RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF FLORIDA FARMWORKERS

Whereas, for decades, Florida farmworkers worked for sub-poverty wages, have been excluded from fundamental labor rights like the right to overtime pay and benefits, and have faced sexual harassment, verbal and physical abuse, and in the most extreme cases, modern-day slavery in order to harvest the food on our plates; and

Whereas, since 1997, federal officials have successfully prosecuted seven slavery operations in Florida’s fields, involving over 1,200 workers; and

Whereas, after more than a decade of education, outreach, and action in its Campaign for Fair Food, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) — an internationally recognized farmworker organization based in Southwest Florida — has developed the Fair Food Program, a creative and historic partnership among farmworkers, the vast majority of Florida tomato growers, and thirteen major food corporations; and

Whereas, through their commitment to the Fair Food Program, these corporations – among them Taco Bell, McDonald’s, Subway, Whole Foods, The Fresh Market and Walmart – commit to:

- pay a Fair Food Premium for the tomatoes they buy from Florida which is paid to farmworkers in the form of a bonus;
- buy only from suppliers who comply with the Fair Food code of conduct, which includes the provision of time clocks, shade, water and bathrooms, the right to form participatory health and safety committees, and a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment and slavery, and
- respect farmworkers as equal partners in monitoring and administering the agreement.

Whereas, through the Fair Food Program, far-reaching reforms have spread across the $650 million Florida tomato industry affecting tens of thousands of workers, including nearly $15 million in Fair Food Premium paid by participating buyers to improve workers’ wages; industry-wide implementation of a 24-hours worker complaint hotline and a rapid, effective complaint investigation and resolution process; a worker-to-worker education process conducted by CIW on the farms and in company time to ensure that workers understand their new rights and responsibilities; a human rights-based Code of Conduct with enforceable zero-tolerance policies for forced labor, child labor, violence and sexual assault; and industry-wide monitoring by the third party organization, the Fair Food Standards Council;\(^2\) and

Whereas, the Fair Food Program has been honored varies times by the White House for its success in eliminating modern-day slavery, and was praised on the front page of the New York

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Times as “the best workplace monitoring program in the US”\(^3\) and in the Washington Post as “one of the great human rights success stories of our day;”\(^4\) and

Whereas, participation of more major buyers of tomatoes in the Fair Food Program is essential to eliminate the alternative market in which traditional abuses continue and enable the expansion of the Program into other states and crops; and

Whereas, the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church holds that:

- “Every person has the right to a job at a living wage... We believe that persons come before profits... We support policies that encourage the sharing of ideas in the workplace, cooperative and collective work arrangements...”\(^5\)

- “Workers from other countries are in many societies an important resource to fill the society’s need of workers. But foreign workers too often meet exploitation, absence of protecting laws, and unreasonable wages and working conditions. We call upon governments and all employers to ensure for foreign workers the same economic, educational, and social benefits enjoyed by other citizens.”\(^6\)

- “Corporations are responsible not only to their stockholders, but also to other stakeholders: their workers, suppliers, vendors, customers, the communities in which they do business, and for the earth, which supports them. We support the public’s right to know what impact corporations have in these various arenas, so that people can make informed choices about which corporations to support. We applaud corporations that voluntarily comply with standards that promote human well-being and protect the environment;”\(^7\) and

Whereas, Publix, Florida’s largest privately-owned company, has declined to even meet with farmworkers of the CIW to discuss joining the Fair Food Program for over five years, despite calls from farmworkers and consumers of faith and conscience through thousands of letters and prayers, a six-day fast, and peaceful marches of up to 200 miles; and

Whereas, United Methodists from across Florida have stood with the CIW for decades in echoing calls for justice, giving rise to the transformational changes in the fields ensuring dignity and respect for tens of thousands of farmworkers; and

Whereas, the 2005 General Conference passed a resolution in support of the CIW’s efforts to call on Taco Bell to sign a Fair Food Agreement, after which they became the first corporation to do so;\(^8\)

Therefore be it resolved, that the Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church supports the groundbreaking changes in Florida agriculture ushered in by the Fair Food Program.

\(^4\) http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/fair-food-program-helps-end-the-use-of-slavery-in-the-tomato-fields/2012/09/02/788f1a1a-f39c-11e1-892d-bc92f6e03a7_story.html
\(^8\) http://umc-gbcs.org/resolutions/taco-bell-boycott-196-2004-bor
Be it further resolved, that the Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church calls on Publix Supermarkets to uphold farmworkers’ human rights by joining the Fair Food Program.

Approval of this resolution would not require any financial obligation of the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Upon approval of this resolution, Missional Engagement will compose and send a letter on behalf of The Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, signed by The Bishop of the Florida Conference & Missional Engagement Directors, to corporations the Coalition of Immokalee Workers is presently inviting to join the Fair Food Program, such as Publix Supermarkets and Wendy’s. Continual correspondence and conversation by United Methodists throughout The Florida Conference will be encouraged until said corporations become full participants in the Fair Food Program."

Submitted by:
Rev. Roy Terry IV, Cornerstone United Methodist Church, Naples, FL; Rev. Audrey Warren, Branches United Methodist Mission, Florida City, FL; Rev. Lisa Lefkow, Cornerstone United Methodist Church, Naples, FL; Rev. Stephanie Campbell, Cornerstone United Methodist Church, Naples, FL

ENCOURAGING JUST RESOLUTION PROCESS

Whereas, it is now legal in the state of Florida for same-sex couples to be married.

Whereas, it is only a matter of time until scores of our ordained elders in the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church are asked by their sons, daughters, long-time members of their congregation or members of the community to either officiate or request the use of United Methodist church buildings to host same-sex weddings.

Whereas, those requests are in direct conflict with our United Methodist Book of Discipline ¶341.6 and ¶2702.1b (BOD 2012) and could be interpreted as unauthorized conduct or chargeable offenses that could lead to church trials. Pastors and leaders of our congregations will be put in the unfortunate position time and time again of having to choose between these portions of the Book of Discipline and the section that states “we commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.” (BOD 2012, ¶161)

Whereas, on the national scene we have recently had two examples of addressing complaints brought against clergy within our denomination in the cases of The Rev. Frank Schaefer and Bishop Melvin G. Talbert. The ensuing aftermath of the church trial involving the Rev. Frank Schaefer, his bishop, and the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference brought on enormous negative publicity toward our denomination with its decision to remove Rev. Schaefer’s ministerial credentials and then reinstate those credentials. It was also financially costly and very time consuming drawing precious resources away from critical ministries of the church. With the complaint brought against Bishop Melvin G. Talbert, the episcopal leadership involved determined that the just resolution process as outlined in ¶363.1c was an appropriate option to resolve the complaint. That process was much more humane and dignified.