

## Prayer service in support of farm workers

*This prayer service was compiled by the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP). If you would like more information, support modifying the prayer service to a different faith tradition, or an editable version of this PDF for printing programs, please reach out to VICPP Faith Organizer, Sheila Herlihy ([sheila@virginiainterfaithcenter.org](mailto:sheila@virginiainterfaithcenter.org)).*

### Opening Prayer

Gracious and Justice-loving God,

We ask your special blessing on farm workers, our neighbors who are among the most abused workers in the United States. They work long and hard to grow the food we eat. But they cannot always afford to feed their families. We know your desire is for all people to thrive and live lives of wholeness. But poverty and mistreatment block most farm workers from this goal.

Please give us the courage and commitment to support farm workers' struggle for justice. Let us be your hands to help "loose the bonds of injustice and to undo the thongs of the yoke" (Isaiah 58:6). Let us be your voice crying out for a world where "justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). We pray that one day soon, all workers will fairly share in the abundance you have given this world. Amen. **(From UCC Prayer for Farm Workers)**

### Scripture

*(Feel free to replace with something from your own tradition)*

A reading from the letter of James:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you. Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. (James 5:1-8)

## Reflection

*(Feel free to customize the reflection based on your reading or current events)*

This reading has strong language against selfishness, and it's easy to think that this only applied in Biblical times. But the reality is that the "cries of the harvesters" are still present in the US and Virginia today. Farm workers are exempt from Virginia's minimum wage and exempt from overtime pay. These laws have their roots in the Jim Crow era, when southern politicians claimed you couldn't possibly pay Black workers the same as White workers, so common types of work done by formerly enslaved people got written out of the regulations. Farmworkers often work long hours doing hard labor, and still they are denied equal treatment. The selfishness of institutions is still oppressing those who have the least capacity to fight back. Caring for those in need means that we must stand up for a world in which every person is treated with dignity.

The reading ends with an echo of hope, though. The farmer waits for the land to yield, trusting in the Lord. We have a chance to build the kingdom of God, and to sow a crop of justice. We do this by advocating more fair policies in the public realm, and we do this by treating workers with dignity, building relationships, and offering what services we can. Let us learn a bit more about the plight of workers over the last few years, as we lift up all these workers in prayer.

## Video

*Two-minute video showing the conditions of farmworkers, especially during the pandemic. It acknowledges the danger they are in, as well as the financial straits they face.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9T5Ca4Bvp8>

## Responsive prayer

*(If this prayer service is over Zoom, invite everyone to mute themselves. Then, participants can choose one part and read to themselves while following along with the leaders, the leaders being the only people with mics on. If in person, you can have the leaders read one part and participants read the other aloud.)*

Leader 1: Today, we lift up the migrant and farmworkers in our communities and commonwealth.

**Leader 2: We give thanks for the dignity of work, the participation in your creation.**

Leader 1: We give special thanks for Virginia's essential workers,

**Leader 2: Who supplied us with food and kept society moving during the pandemic.**

Leader 1: We give thanks for those who helped institute protections for these workers,

**Leader 2: And yet we know there is so much more to do.**

Leader 1: We know that many farm workers struggle with long days in the hot sun.

**Leader 2: We ask Your support and encouragement for those who go without heat protections.**

Leader 1: We know that many farm workers struggle with low wages and no time off.

**Leader 2: We ask Your support and encouragement for those whose labor is not valued.**

Leader 1: We know that many farm workers struggle with exposure to pesticides and other chemicals.

**Leader 2: We ask Your support and encouragement for those who are unsafe at work**

Leader 1: We know that many farm workers struggle with exploitation and discrimination.

**Leader 2: We ask Your support and encouragement for those who feel their dignity is denied.**

Leader 1: Bless the hands that pick, process or serve our food.

**Leader 2: Bless the backs that ache from work that feeds others**

Leader 1: Bless the souls that cry out to you.

**Leader 2: Bless all who work to see dignity restored and your will done on this earth**

**All: Amen**

## **Action/ Next Steps**

*(Leader says)* Now, I invite you to take a piece of paper and share your commitment to a next step to support our brothers and sisters who provide food and endure such harsh conditions.

*(If over Zoom, leader says)* Please share your commitment in the chat.

*(If in person, leader says)* Please drop your paper in an offering basket.

It could be scheduling a meeting with your state senator. It could be visiting a migrant camp and really building relationships with the people who live there. It could be joining the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy's advocacy network. It could be talking about migrant ministry to your congregation. As we listen to this song, please share your commitment, and hold all these resolutions in prayer.

## Song

**“Duerme Negrito”** by Mercedes Sosa (*about a mother who is singing her child a lullaby while she prepares to leave for work in the fields*):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKgEBBUI6U4>

(*at the end of the song, all say*) **Amen**

Thank you all for sharing your commitments moving forward. We'll close with a final blessing.

## Closing Benediction

“May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and turn their pain to joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.”

**(Franciscan Blessing)**