

Harvest Season Reflections 2018



Episcopal Networks Collaborative

These Harvest Season reflections are part of the Joint Education and Advocacy effort of the Episcopal Networks Collaborative. In the past, we offered justice reflections for the Sundays of Advent, a Lenten Reflection Series, Reflections for the Creation Season and O Antiphons Reflections. These publications are available at www.enej.org.



The Episcopal Networks Collaborative

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Preface

The Episcopal Networks Collaborative offers the following reflections and essays on labor. We chose this time of year, the Harvest Season, because the bountiful harvest demonstrates the unification of the labor of God and people.

One of my favorite offertories is a Spanish offertory "He Presentamos" which basically says "We present to you the fruit of the earth and our labor, bless you Lord for the bread/wine you give us."

The bringing forth of the elements to the altar is exactly this, a joyful unification of our labor and God's Blessing.

We as Christians are called to prophetic witness to heal injustices and bring about reconciliation in the world.

May the holiness of the uniting of God and our labor be recognized by those whose labor is a struggle.

And the aching workers of the world again shall sing.

These words in mighty choruses to all will bring

We no longer shall be poor for no one owns us anymore

And the aching workers again shall sing

(lyrics from Weary Mothers of the Earth by Joan Baez)

Dianne Aid, TSSF

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Introduction to Harvest Season Reflections

In 1988, the 69th General Convention of The Episcopal Church established a church-wide program concerned with broad expressions of economic justice. This bold announcement followed the seminal work of the U.S. Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops (1986) in the same area; as workers with under-employed and unemployed people joined together to seek a renewed understanding of the relationship of our labor with our life as found in the traditions and scriptures of the Christian Church.

Nearly a decade later, in 1997, the 72nd General Convention returned to some of the same concerns when it authorized a study at all levels of church life (parish, diocesan, provincial, and denominational) of “Theology of Work.” Several dioceses took up this call. Some read the cutting-edge book by theologian Miraslav Volf – *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 1991 – and some established task forces or conference teams looking into the subject. In the Diocese of Southern Ohio, a twenty-member study group was assembled under the direction of the then dean of the diocesan education/formation office, “The Anglican Academy.”

Among many reports and resolutions at subsequent parish meetings and diocesan conventions, the Theology of Work Task Force in the Diocese of Southern Ohio, 1998-2000, published *A WORKER’S PRAYER*:

Lord, we pray today for all who work and all who are seeking work.

As you looked at the work you had done and saw that it was good help us to value all work performed, care, and honesty. Help us seek rewards for our work not only in the wages we receive, but also in stewardship of your creation and justice toward all persons. Help us to recognize that we cannot do our work alone, but depend upon the work of many others, some of whom we do not even know. Help us to remember that it is your gift to find, even in the inevitable routine, occasions of interest and joy. Help us to remember that laborers are worthy not only of their hire, but of their rest. Help us to say “well done” to others, as we hope to hear the same.

Finally, when we cannot see the direction to go, give us faith that you can always work for good through us.

We ask these things in the name of him who promised to be with us always. AMEN

Many of the themes expressed in this prayer – equity & respect for labor, creation care, joy in creativity, Sabbath rest, gratitude for co-laborers – will be explored in the following reflections for

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“A Season of Harvest” offered by lay leaders and clergy active in Episcopal Network for Economic Justice (ENEJ), Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE), and Episcopal Ecological Network (EpEN).

In this 30th anniversary year of The Episcopal Church’s advocacy for a more just economic system, and in the second decade of the Church’s explorations into the theological underpinnings of work in our society, these promptings and provocations are all the more timely and, we hope, useful in our teaching and preaching during the last weeks of the Church Year.

With every blessing as we seek an abundant harvest,

The Rev. Richard A. Burnett

Rector, Trinity Episcopal Church, Columbus, Ohio

ENEJ board of directors

Work and Our Common Life

“We urge you, beloved, to [love] more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.” (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12)

“Grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil.” *The Book of Common Prayer*, 134.

The table on which I write is a large, farmhouse-style dining table. I built and finished the table with my father from cherry wood that was harvested near his home in my native state of West Virginia. Neither of us is an expert woodworker, but we did the work carefully and, I would say, lovingly. The wood's beautiful texture, with knotholes and imperfections that would not appear on a factory piece, is a reminder that the table was fashioned from a tree by the patient work of human hands.

Work is the primary way we humans relate to our world. Through our work, we modify our environment to provide for our survival and even flourishing. Through work, we fashion the materials of the world into a common life. We do this not only in direct ways through physical work like sowing and reaping, building and removing trash, but also less directly through mental work, as when a doctor uses combinations of elements to heal a patient or a poet crafts the stuff of experience into art that moves souls. Likewise, the work of childrearing, of buying and selling, of keeping communities safe, of worshipping and caring for congregations – in one sense or another, all of these fashion the gifts of the created world into a common life.

Work defines our relationship with our world, and indeed defines who we are as people, in part because we cannot simply impose our will on the created world. Creation has its own integrity, its own truth, that reflects the mind of a loving Creator. Human beings have been blessed with incredible capacities to modify, craft, and utilize our world – and even to exploit it beyond remedy – but we cannot violate the truth of creation, at least not for long and not without profound consequences for our own being and truth. If our work is to create genuine flourishing for us, for others, and for the creation itself, it must attend to and respond to the truth that is in the elements of creation. It must reflect the mind of the Creator.

Can all types of work be undertaken with this attitude? Certainly, some types of work are more able than others to reflect the mind of the Creator. Work that by its very nature treats persons and creation as mere objects, as means only with no truth or integrity of their own, violates the truth of creation. Work that is fundamentally deceitful, exploiting some for others' gain and “calling evil good and good evil, [putting] darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5.20), cannot reveal truth. Work that adds nothing to our common life, but rather destroys it through violence and the tools of violence, diminishes it through usury and extortion, or divides us through manipulation – such work violates the truth of creation.

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Rowan Williams suggests that in Christian community, every action should be offered as a gift to the life of the community, “recognizable as an action that in some way or other manifests the character of the God who has called the community” (“Making Moral Decisions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, 1st ed., 134). What would it mean to think of our work, and the work of others, as gifts to the community, capable of manifesting the character of the Creator? How would we work differently if we thought of every action as one that fashions the gifts of creation into a common life? How would we receive the work of others if we recognized it properly as a contribution to that common life? And how would we respond to work that, rather than manifesting the Creator, distorts or violates both creation and the common life?

Andrew R. H. Thompson, Ph.D., School of Theology, University of the South (Sewanee)

Displaced Work: Fracking and Moving to a Clean Energy Economy

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

For generations, men from communities throughout Appalachia went down into the coal mines; working long hours and often dying horrible deaths from Black Lung. They provided for their families and passed down a proud culture centered on “King Coal”.

Eventually, however, many of the mines closed. Technology moved on. New understandings of how burning fossil fuels affects human health and the earth on which we live came to be. Communities disappeared. Workers were unprepared for the challenges of a new century.

With the demise of coal, fracking, a process of obtaining natural gas, became profitable. In many places, including Pennsylvania, where I live, it has been touted as a way of providing jobs. In many communities, it does just that. Yet there is evidence that fracking also can have adverse effects on human health. Fracking is seen as a means of rescuing communities devastated by the disappearance of jobs in coal mining; yet the risk of fracking is that the jobs it creates will also disappear as our nation slowly but surely shifts to a clean energy economy.

While this clean energy economy will ultimately benefit our world, justice and kindness dictate that we care deeply about displaced workers and devastated communities. This care, furthermore, needs to be shown in concrete ways. We must work to provide resources for job training, community redevelopment and other necessary tools. We must listen to their stories and walk with them through the pain transition inevitably causes. We must, above all, give them the dignity of hope for a bright future.

Humility teaches us that we are all together as the human family and when part suffers, so do all. Humility teaches that we cannot ignore the needs of others but rather that we must all work together for the common good.

This is part of what we mean when in our Baptismal vows we promise to “strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.” Part of the dignity we pledge to respect is the dignity of meaningful work; work that not only supports oneself and one’s family, but contributes to the well-being of all, including “the earth, our fragile island home”.

God of all of our lives, be with those who have lost their jobs and their hope as technology changes and we seek new ways of providing for our common good. Give us all the grace to walk humbly together with them and to reach out in peace and sacrificial love. Show us your path into the future and may we also be content to trust in you. All this we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ, your Son.

1. Are there communities near you that have been devastated by the loss of jobs due to changes in technology of the shift to a clean energy economy? Lift them up in prayer.
2. What tools are being provided to help these communities? Are there ways our churches can minister to them and their people.

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3. What is your state and local government doing to help? Are there ways you can advocate for the help needed?
4. What are the facts? Do some research to find reliable statistics on the number of jobs created by processes such as fracking as well as to the effect on communities.

The Rev. Linda Watkins, Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

Church, Poverty, and Privilege

I hear stories all over the U.S. and other provinces of the Anglican Communion from people who feel a financial burden of maintaining church membership, or at least being in the center of congregational life. We expect poverty as the standard for those receiving services from a variety of outreach ministries. The stories I am referring to are coming from “perceived’ affluent middle-class people sitting in the pews on Sunday morning.

Perception really traps people into expectations.

One of my favorite movies is “A Million to Juan” (Paul Rodriguez). Juan is given a check for one million dollars; but is told not to cash it, and, he will have to return it after a week. Juan simply shows the check to a banker and doors fly open for Juan; he did not have to spend a cent.

It is highly unlikely anyone reading this is going to be given a million-dollar check for leverage, but, we come from a church system which assumes enough wealth to be a solid, pledging church member with additional discretionary money for expensive charity/fund raising dinners. Attending conventions and conferences adds up, even if expenses are covered. The extra out of pocket money is unofficially required for full participation.

It is time to un-ravel the assumptions and systems which have brought us further and further from simplicity being a spiritual value and has added additional financial pressure on families simply trying to keep basic food and shelter intact.

Church and Neighborhood

The 1990’s were proclaimed The Decade of Evangelism for the Episcopal Church. We were entering an age of turbulence, globalization and increasing demographic shifts. The church I grew up in, which consisted of Sunday attendance as well as several youth and family activities during the week gave way to time-consuming and changing lifestyles of work, mobility and technology. The church needed to find ways to be relevant in proclamation of our faith and assisting with maintaining a spiritual core in very fluid times.

I participated in several training programs and engaged in the work of Evangelism Consultations for several years. One of the exercises I remember involved taking people on walks around the neighborhoods their churches were located in to see what barriers and invitations existed. We also noted the number of cars parked in driveways on Sunday mornings indicating the potentially unchurched. A Spanish language ministry started growing at my parish among the migrant and settling farmworkers in the area. There were many barriers – the church was in a very wealthy neighborhood with mansions, well-trimmed lawns, gardens, and no sidewalks. Neighborhood residents viewed people who did not look like they belonged in the neighborhood with suspicion.

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Several of my co-worker/friends who lived in this neighborhood invited me to parties with the governor and other state people (my political party central committee met in this neighborhood). What my acquaintances/co-workers did not know was that I was poor – living below the poverty line. I grew up in relative affluence and knew the correct behaviors to pass as upper-middle class at the least. My friends did not know that I dug change out from behind the sofa or anywhere else to purchase the coveted Cabbage Patch Doll for my daughter. For years I thought I was alone and felt inadequate. I did not know I shared my hidden story with others assumed to be financially successful based in White privilege.

Getting Out and About the Church

Fast forward a number of years to the spring of 2014. I attempted to register for a conference on-line, the only publicized option for registration. My registration fees were to be waived as I was a presenter at the conference; however, I could not complete my registration without entering a bank card number. It took several attempts at contacting conference organizers to find a way around the on-line registration. A more recent conference online registration inadvertently charged my card the whole amount of the conference instead of just the deposit, which created havoc on my bank account.

The obvious question I began to ask was ‘How do people without bank accounts register?’ The answer I got from one was ‘The assumption is people attending this conference would have bank accounts’. The majority of attendees at this particular conference were ordained.

Other instances of assumption of affluence is mileage paid to church volunteers compared to church professionals of up to 75% difference (the volunteers receiving the low end of course) on the assumption that volunteer work comes out of leisure that is produced by affluence.

The question of cost for seminary trained clergy is deserving of an article/books of its own on this topic, so for here leave it to say we are in a real trap of a church model that is becoming less equipped to support the costs to maintain professional clergy. Injustice and inequality in broad based representation of church membership are a result of a system which functioned in a church of 50 years ago.

The Laundry List

I would suspect a large number of readers of this article have participated in Diocesan Conventions, General Conventions, Conferences and Retreats. I imagine there are also untold struggles to participation.

Here are some of these challenges:

Out of pocket, non-reimbursable expenses.

Time loss from work

Extremely high ground transportation costs for wheel chair bound people (literally hundreds of dollars)

On-line/ Credit Card registration without a visibly publicized alternative

Child Care issues

Reimbursement after the event financially straps individuals and families for up to a month.

Adequate translation is not always readily available.

I am sure there are many other examples/barriers and you are invited to add to this list. You also may share stories of creative ways these challenges have been met.

There appears to be under representation from low wage workers and immigrants at church conferences. There are challenges for these communities, including those listed above. There is also little opportunity for these communities to be equipped to understand church polity. Congregations made up of brothers and sisters in this category do exist, and some are several years old but in the minds of those in church governance and those planning events, these growing “marginalized” communities are viewed essentially as outreach.

Scripture, Tradition, and our Cultural Context

We cannot ignore the communal caring model laid out for us in scripture, The Feeding of the 5000, (Matt: 14: 13-21) Jesus’ advice to the man who wanted to follow him to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor, (Luke 19:22) and the beautiful words of The Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55). Religious communities, such as the Franciscans founded on principals of living in poverty (poverty as a spiritual gift and choice), and caring for basic needs in a community model, thus being equipped to serve other poor and marginalized communities. These examples contrast the cultural messages of hoarding possessions and gaining wealth, encouraged by intense competition.

The Church sits in the middle of these two systems. We have our traditions, which we attempt to interpret from our experiences while we are products of our economic system fueled by commercialism, which has the power to impact our self-image.

For several years, ENEJ advocated for workers’ rights, introducing resolutions (which were successful) concerning support of workers and using Union Hotels for church event venues, and yet we continue to see church wide meetings in non-Union venues and a majority of service workers are sub-contracted, receiving lower wages than if employed directly by the hotels. This is, of course, the challenge of keeping costs down, and ensuring fair conditions for workers.

Actions

I wish I owned a magic wand to fix all of this. I do not, none of us do. However, I think it is time for honest conversations of dealing and addressing all of this. The discussions shall not be focused on how we save money/cut costs but, how we empower the church to be the healing church in a

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hurting world. How do we bring our communities together, the struggling “people of privilege” who are trying to function in a system they understand, but cannot afford? Working poor and immigrant communities who know how to survive through their community systems but are pages away from functioning in existing church systems.

Let us at least begin with Scriptural models for Christian living and create opportunities for dialogue and move on down the road together.

Dianne Aid, TSSF

The Labors of Jacob

“O Lord our heavenly Father, by whose providence the duties of men are variously ordered: grant to us all the spirit to labor heartily to do our work in our several stations, in serving one Master and looking for one reward. Amen.” The Book of Common Prayer

Jacob is sometimes called the first worker in the Bible—the first to have his work vividly described in its complexities and satisfactions (Gen. 29:14–20; 31:10–13). But more importantly, this story reveals God’s interest in work. Jacob’s work (and ours) is a way to God; it is blessed by God and becomes a ministry to God and our neighbor. This is all-the-more remarkable when one considers that Jacob’s work was slave work—which is exactly, undoubtedly, how many would describe their work today: routine, monotonous, never-ending, inadequately remunerated, exhausting, and just plain hard.

Jacob arrives in Paddan-Aram penniless, running from his brother and in search for a wife from the extended family home. But his father did not send him with the bride price. He has nothing to give for the gorgeous lady at the well but his sweat. So, it appears he indentured himself effectively as a slave to Laban to get Rachel—working for seven years with no pay, no freedom and no dignity. He looks after his future father-in-law’s animals.

When Jacob describes his work, he uses the language of slaves. “Sleep fled from my eyes,” he says (31:40). “The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night” (31:40). Later he complains to Laban, “You changed my wages ten times” (31:41).² He describes his work as “my hardship and the toil of my hands” (31:42).

Love Work

The surprising reversal in the story is an eruption of hope and good news, a breaking in of a God-sized view of work. In Genesis 29:20 we have one of the purest statements of human love: “So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.” Slave work can become love work. Love transforms all kinds of work into a ministry.

Working for the love of a woman or a man, for one’s parents or children, for one’s neighbor, for love of the earth, for love of nation and love of God—any of this can transform work into a ministry. And in the last day Jesus will say, in effect, “You changed my diapers, you visited me in prison, you made my dinner, you hosted me at a business reception, you put clothes on my back.” And then the parable concludes, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). Jesus (yes, God) receives our work, and not just religious work such as preaching, pastoral care, church planting and other forms of ministry.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 Paul wrote to the Christians saying, “We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jacob worked for love, but did he work with faith?

Faith Work

After fourteen years Jacob wants to do something for his own family. He has paid off the bride price (actually for two wives!); now he wants to work for wages. So, he negotiates with Laban for a few more years of work. Their conversation is a masterpiece of diplomacy. Laban asks, “What shall I give you?” (30:31), but really doesn’t want to give him anything. Jacob knows a cheat when he sees one, so he says, “Don’t give me anything.” But Jacob shrewdly offers a plan to enable Laban not to give him anything but that at the same time (though Jacob does not reveal this) would enable Jacob to get what he needs for his family.

What happens is brilliant—entrepreneurial but surprisingly inspired by faith. The results are not guaranteed, so Jacob must trust. But it is not a blind trust, a leap in the dark. God gives him an idea. Children of our creative God are inspired by the Holy Spirit. They should be the most creative people on earth—and not just in church work, but world-making work.

What happens next is shrewd, the kind of business deal that would make the toughest world-ling admit that it ought to be commended (Luke 16:8). It is also mysterious, perhaps even magical. Jacob’s work has been shepherding and he noticed the sheep are mostly all white and the goats are mostly all black. Multi-colored animals are rare. He makes an offer that Laban cannot refuse and he strategizes how to make it impossible for himself not to lose. Today we would call it win-win.

Jacob proposes that Laban will keep all the pure white sheep and pure black goats and the presently alive mixed-color animals. What Jacob will take for his own wages will be all future multi-colored lambs or kids. But for the present, Jacob will separate out all multi-colored ones for Laban to keep. Laban, like Jacob, knows a cheat when he sees one, so he does not trust Jacob with the separation of the flocks. So, Laban separates out the multi-colored flocks, takes them three days’ journey away and puts them in the care of Laban’s own sons (30:35-36). Effectively Laban has everything. He has all the animals—the blacks, the whites and the (present) multi-colored ones. He has Jacob to care for some of his flocks, and Jacob’s chances of generating a nest egg for his family are a remote possibility, or so Laban thinks. Such a deal! “Don’t give me anything” (v. 31), Jacob explains. But Jacob has a plan.

Jacob, considering the era, did not understand the principles of genetics, namely that recessive genes may emerge through mating. But his observations as a shepherd led him to believe that he could breed strong, multi-colored animals in a big way through careful selective breeding. And he could do this with all-white and all-black animals (since Laban already had the first batch of multi-colored ones and Jacob was still taking care of Laban’s monochrome animals). Some research indicates that the vigorous animals are hybrids “whose recessive coloring genes merge when they are

bred together” and that “Jacob can distinguish the strong animals with the recessive genes by their copulating earlier than the weaker ones without that gene.”

Here is where it gets mysterious as well as cunning. He does this by something that might be a primitive magic, by placing a multi-colored post in front of the animals while they were mating on the assumption that what they see during intercourse determines their own color (30:37-40). The upshot is clear. Jacob succeeds in breeding multi-colored sheep and goats from monochrome stock and ensures that the strongest sheep and goats are the multi-colored ones—in other words, his! The narrator concludes: “In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys” (v. 43). Not surprisingly, Laban the out-foxed fox changed his attitude to Jacob (31:1-2) and it was time for Jacob to leave.

Jacob’s plan is brilliantly entrepreneurial. But where is God in this? Is there merely unbridled selfish ambition, a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20)?

Six years later Jacob, like Joseph, recalls a dream he received from God. As he sensitively and diplomatically draws his wives into the country to discuss in secret his desire to leave Haran and return to Canaan, he uses a multifaceted strategy. He notes that Laban's attitude has changed. He recalls how hard he has worked and how their father has cheated him. Then he appeals to divine providence: "God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me" (31:9). Finally, he tells us, what we have hitherto not known—that God gave him a dream that offered the secret of his success in animal husbandry. God showed him that the strong animals mating were striped, spotted and speckled.

Jacob is working out of faith and holy ambition. Doing “the Lord’s work” on his father-in-law’s ranch. In the same way we work in faith when we honor the ideas that God gives us, and work to please God. Jacob’s approach to work is an Old Testament hint of Paul’s advice: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col. 3:22-24).

Jacob has love and faith. But what about hope?

Hope Work

Jacob remembers his destiny as a person of promise. Jacob is part of a holy plan, engaged in a divine project, enlisted in God’s work. He has seen the promise of family amply fulfilled in his eleven sons and daughters (the first part of the promise). But the land remains unoccupied.

Several factors lead Jacob homeward. First, when his barren but beloved wife Rachel conceives and bears Joseph, Jacob now has a complete family and can return to the land fruitfully (30:25). A second factor is that Jacob has a dream (at approximately the same time) in which God says, “Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land” (31:13). God promised to be with Jacob at

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Bethel (28:15). Now once again God promises to be with Jacob but this time on condition that he returns home (31:13). Jacob sees his work as part of God's grand plan to renew everything and to bring about his kingdom on earth. In the same way, work today can be hope work, not only because some of it can outlast this world, but because it is part of God's long-term intention to renew people and all creation.

What makes work God-pleasing and God-blessed is not that God's name and Word are spoken out loud but that the work is done in love, faith and hope. With these virtues (which are not human achievements but divine encouragements), even slave work can become holy work.

For Reflection

What does it mean for you to work with love, faith and hope? Give some examples? What difference will it make to view your daily work as part of God's grand plan of renewing everything by bringing his kingdom rule into all of life and creation?

Joe McDaniel, J.D., Union of Black Episcopalians

Laboring Toward a Seat at God's Table

I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. *I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep*; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (2 Cor 11:26-27)

Every year as a new agricultural season approaches, a local newspaper prints advertisements expressing a need for field laborers. The notices have a radius of upwards of 100 miles and indicate housing is provided if transportation is an obstacle. These ads run for weeks. A significant number of these agricultural labor positions are filled by migrant workers *that have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep* to support their families, like Paul in the early formation of the Church. Migrant workers serve as the unseen, unheard, and frequently un-thanked backbone of the agricultural industry. The United States has historically treated agricultural laborers sub-humanely to the benefit of traditionally higher valued citizens. That is, White Anglo-Saxon Protestants have unjustly benefitted from the labors of black, brown, and all minority bodies in tangible and intangible ways. Many United States citizens want to take pride in the idea of the United States of America as a shining city on a hill, an exemplar of Christian values and ethics; however, these same citizens fail to recognize the unjust systems of oppression, like those of Pharaoh or the Roman Empire they uphold. Systems that deny communal flourishing and the realization of the kingdom of God.

Agricultural workers suffer for the benefit of the entirety of the rest of the socioeconomic and racial structure. Poor wages lead to cheaper prices in the market for goods, so anyone who buys food benefits from the unjust system. Difficult, sometimes life-threatening labor is performed by agricultural workers so others have time for leisure. The families of migrant workers rarely spend time together because of the long days of travel and work; while others regularly have a much more desirable work-life balance. Despite all these hidden benefits, some of my neighbors feel harmed and threatened by migrant workers. They themselves *have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep* because of their own economic anxieties. My own mother has spoken to me in ineloquent language about how she perceives “Browns are taking away jobs for good hard-working Americans”. Her beliefs are common in the region. Frequently I hear folks state: America (tacitly meaning White America) is in danger of losing its moral and ethical heritage and jobs are at risk because immigrants are willing to work for lower wages. She works a blue collar industrial job that pays the bills and provides food, but doesn't provide much comfort beyond those basic needs. The uncertainty felt by many people like her needs to be validly recognized and taken seriously, despite the ideology being based in assumptions and misconceptions.

In rural Ohio, when migrant workers are in town to work the vast plots of farmland, their presence is unmistakable. Workers aren't only encountered in fields as one drives past at 55mph. I recall my

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first memory of migrant workers, being a non-encounter. I was about ten years old (fifteen years ago) and my mother parked her car outside of a convenience store to buy some gasoline. Rather than go inside to pay the cashier so she could pump the gas, she waited in her car. A bus for migrant workers was also in the parking lot, and she uneasily waited for the bus to leave before proceeding inside. She chose to keep the migrant workers as invisible blurs down the highway rather than share the same space inside the store. The tale of two underappreciated classes of workers struggling to find their belonging in the world in relation to each other was delayed. Over the years, to no fault of their own, the reputation of migrant workers has worsened. A situation exacerbated by growing economic inequality, misplaced anger due to media scapegoating, and increased policing leaves migrant workers further in the margins.

Erie County in northwest Ohio recently underwent an Immigrations and Customs Enforcement raid resulting 114 arrests, many of these immigrants lived in nearby towns. Families were split without any notice; children instantly orphans, sole breadwinners of families detained with no regard for their family's survival. Meanwhile, industrial workers endure grueling days of intensely physical labor as they face the potentiality of downsizing, automation or outsourcing. Both groups face anxiety in America today. Both groups could easily find themselves feeling like the Apostle Paul described he once was. Pain, suffering, and anxiety prohibits flourishing. Our job as part of God's Community of Creation is to come together for reconciliation and healing. Nothing in this context should come down to conservative/liberal, Catholic/Baptist, immigrant/citizen, industrial/agricultural. What should matter is justice and living into the reality of God's reign. We all belong at God's table regardless of identity. We all play a role. Now is a time for listening; listening to find common ground, listening to our insecurities, listening to the marginalized. Now is a time for honesty; honesty about our anxieties, honesty about our complicity, honesty about our hopes for the United States. Now is a time for justice, but first we must see, hear, and recognize our common humanity then we can claim our seats at God's table and strive toward justice.

Steven Simpkins, Diocese of Ohio

A Reflection on the Workers in the Vineyard

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” -- Matthew 20:1-16

For the last 25 years I have journeyed with immigrant workers predominantly from Mexico and Central America. Each year conditions have worsened. People who migrate to the United States for work will willingly take jobs rejected by American workers. The immigrant workers have become the political football of elections. Here we are in 2018 and the unthinkable has happened, children being ripped from their parents’ arms at the border and being locked in virtual cages while parents are sent hundreds and thousands of miles away. Hundreds have been deported and chances are high that they will never be reunited with their children. These immigrants are treated as if (in Jesus parable of the vineyard) they had arrived too late to receive full pay.

In explaining the parable of the workers in the vineyard to workers, I used a simple four source model of theological reflection and worked with a diverse group of low wage workers. This was in no way a scientific study. When asked the question of what they thought of everyone getting paid the same there was consternation. It was only fair to continue this exercise with different groups. What I have to offer here is my own reflection.

Insights

Jesus is telling a parable about communal access to the Kingdom of God. The last shall be first and the first shall be last. All are equal in the eyes of God. No hierarchy based on who got there first.

There is also the element of the workers hired early in the morning disgruntled about everyone getting the same pay. Think about many of our experiences growing up with a version of Dana Carvey’s “The Church Lady”. Too often when churches think it is the Christian thing to do to start

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a homeless feeding program or services for immigrant communities. Without adequate preparation, very quickly the homeless and immigrants are harassed by the “inner circle” of the long standing church members. This is because they lack understanding of the full humanity as the other just as the disciples needed Jesus to open eyes to the nature of God's grace.

We live in a society where the loudest voices promote a culture of wealth and political power to drive everything.

There are some bright spots of justice and compassion such as The ACLU and dozens of non-profits carrying for poor and disadvantaged people at low cost. These become our partners in the work of justice.

Moving Forward

The answer I have for these troubled times is very simple: Engage in study of Scripture with our communities and let that guide us into action.

I would like to close by relating a theme from the movie *Brother Sun Sister Moon* about Francis and Clare of Assisi. Francis and his brothers are laboring in the harvest and meal time arrives, they, having nothing, begged bread from other workers. One of the workers questions Francis that he and his brothers come from the wealth of Assisi. One of the other workers points out that Francis and his brothers have worked equally side by side and they are fed. Thus the rich and poor become one community.

Dianne Aid, TSSF, President, Episcopal Network for Economic Justice

Appendix: Revised Common Lectionary for Harvest Season

In this set of reflections on “Harvest Themes,” Scripture is referenced, alluded to and sometimes assumed. The church is rooted in its biblical life, and for this reason we offer easy reference to the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) for each Sunday in October and November, 2018. We also include two annual feasts that bring potent opportunities to teach and preach harvest themes.



OCTOBER 2018

	<u>Psalm</u>	<u>Gospel</u>
Sunday, October 7, 2018	26	Mark 10:2-16
Sunday, October 14, 2018	22:1-15	Mark 10:17-31
Sunday, October 21, 2018	104:1-9,25,37b	Mark 10:35-45
Sunday, October 28, 2018	34:1-8,(19-22)	Mark 10:46-52

NOVEMBER 2018

Sunday, November 4, 2018	146	Mark 12:28-34
Sunday, November 11, 2018	127	Mark 13:1-8
Sunday, November 18, 2018	1 Samuel 2:1-10	Mark 13:1-8
Sunday, November 25, 2018	132:1-13,(14-19)	John 18:33-37

TWO OTHER DAYS OF IMPORTANCE FOR “HARVEST THEMES”

October 4 – Francis of Assisi	121	Mathew 11:25-30
November 22 – Thanksgiving Day	147	John 6:26-35