particularly related to the H-2A program and the vulnerability of its participants. A recurring challenge arises when an H-2A worker shares difficult situations, such as inadequate housing, incomplete pay, or experiences of abuse. These testimonies evoke in me a strong

the tension between the commitment to defend human dignity, following the example of Jesus, and the need to safeguard workers' safety. The fear of reprisals, the possible loss of employment, or difficulties in renewing their visas mean that speaking out or filing a complaint entails considerable risks, given the structural inequality between employer and employee.⁴⁷

Furthermore, I recognize that certain actions may affect my pastoral relationship with some employers or limit my future access to the working community. For this reason, accompaniment in these circumstances has taught me the value of attentive and respectful listening. When someone shares an experience of injustice, my role is not to provide legal solutions, but to offer a safe space for their story and, from there, provide pastoral guidance. Beyond individual cases, I foster spaces for dialogue and awareness-raising about the reality of the H-2A program and its effects on the daily lives of those who experience it. I am not referring solely to formal working conditions, but also to the human consequences: isolation, constant fear, family breakdown, emotional insecurity, and the dehumanization that many workers face. I am convinced that raising awareness about these realities is also an act of justice, and a concrete way to strengthen the community's commitment to those who need it most.

D. Reflections on Mission and Discipleship

Throughout my journey in the pastoral context of Yuma County, I have come to understand that mission, discipleship, and leadership are not fixed formulas, nor are they concepts that apply uniformly everywhere. They are experiences that are shaped over time, by what we learn in practice, and by what reality reveals to us when we look at it from

⁴⁷ Economic Policy Institute, "Mistreatment of H-2A Farmworkers"

close by. Understanding mission as an incarnate and prophetic presence has transformed my vision. It is no longer about people “coming” to the Church, but about the Church being where life unfolds and where it is most needed: in the fields, in the camps, among those who bear such heavy burdens and often remain invisible. That is where our faith must be: accompanying, embracing, speaking out. Not from theory, but from real commitment, rooted in concrete life and with a heart sensitive to the cry of those who suffer.

Discipleship is no longer just an inspiring idea or a theoretical notion; for me, it has become a concrete decision: to follow Jesus in a real way, walking alongside those who suffer the most. Charity, on its own, is not enough. We need an awakened community that reflects, questions, and commits itself, especially in the face of the injustices faced by agricultural workers under the H-2A system. In this context, the pastoral method of seeing, judging, and acting reveals itself not as a technical formula, but as an incarnate way of living the faith: observing reality with compassion, interpreting it in the light of the Gospel, and responding from a place of justice.

The leadership I strive to embody has nothing to do with commanding or exercising power, but with serving. It is a leadership that knows how to listen, that walks alongside people, and that helps ensure the voices of those who have historically been ignored can be heard. It is not about speaking for them, but about creating spaces where they can express themselves. **This form of leadership has taken shape through concrete actions: training programs, opportunities for participation, partnerships with other stakeholders, and moments when people can feel part of a community, recognize their own worth, and regain hope.**

VI. Conclusion.

This work has been an intense and deeply personal journey. I have immersed myself in the lives of farmworkers in Yuma County, Arizona, seeking to understand their reality from various perspectives: their history, their rights, their daily struggles, and also from the perspective of my own pastoral calling. It has not been merely an academic analysis, but a process of listening, learning, and participation. Throughout this journey, I confirmed that the situation faced by farmworkers is neither new nor accidental, but rather the result of decades of inequality and a system that has exploited their needs as migrants.

The growing use of the H-2A program in this county, while offering a path to legal employment, also exposes thousands of people to situations of injustice. This realization reaffirms to me that the Church's presence cannot be limited solely to the spiritual realm; it must reach out, accompany, defend, and stand alongside those who have no voice.

The figure of César Chávez, a son of this land, continues to be a source of inspiration. His way of organizing, of fighting through nonviolence and faith, made a historic difference. His example reminds me that faith is not only prayer, but also action, organization, and shared hope for a more just life. Despite the adversities, it is encouraging to see how farmworkers continue to defend their traditions, their families, and their spirituality. They embody a living and resilient faith.

Likewise, understanding the legal framework and the so-called "agricultural exceptionalism" allowed me to see how the system has neglected the basic rights of these workers. Like the Church, we cannot remain indifferent. Our faith compels us to denounce injustice, care for the most vulnerable, and work toward a more humane society.

This pastoral project also led me to look at theology from below, from the ground up. The Gospel, the resurrection, and fraternal communion come to life in the furrows, in the fields, and in the stories of those who work them. The Church is called to be a home where no one feels invisible, where every person is welcomed, valued, and respected.

My vocation has taken shape over time, and today I am certain that I am called to be present in the reality of this agricultural land, for I feel that my mission is to sow justice and hope where they are most needed. I am inspired by a spirituality that is committed, rooted in the Gospel, and enriched by various theological currents such as liberation theology and the Social Doctrine of the Church. I am also nourished by other prophetic voices emerging from the peripheries, the experience of the people, and from dialogue with reality. My mission is not only to console immediate suffering, but also to question and transform what causes it. Simple practices sustain me in this work: daily prayer, frequent communion, close contact with people, and attentive listening. They are the driving force that gives me strength every day.

My formative experience at the Institute of Pastoral Studies (IPS) has been fundamental to my personal growth and to the development of a deeper pastoral and theological perspective. The formation I received has provided me with analytical tools and ethical criteria that help me understand and address the complexity of this ministry. It has propelled me toward a more incarnational faith and equipped me with skills for social and critical analysis, as well as for exercising service-centered leadership. I recognize, however, that I still have much to learn, especially in areas such as the legal dimensions of the contexts I accompany.

The ethical dilemmas that arise when confronting labor abuses, especially in the context of the vulnerability of H-2A workers, require constant discernment that prioritizes the dignity and safety of the worker. This involves seeking justice with prudence and with the support of experts. My leadership focuses on service, empowerment, and prophetic advocacy, seeking not only formation in the faith but also to contribute to the transformation of social structures.

This project springs from the concrete experience lived in Yuma, but is not limited to it. Its horizon is broad and seeks to foster a pastoral ministry that forms, accompanies, and builds networks of solidarity within the Church. It aspires to promote real transformations in contexts of injustice, mobilizing resources and sensibilities that dignify the lives of those who work the land. Inspired by Pope Francis' call for a "Church that goes forth," **I long for an ecclesial community that not only opens its doors but also rises up courageously to care for, denounce injustices, and walk alongside its people.**

Bibliography
(*See the Spanish article*)