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Interviewer: Ryan Nilsen, NFWM-NC Summer Intern through Duke Divinity School

Interviewee: Alex Jones, NFWM-NC State Organizer

Date and time: 2:00pm on August 2, 2011

Location: National Farm Worker Ministry office in Greensboro, North Carolina

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Transcriber: Amy Markin

Abbreviations:

A = Alex Jones

R = Ryan Nilsen

NFWM = National Farm Worker Ministry

FLOC = Farm Labor Organizing Committee

NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement

Interview Summary: In this interview, Ryan Nilsen asks Alex Jones, the North Carolina State Organizer for NFWM, about how she first got involved with NFWM, how her faith perspective has informed her work, some of the challenges of her work, how she has been impacted by his involvement, and what she would say to those who are considering being involved. Jones discusses her experience with agricultural workers in the Philipines, her relationship to the United Methodist Church, heat-related deaths of farm workers, the core values of NFWM and difficulty of justice work. She also comments on her involvement with the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, FLOC, community organizing, immigration, and tobacco workers in NC.

R: Alright so this is Ryan Nilsen and I'm about to ask some questions to Alex Jones, the NC State Coordinator, State Organizer for the NFWM. We're sitting in Greensboro, NC at the NFWM office here. It's about 2:00 in the afternoon on August 2nd, 2011. So let's get started. So Alex- how did you first get involved with the NFWM?

A: I first heard about NFWM through David Wildman who is a board member for NFWM through the general board of ministries of the Methodist Church. He's also an invaluable resource within the Methodist Church general board in and of itself and I was participating in a 3 year mission program for young adults and I was at the point of finishing the first half of the program and David had suggested NFWM as a possible site for my - the second part of my placement. So the Mission program I was a part of is a three year Peace and Justice program for young adults in the Methodist church. Essentially, you spend the first half living abroad, living in an area of conflict and then you spend the second half in a domestic setting. So I had been in the Philippines working with agricultural workers and had some options in terms of where I would transfer back into a domestic setting. So David had suggested NFWM and up until that point I hadn't heard of the work they were doing and the organization and it seemed like a very natural fit in connection with the work I was doing in the Philippines working with people in the countryside, working in agriculture; farm workers not owning their own farms but also coming together collectively through the union movement and working with workers' rights.

R: Cool. So what was it about the NFWM 's work that you heard about at that point that made it seem like a natural fit?

A: In terms of the mission of solidarity, one of the core values of NFWM is that we're an organization and a people that work within the church in solidarity with farm workers- that we take our direction directly from people who are the experts in the fields. So that really resonated with me. Also the idea of um, labor and workers' rights and coming from a place where it's mostly still an agrarian society and the union movement is still relatively young in the Philippines and with that comes some of the same authenticity of a young movement but also some of the same challenges. So as I learned about the work of NFWM and about the farm worker movement in the US in general, the likenesses and some of the same challenges were really, really resonated with me and the work that I had been doing; it was a very natural transition. And interestingly though, the setting is different and there were cultural aspects and differences that were dissimilar- the bulk of the work is really similar and in the US the farm worker movement is still really a young movement so I think it speaks to the need- that the need is so great that people need the protections of a contract and come together to be able to collectively unite their power- to collectively bargain. So that was a very natural transition, minus the language part.

R: And you came to this as a missionary thru the United Methodist Church.

A: Right.

R: So, how has your, how have your beliefs or values, kind of impacted or effected your involvement with the Ministry?

A: This is something that I think about a lot. This is kind of a full circle. I grew up in an area in the Midwest with a family that was rooted in union struggles and workers' rights and it's mostly an agricultural area there, too. And then to have gone into an international context and worked with people in that capacity and then to come back here to the US, again, really has given the same kind of - same ideas, like I've been able to view it from very different perspectives. So the other part of my history I think that's important is that I was raised in a somewhat traditional Methodist church involved

in mission work that was really formative for me when I was young, but the idea of justice and what it means to work for justice has evolved over time. I mean, it's taken years and I think my work here with the NFWM has just continued in that process of evolution for me. I think in the church a lot of times, we look at justice and we start to learn about justice through parables and through kind of theoretical and historical contexts but justice as its lived out- is very different. It's harder. It's messier. Inevitably we make mistakes and it's a really humbling process. It's a thing in our everyday lives when we work for justice it's having hard conversations with the people that are closest to us sometimes, with our family members, with people we know from church and then also having larger conversations against and with larger structures that are in place. It's work that isn't comfortable, but it's critical. So I think that participating in the work of NFWM and especially in supporting the unions and organizations that we do, that are loved by the farm workers, that has solidified that even more for me and helped me to understand in the evolution of that process what it means to everyday try to live my life and to make choices and to speak out for justice and that it's I think sometimes, it's glorified a lot in settings that we hear about it through the parables, it just sounds so right and so simple and in everyday life it's going against the grain and that's what every single one of us is called to do by our various traditions.

R: Thanks. Um, I mentioned that I might ask this kind of last minute- but the distinction between faith-based and faith-rooted organizing or justice work is something you've brought up in conversation to me before. Can you tell me about how the work of the NFWM is either faith-based or faith-rooted and how that effects what it is you are actually doing here?

A: Uh-huh. I think that you know the idea of being driven by our faith or you know, people call it by different names; it's your faith or your values or sometimes- goodwill- it's something that's a core fundamental part of who we are. So, I think when we're driven by our faith- whether it's in my case- I was raised Methodist and so I've studied the Christian bible and the various resolutions and principles of the Methodist church which as a young Methodist person and I think like a lot of people I grew up in this tradition because it was my family's tradition not because I really understood it and as I grew to understand what Methodism means, especially in the context of the social principles and the resolutions that are passed and the way that it relates to our everyday life, that's when Methodism really came to life for me. So, so for me- in doing this work and being driven by my own faith that's come from these- the learning that I've had or the experiences that I've had- um, I think it just means that everything we do is tempered by that, right? So it's a constant process of reflection and evaluation and studying and learning and trying to understand what it is that the values that I have are calling me to do in every instance. It's not something that you can just paint with a broad brush- every single day you know, with lots of encounters we have are opportunities to act in a just way. You know sometimes we are able to and sometimes we're not. You know that's part of the learning process. If that makes sense.

R: Yeah- I think so.

A: I think being rooted in faith or being based in faith in terms of organizing, I think means also that it's not just something that we're doing as a reaction. It's something that's deep within us that creates this drive and it's relating to people on that level. You know- like recognizing that someone might be a mother and she might be a worker and she might be a daughter and she's also a person who

participates in her local congregation- like that's one aspect of her life and that's how we relate to people sometimes. Not singularly because that person goes to church but in all aspects of her life and that's what drives her to participate.

R: Yeah- I like that. Um - so once you actually got involved with the NFWM here in NC-did you come to NC first or did you -

A: Yeah- I started out here- I drove here on January 27th and I drove right into town and Lori put me to work immediately. [Laughing] I hadn't even gone to where I was going to live and she was like, "Okay- we've got a lot of work this afternoon." So I left everything in my car and went to the office at ERUUF and started in- and that was it.

R: Perfect.

A: Hit the ground running- yes.

R: Nice. So can you share some experience- maybe a story of a specific situation with your work with the NFWM that had a really significant impact on you- maybe something earlier on since we're talking about that early transition?

A: Yeah- I think there were two. When I first came, it was right around the springtime so within the first month or so it was when people were just coming to NC for the planting season. And you know, I went through a process of learning, even though I grew up in an agricultural area in Illinois, because of mostly having corn and soy- very few crops in the area where I'm from are hand-harvested so I had a lot to learn just in terms of the kind of lay of the land, just in terms of what farm work is all about and who does farm work and you know, all the statistical things that we work with churches and teach people about all the time. But the first experience that really stayed with me and has continued to stay with me is participating in the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, I think in March that year; it was really early in the year. And we were in eastern NC and you know part of what the pilgrimage does is walk throughout the day. I think we had walked 6 miles that day. And we ended up in the afternoon kind of at the outskirts of town at a house that was empty and we were in kind of a yard area and we were told by the person who was leading the activity there that this was the house where a man had lived who had died in the fields the year before. So I had come in '07 and the couple of years before were really hot summers in NC and several people had died of either heat stress or you know, essentially lack of water and shade in the fields and so we had a ceremony that was part of the pilgrimage where we had a pitcher of water and each one of us poured out water and offered up our hopes for not just for this man and his family, but also more broadly. And we learned about him and his family and the day that he died and I think the reality and the gravity of his particular story was what stayed with me so much because in my ignorance thinking that this was impossible... you know? And so it was really motivating to me so that more people would know that this happens- that this occurs and that this sacred person had died because he didn't have water. I mean water is everywhere. So that experience really stayed with me for a long time I mean, in a way that I think for maybe the first year that I worked here I made a promise to myself that like I just drank water; I only drank water so I that I would always remember. I guess just so I would always remember.

But then the second experience

R: Can I ask you before you...take a minute if you want, but has that continued to be something, like the deaths in the field due to water, has that continued to be something in NC that has been an issue in your time over the past several years or have there been significant efforts that have helped in responding because of these particular deaths since when you first started?

A: I think yes and no is the short answer. There were definitely, I mean there were groups- NFWM, FLOC and others, that, of course, tried to bring these- like these stories bring them to light in the broader public. The short answer is there wasn't legislation that was passed. I don't know that enforcement on behalf of the government agencies has changed any. I think the reality is that here, for a couple of summers it was a little bit cooler. So at least for two seasons after that to my knowledge, no one's life was taken as a result of that but certainly there were people who suffered from the heat. I don't know the gravity of each person's situation. A couple of years ago in California, I think seven people died in one season in CA and that's a state, even where there are laws about shade and water. The issue is systemic and the reality is that this work will always be difficult and hot and there are precautions that can be taken. It's a broad multi-layered issue but the fact that people are working, that they're in their job and that a possible result of their job is [train noise] are suffering from the heat- not because it's just hot but because you don't- you're not able to stop when you want to stop or when you know your body needs to stop; you're not able to get water or even if you're able to get water you can't get it until the end of the row. So even if you go to every row and then get water, that's you know, if you have a crew leader or grower that allows that. That's absolutely unjust that basic human functions that our bodies need, that people have to struggle just to be able to have those! So I think a lot of times it's circumstances and stories like that that strike the human spirit. That really touch us because they're shocking and they're appalling. But I think I learned over that first year, the very first workers' meeting that I went to was maybe two or three months later in the western part of the state. There were probably about 35 people that came together and it was a union meeting and a training and Leticia who was the vice president of the union and the director in NC of FLOC, she and the other organizers led some activities that day and it became really clear when we were there that they were the ones facilitating the activities but they were just the guides. And the people with the real answers and the real expertise were the workers and the people making decisions. And respect was absolutely inherent in the full process and I'm sure that plenty of people in that room had experienced similar situations in their work. It didn't rise to the level of seriousness that their life was threatened but they were able to talk about those circumstances, they were able to talk about possible solutions and how to work together and then in the meantime, they also had fun. And people laughed together and they "got real" together. So I think those two experiences are really illustrative of kind of the spectrum of this work and the farm worker movement in general. That there are, unfortunately stories that we can see every day that happen that are just- I think, that just effect us on a human level that we can relate to people and just feel really deeply concerned and touched but then on the other end of that is like the strength of the human spirit and people coming together and saying this is not right and this is why. You know, I think it's really important, maybe in Christianity, it can be compared even to like the resurrection, like we can't as allies and as supporters, we can't stay in that place where we're incapacitated by grief or by

just the difficulty of what people are facing in the fields but that we have to move forward and support what changes are happening and the people that are leading those changes. You know? So- that's been a constant process as I've been an organizer here is coming to understand that. Like I said- growing up in a traditional church- it's not language that we learn every day. There are lessons, but the application of those lessons that we learn in Sunday school or you know, in religious education- they're really different when you apply them. And especially in terms as our roles in NFWM, and being support, it's trusting that the people who are working in the fields are really the ones that know- they're the ones with experience every day and they're the ones that will lead the change and we're going to support that.

R: I'm kind of curious about that dynamic. Have there been times when that's been really difficult- or maybe convincing people in churches that you're trying to bring into this work- has it been hard to get people to see that vision where you're looking for leadership, yeah I guess leadership, from farm workers themselves?

A: I think inherently [adjusting microphone] that process is difficult for us as people. I think it makes it more difficult as Americans. Part of the reason I think it's a difficult process is because it's a humbling process to understand that we can't necessarily make that change. Yeah- I mean I would say that's the crux of our work as organizers with NFWM is to walk with people as they're growing in that understanding and to lovingly help develop and shape that within other people as we are within ourselves. That you know- I don't think anyone is born with an inherent understanding of what it means to live out justice. Maybe- but people are really lucky if they are. For me, it's been a struggle to understand what it means on a daily basis and I think it is for a lot of churches and the people in the churches that we work with. Like I was saying, it calls for difficult conversations with people that we're the closest to and to be able to reconcile that with those people. Sometimes it also means that we're not able just to fix something. It doesn't make sense to us that we can't put you know- a large amount of money into something or a whole lot of energy into something and it's not just gonna change. You know- and the other part is there are language and cultural barriers that exist, also and that's also a very humbling thing I think it's important and it's really good that a lot of times, in our everyday- in our work- we're kind of a dominant society- right, I think the majority of the churches we work with tend to be non-immigrant churches and so kind of standing in the background in an active but supportive role I think is a challenge a lot of times for people who are leaders in their lives. And it's kind of a servant leadership that we're called to do. And so I think that takes time and a certain finesse to understand it.

R: In some ways that might get into my next question- how have you- how do you feel that you have changed? You're talking somewhat about how the process has been walking with people as they're seeing this transformation, ideally, but how do you feel like you've changed through your work with the NFWM?

A: I think it's just been part of my own process of evolving and understanding. The interesting part is that I'm learning as I'm also teaching and I think it's important, self-evaluation is really important, just to be sure that that you know, I think as I learn more, I'm able to teach better. But I think I've come to understand like some simple changes have been even like being quiet when I want to speak and

listening a little bit longer. A really very fun and simple thing that I learned a long time ago, I went on to labor camps a lot, and sometimes I've gone out with organizers from the union over time and that's been really helpful. You know when we go to labor camps a lot of time, it's to be that bridge between the people who are working on the farms and living in labor camps and then congregations for that exchange- right? For that contact and interaction and mutual learning. But when you go out and do outreach with an organizer or on a one-on-one basis different conversations happen, of course. So understanding that there are comfortable silences and it's important to wait through those silences to build rapport and to connect with people. It's a really subtle thing but it's something that's really stayed with me. Somebody explained it to me a long time ago and just said, I think especially in our lives right now everything is go go go and we're time conscious and we have a lot to do and we have a short time to do it and so a lot of times I think we focus on getting through our list A to Z and organizing- it's not as simple as that. Sometimes getting from A to Z means sitting and waiting in uncomfortable silences and then that's going to help to connect in a deeper way and give people the opportunity to speak up or not. So- um, so I think it helps me to learn both on a personal individual basis to sit through uncomfortable silences but also on a larger scale, sometimes there are uncomfortable silences that need to happen to help us grow and develop. So I guess the answer to that is I'm changing every single day and developing every single day. Sometimes it's a little but- it's definitely humbling but sometimes it's a little bit embarrassing to think about things that I've said in the past- very well intentioned but recognize now, how they might have been understood, because I didn't have maybe the tools to express it in a way that I really meant it. I think there's a lot that we have to unpack in society- you know a lot of perceptions that we hold about ourselves and about other people especially when there's a cultural barrier or a language barrier and we can remember people are people and you know, remember a lot of the theoretical things that we're taught but when you put them into practice and really honoring another person and respecting another person- looks different. So- yeah.

R: Thanks. It occurred to me while you were saying that that you'll have some of these words to look back at. [Both laughing] You'll critique using different tools.

A: I've done this before - it's always more embarrassing on tape 'cause you think, "I really thought that..." I was so convicted.

R: No- I think what you're saying is insightful for sure.

A: You know one thing to add to that- I think is about voice. Just even semantics can make a big difference because a lot of times we say, "We're speaking out for the voiceless," and this is a perfect example of something I had said in the past- it's a really common phrase like, "Farm workers are voiceless." And I've really come to understand how wrong that is. That it's one thing if peoples' voices are being silenced, but no human being is voiceless. No one is. And farm workers, you know, people who are doing farm work have a voice just as much as everyone else does. They might not be able to influence the legislature by their vote, but certainly, it's our responsibility to listen to what people say and be our own voices in our communities, too. That as an ally, it doesn't mean that we should be silent; it means that we need to speak up in our own communities. But just that even that very simple concept of being voiceless vs. um, not.

R: You also have been talking a little bit about, I guess coming to that realization about silence, and voicelessness and voices; everyone has a voice through actually visiting labor camps. Can you tell me a little bit more about visiting labor camps or some particular story or experience you've had visiting labor camps in NC?

A: I think everyone is different. One thing we don't do as a society much is sit on the porch with people the way our parents or grandparents did. Just sit and talk...you know maybe with an agenda or a particular topic that we come to talk about or maybe with none at all. So that's an opportunity that happens I think when we visit people in labor camps- I mean they're labor camps but they're temporary homes- right? So we're visiting somebody at their home. I think every time I've gone, I come back with a different understanding or a deeper, deeper level of understanding. I got to know NC in a really strange way. A lot of people you know get to know a city or a neighborhood. And I got to know NC when I first moved here by, you know, "Something Something Church Rd." which is off of some other road. NC has a lot of streets called, "Union Grove Church Road" or "Cedar Rapid." So I got to know NC through tobacco fields and through driving you know in the evening time as people are leaving the city we would leave the city and there are very distinctive smells and sights and sounds. People mowing their grass in the evening as the sun's setting and it starts to get cool. You know, they're like almost the routine in preparation for the work. Right- which kind of on one hand doesn't feel like work sometimes, if you're talking with people because it's really enjoyable. Like you said- Outreach is some of the most enjoyable time because you connect with people and you get to know them personally and in your mind, you kind of organize their own story like their personal story with what you've learned about kind of the greater context- right? So I think not one experience is coming to mind in terms of visiting people in labor camps, but what more broadly is coming to mind is developing friendships with people who are living dual lives. FLOC works with a lot of people. The majority of FLOC members are on the H-2A program so the majority of the people that I meet are here part of the year and in Mexico part of the year. And so some people that I would call friends that have been an important part of half of my year every year, come and go. And so I think that is what has stuck with me the most. You know-the handful of people that I look forward to in the spring- I feel myself anticipating their phone call. "I wonder if so and so is back." "I wonder if so and so's daughter graduated from high school. Did she make the grade?" When you get to know people's lives and then this weird kind of juxtaposition of being in their home country, in their home state, in their home town living life with their families and then coming here and living with a group of men and cable. Like cable television and just imagine half the year you sit and you have ESPN as your main source of entertainment and then half the year you have the richness of your own food, your own culture and your own family so I've often said that I feel like some people-it's like a sacrifice generation. That one person, I'm thinking of in particular has been coming for 25 years. He started coming when he was 20; he's now been traveling back and forth for more years than he didn't. And now his son comes here. So it's going into a second generation. And granted, I think his experience, part of the reason he keeps coming back is because he's working on a farm that works for him. You know, he can come here- he can earn enough money that when he goes back to his own farm he can pay people on his own farm for the rest of the year. Which, you know, that's a good thing. But why can't he earn enough money where he is, that he wouldn't have to come here and leave everything in order to be able do that? So it speaks to a lot of larger issues like trade and economies and you know,

people are doing what they have to do for their families but that doesn't mean that in the meantime that their lives aren't forever changed. I don't know. I hesitate to say that they're suffering because I think people just learn to endure what's normal, what becomes normal. But there's still a sacrificial nature of having to live half of your life in a full way in a way that you choose and half of your life in what I always say- like labor camps- I think I've always related the very nicest labor camp I've ever seen was kind of like one of the worst church camps I've stayed at- you know? I wouldn't want to live in a church camp setting with a whole bunch of other people that are coming that I maybe just met for 10 months out of the year and then for the other 2 months, be able to visit with my family and live the life that I want. So that's what I think sticks with me a lot of times when I leave labor camps is talking with people that are in that situation that go back and forth, You know- yeah.

R: I think bringing in the larger kind of trade and economic realities and just kind of how huge some of this is- do you have ideas about some of the more, maybe the smaller concrete changes that could really go a long way in NC or through the work of the NFWM or FLOC?

A: Yeah- I always call it the "NAFTA can of worms" because once you start down that road where do you go from trade policy needing to be changed; it's really big. Yeah- I mean there are successes all the time. I think there are small victories and medium sized victories. I mean even when you look at NC it's still amazing to me that NC, which consistently competes I think with SC, to be the least and second least unionized state, right? That here- there's a contract that covers between 7 and 8,000 people who aren't citizens in this country. The place that has anti-union laws built in and people are pushing for them all the time- the strength of people who come together to create this contract that covers thousands of people- it's one of the largest contracts in the state- that's huge. I mean it's a huge victory. And I mean, you know, in the anti-immigrant climate in NC, especially in the short time that I've lived here and presumably before, to have a union of you know, made up predominantly, maybe 99% or more of immigrants is also another really huge thing. It just shows the strength of spirit and the strength of coming together and how people can create change. So you know, I think it's holding those victories close and thinking about them as a motivation and a continuous drive is what's really important. Some of the changes that I think can be made- there's a lot! Luckily when you're in a state where there's a long way to go- there's lots of opportunities- right? But looking at NC we have a lot of protections here for workers that neighboring states don't have. So that's also really important. I think victories for the NFWM are, are, helping supporters realize that drive within themselves to go out and drive the extra mile, as it were, or sometimes literally. To have people participate in the processes which create these changes. Whether they're legislative changes which accompany union contracts together- that's really powerful. I feel every person that gets in involved and gets like emboldened by what they're hearing and what they're learning and enough to create the drive within them to do things, you know to have presentations within their church or to go and participate at a Reynolds's shareholder meeting. You know, people, new people all the time are participating so like from the NFWM's perspective that's a success. That more and more people are learning and they're taking that learning and putting it into action. You know, in terms of, in terms of the union- there are still lots of farm workers who would benefit from contract so successes would obviously be you know, the Reynolds campaign- winning a contract that would cover all the people working in tobacco. That would be huge- you know. We talked

about yesterday with the group that was there- how tobacco is, from what I've heard, people kind of have their most loathed crop to pick and then the one they mind the least. It's like chores- you know? Everybody has their chore where, "yeah- I can tolerate this." And then there are those they just hate to do. So regardless of what that is- tobacco physically might not be quite as bad as other ones. I've heard strawberries are terrible because they're so small and it takes forever. But the reality of tobacco is it's a naturally occurring toxic substance and so that makes it just one more level of difficult and dangerous and I heard a couple years ago from some people at work at an organic farm that they almost wished that the farm hadn't gone organic because the pesticides also have what they call- sucker suppressants. So like in the flowers and in the tobacco leaves there are suckers that come up and you have to tear them off with your hand- so you tear them off with your hand and if it's organic there's not the suppressant- there's not the chemical to suppress them so it's actually harder work. So it's a double edge sword- you know. But, but, the point of all that, especially in a crop, and a harvest like tobacco- having people covered by a contract, that they're not going to be afraid to be fired because they're not getting enough wages or you know, because they're not being paid for the hours they're working or because the conditions where they're staying are absolutely inhumane. Or a myriad of things like people feeling the protections of those contracts to allow them to do their work in a way that's safe and healthy and dignified- is huge. It's as simple and as difficult as that, I think.

R: Yeah. Simple and difficult.

A: Right.

R: So Alex, today, what would you say- what would you like to say to people who might be interested in getting involved with the work of the NFWM? Actually, hold on one second I want to see if I can hear them talking.

A: Should we go...

R: Let's move rooms. For the record, our office is a little noisy and we can hear the people talking in the office next to us so we'll be right back.

[Stop in recording. Move to hallway for end of recording.]

R: So Alex- what would you like to say to people today that might be interested in getting involved with the work of the NFWM?

A: Um- let's see. From the first time that I learned about the work of the Ministry and its mission, I've never known an organization to more genuinely carry out and fulfill its mission on a daily basis like the NFWM does. And I think that says a lot having been a staff person. When you see the inside of something I think a lot of times you see how everything works, and I can definitely say today that I feel more connected than I did in the very beginning. I think that's natural but they're- it's an organization that serves a role both for people who are doing farm work and for people who aren't- that are part of churches; that's invaluable. And, the group of the small number of staff and the board members who each have their amazing stories and their connectedness to the movement is an inspiration and

essentially, I guess, if you want to start getting involved- be ready! 'Cause it's going to change your life. It's going to be something that will stay with you- I think, this work and the farm worker movement isn't something that you can be a part of and let go, because I think it changes, it changes who you are essentially.

And it's important and it's not always comfortable but it's always positive and there's been a real benefit to being a part of a national organization 'cause lots of people here in NC have the opportunity to see farm work and the struggles of farm workers and the joys and challenges of farm workers from the NC context but I think balancing that with understanding how it is in FL and CA and OR and other places gives a depth and a history and a trajectory in a way that you can't get if you're just in your own context and your own state. So- I think it also comes with that really rich, um, breadth of being national and you know, connecting with people who are in CA. A lot of times I'll come back from a board meeting in the summer time and I'll talk to people about where we've been, people here in NC. So last year, and the year before when we were in CA. I talked with some people and we were doing outreach, about the struggle of the grape pickers in CA and for people to hear those stories and understand it inherently when I was saying things like the crew leaders were targeting the union leaders and if they had one grape that wasn't quite ripe or was over-ripe they would pick it out of the box and then the workers wouldn't be able to work the rest of the day. They had to be on their toes so much they couldn't make one tiny mistake without being punished- right? As they were organizing for this campaign and to say that to people here in NC who gave a nod that was a really understanding nod like, "yup-we know how that goes." I think there's a relatability, but that strengthens people to know that you know, "I'm not just on this farm here and I'm not just living through this here now but there are people in CA that are also struggling and also trying to make change and there are people who all came together for a board meeting from all across the country representing their various churches and I've never met any of them but they have people within their organizations who are supporting this change." And so, I think it makes a really big world feel really small sometimes, knowing that there's this kind of, invisible [laughing] sometimes, you can't see it, you can only imagine the support that's there. It exists whether or not you have the opportunity to come in contact with it other than just through one person.

R: That's a really good answer.

A: It's circular- it's always circular. [Laughing]

R: Is there anything else you'd like to add or share?

A: Well I think this is an interesting time for this interview and this project and for me and where I am with my role with the Ministry and it's been a really reflective time for me and thinking about my future and how much I've been shaped and transformed by working in this role and with the people that I work with who are people in churches in NC; people who are doing farm work, people who are on our board- just amazing people I've been able to meet and who have helped shape me and in turn, I've been able to connect with and help develop, too. Um, it's really - it's a really profound experience, and humbling experience. It's been an opportunity I would never have imagined that I'd be able to be part of. And so- I feel good about this phase of the way I'm connecting and look forward to the next phase of how I'll be

involved. I think it's inevitable, my involvement won't change, for my life, I think it won't change- I'll be a supporter of this organization and farm workers and farm workers' rights forever as a result of this experience. And I can only hope that I've been able to give as much as I've been able to receive in the time that I've been here. That's it.

R: Well thank you for sitting with me this afternoon and answering some questions and for being my supervisor this summer and teaching me a lot.

A: Well thanks for all your work and good luck transcribing.