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

Interviewee: Lucy Boutte, NFWM-CA

Date and time: 9:25AM on August 25, 2011

Location: Portland State University in Portland, OR

Length of Interview: 62 minutes and 51 seconds

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Transcriber: Kelley Morgan

Abbreviations:

R= Ryan Nilsen

L= Lucy Boutte

NFWM = National Farm Worker Ministry

UFW = United Farm Workers

DREAM = Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors

YAYA = Youth and Young Adults

MAPA = Mexican American Political Association

Interview Summary: In this interview, Ryan Nilsen asks Lucy Boutte, NFWM California state organizer, about how she first got involved with NFWM, how her beliefs and values have affected her involvement, how she has been impacted by her involvement, and what she would say to people who might be thinking about becoming involved. In her responses, she discusses her work with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, the development of an ecumenical advisory committee for NFWM in California, the importance of having a faith or belief in working with the farm worker movement, Catholic social teaching, and her involvement with recent UFW campaigns. She also comments on race, privilege, livable wages, and the difficult situations that farm workers face today.

R: This is Ryan Nilsen, sitting with Lucy Boutte, thanks. We're in Portland, Oregon with the National Farm Worker Ministry Board meeting sitting in a dorm room at Portland State University, and today is August 25; it's about 9:25 AM, and I'm just going to ask you a few questions.

So, Lucy, how did you first get involved with the National Farm Worker Ministry?

L: I had previously been, well, I previously worked two years with the UFW organizing, and one of the organizers, the lead organizer, is in LA, Roman Pinal, and there was a need for, for some support work for the UFW, and that was about, in 2008, I believe. So they, Roman knew that I was in town, and that I worked with them previously with getting some church congregations out to some actions in that. So he invited me to talk to, first to do that one project, and it was under NFWM but we spoke with Virginia through the phone and I did...it was about a 2-month little project campaign. It was really fun because it was about getting some, different congregations on board to support, farm workers, a letter-writing campaign, a petition, and that kind of stuff. Then about, yeah, 2009, they called me again and then they offered me the job, the National Farm Worker Ministry offered me a job, part-time at first, and I thought, "Oh, this is fun. I think so. It's right up my alley 'cause I'm connected, very connected with my church, Catholic church. So it fit with what else I was doing as a, as a, on a volunteer basis. It really...it really...it really fit well 'cause I'm visiting churches and church groups and talking to pastors, so now I could do both, talk to pastors about National Farm Worker Ministry, about the farm worker issue. So I've been, it's been three years this month I think. It's been great.

R: So when you came on staff, did your job transition more directly into working with churches, or what does your overall involvement since you started working with the National Farm Worker Ministry look like?

L: It, it's very fluid, but basically it's about, getting, advocating for farm workers, creating a constituency that understands the farm worker issue, is ready to support in whatever way, necessary. Mostly it's through petitioning or going to actions or writing or making telephone calls. We created or developed an interfaith advisory committee with some religious, about 12 members so far, but we've been trying to build that up. There are Catholic, there are Jewish, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Lutheran. We still have to extend to other denominations and non-Christian denominations. So they're there to support us in whatever way their congregations can to motivate, educate, inform, and advocate for farm workers. The other is a lay leaders' support group. Because I work with the Catholic Church through the Charismatic Renewal, Spanish-speaking, I have access to many groups on a regular basis, especially a monthly basis because we have, we conduct a formation process. It's called the *Convocatorio*, once a month. They gather the leaders from different prayer groups in the San Gabriel Pastoral Region which is one region of the Archdiocese in Los Angeles, and we have about...there are 65 churches in that region under Bishop Zavala. Bishop Zavala is my bishop; he made me coordinate, four of those, for the Charismatic Renewal. So, and I work out of his office. Out of those 65 parishes, there are maybe 30 Spanish-speaking prayer groups, so those are the groups, the leaders from the groups who we try to engage to come and get some formation. Through that, I'm able to talk about justice, specifically about farm workers. And because they're Hispanic, most of them are immigrants; it's really connected. We've been able to do a number of things like, we organized a, and they raised the funds for a bus to Bakersfield, to do a trip about 2 years ago. So we took about 70 people in a bus and several vans to Bakersfield to visit. First we visited La Paz, where Cesar Chavez

is buried. There's a museum; it's a beautiful place. We had lunch there, they had a little presentation, they went through the museum, had some prayer, then we went to visit workers in Bakersfield, and that was amazing, because what we did too is, yeah, that was one activity. They took food and we fed the workers, and gave them *chapurrado*, which is a Mexican rice drink that they loved, and so it was really great. Another time, we took, because farm workers have died in the fields. Since 2004, 15 farm workers died in the field, due to heat-related illnesses

R: In California, or...

L: In California, I'm sorry, yes, in California alone, that we know of, and only because the UFW went out and investigated because, you know, it's not something that they made public. They try and hide it and say that it was something else. So I'm sure if we had had the resources to go out and do further investigation we would have found more. So since 2004 most of the deaths were in the hot, hot summer months, of course, July and August, only because they're not provided water, shade, and rest, education about dehydration for the farm worker and for the, for their supervisors, so that people suffer when they don't. I remember one story of one of the farm workers that, his colleague went to look, to check him out, and he looked into his eyes. He says he looked just totally, really bad, weak, but the man looked him in the eyes and said [whispers] "I don't want to die." And he did. So, that's what it's all about. [Laughs] We went, that one time, we took water, and, and shade canopies. It was just a symbolic gesture, of course, that doesn't do the trick, it's not about that, it's about workers having the same rights that you and I have, right? But the people that we took were even more touched than the people that were there, the farm workers. Much more because they got to see their brothers, you know, and sisters, and the difficulty in the work that they do. It's hard. I didn't think it was going to be, but you start talking about it and, it, it touches you. [Tears up] So, farm workers are really suffering but it was really beautiful to see the, the conversation on the way back, how different it was than on the way in there, about the commitment they have to continue to work with the farm workers. It was, yes, and their job, then was to go back to the churches and share the stories, which they did. We took pictures and it was very good. And it's not enough, 'cause it was just one busload and one vanload and another, so it's a continual struggle to make people aware that the food that we eat has been touched by farm workers, and sometimes that's a great, great sacrifice. So, we continue the journey, and I think you were going to ask me something else. [Laughs] I can go on and on! You tell me when to stop!

R: No, that's cool. I appreciate it, your sharing. You mentioned how coming from your involvement with your church and you mentioned the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement. How would you say that your faith, beliefs, or values have impacted your involvement with the National Farm Worker Ministry?

L: I think, I don't think I could see myself doing the work without the faith element, and I think, yeah, I think that it has deepened my faith [tears up] because I've been able to put it in action in a more concrete way, more direct way, you know, 'cause we talk about faith in our church and we do good works and we organize people and this and that. But

here we actually come back and we almost see it, not come to fruition, but come to touch somebody's life concretely, you know, when we go visit the workers, when I talk to them, when we do the marches, that connection becomes very, very...it's almost synchronized with my faith, working and touching them. It's, yeah, I think it's been very, very, very helpful for me. It's been an asset, really, and not only my own, you know, belief and faith and basic, that every man, every woman is worthy of dignity. I mean, dignity is already there; it's yours, and that we need to honor that and the other, and that we are responsible for our brothers. That has become much, much deeper, stronger, and real. Before it was a little bit more in my head, I think it's coming down to my heart [tears up] a little bit. The other thing is by having the connection with the church, I've been able to get in and probably reach, especially clergy, who I might not have had access to or wouldn't have really talked to us, because I've been around so long in the church. So they know who I am, and that just opens up doors for us, so that...yeah, couldn't do it without some type of belief. It doesn't have to be Christian; it doesn't have to be Catholic, probably doesn't even have to be about God, although for me it is. But, you know, anybody who... who...believes in the dignity of a human person, I think could do it. They tap deep and look into the eyes of the farm worker, yeah.

R: In your own faith community, or in the faith communities that you've been able to interact with through this work with the ministry, have you come across people who didn't see it that way, or disagreed?

L: I went once to a...I was invited, about 2 years ago, I think, to a, what was the organization.... It was, in Orange County. No, it wasn't Catholic, it was like a Chamber of Commerce type of thing, and I don't know why they invited me, but they wanted someone to talk about labor, so they asked me to come, and it was an organization made up of, like a bunch of businessmen and women, pretty active. They....they solicit money to do good works for different charities and stuff like that, really great. And they were [laughs] a few politicians there and I was....so I spoke about farm workers. It was right in the heat of some of the deaths or our campaign vigils that we were having, so I had the material to share that with them. And, you could feel the pushback and the resistance, and one actually started questioning me and all, and I...yeah, that's right. It seemed like others came back and they were amazed; they didn't know what was happening in the fields, and that's the purpose. Those are the ones that we want to go visit, people who are not aware. Part of our ministry, National Farm Worker Ministry is to bring awareness to the public, to raise the issues about farm workers. And out of that came a few people who wanted to sign up for UFW and NFWM and became, at least financial supporters if nothing else, but they were not aware. "I thought that died a long time ago." I said, "No, fifty years ago, we're still in the same boat, people are suffering, and children are in the fields, you know, still picking to try and make ends meet for the families and all." So, but not that many people that I have talked to, maybe it's because of the circles that I visit. I try to figure out how do you get to the other, 'cause the other ones we need to convert, you know. How do we get there, what tools....what....what is out there that can help us promote that? And I don't see it happening other than small groups, 1 to 1 sort of thing because when you're talking to a big crowd, it....that person is in the crowd, it

seems like they build a shield around themselves, “I’m not going to listen to this, I’m not going to listen...” sort of protecting what they may already know. Hey, you know, we’re human, and the other person is important, too, huh? So, so far, no. I have not had that much resistance. Of course there are some organizations or churches that...oh, no, they tell you they’re not interested in different ways, like, oh their plate is full right now, dadadada.... But we keep going back to them though. Eventually they get tired and if they want it bad enough, just symbolically, they’ll say yes, just to appease us, but it’s amazing that it touches some of the congregations, people in the congregations, and they say “Oh, there is energy here; they won’t be that mad at me if I do this.”

R: Thanks. Can you tell me a little bit more about your personal background and perhaps, how parts of your personal background, your past, where you’re from, maybe has impacted your work with the ministry today?

L: Yeah. I was born in Mexico, Chihuahua. We came out here when I was very young, in Texas, San Juan, Texas. I remember when I was little, maybe 4 or 5, there were some, we had those little TVs, actually it wasn’t ours, it was our neighbor’s, and I remember being there with the whole family watching the news, and there was a disturbance, some rioting with some blacks, and I was tiny. I remember I got so mad I just stood up and held my hands on my waist and I said, “When I grow up, I’m going to marry a black man,” like that was going to take care of this. But, just watching that, I think, marked me and, you know, “That shouldn’t happen,” as a child. So, growing up, not too much, except my dad always, always took in people. We were a large family, but there was always somebody that needed some help, you know, staying with us, so it’s part of charity. But then, I think, in my teens, late teens, my dad became involved with a Mexican-American political association in, in LA. They started, a chapter, and he was the first chairperson or president of the chapter in Pico Rivera. At one point we went to a convention and I went, and Arturo, or [corrects herself] César Chavez spoke, and that marked me, so we started, I started collecting food and taking it on caravans to Delano, that kind of stuff, and a few months down the road, or during those first years, I think, they, the boycott was beginning, the Great Boycott and, César used to have, I don’t remember how I found out, I guess it was through MAPA, conduct house meetings, in East LA, on First Street near the cemetery. I don’t remember the house or the street but it was on First Street near the cemetery in East LA, and I lived in La Puente, which is a little distanced, of course we don’t have transportation and I used to have to borrow cars, taken without my parents knowing and that kind of stuff to go to the houses meetings. [Laughs] So I did that and helped out with the boycotting in East LA on Beverly and Atlantic, somewhere around there, there was a market and we used it for the boycott. Then things quieted down after the boycott and the house meetings I wasn’t able to continue. I think that had I continued the house meetings, I would have been involved all that time with César. But I didn’t have transportation and my parents’ “No, you can’t go” and that kind of stuff and we’re Mexican, so we do what our parents tell us to do. [Laughs] So, yeah, that started it, I think that set a...a seed, so when I was invited to come to UFW, of course in 2001, I think, yeah, to come organize, it was, of course, that was what I felt I wanted to do at the time, and I didn’t get to do much of that. That was an exciting piece, so that’s how I started that. So there was something already there and

my...my father's very much an activist, especially in Mexico. That's partly why he came; my mother got scared. They were teachers in Mexico and they were organizing teachers, and it got a little hot, but they came out here. What else could I tell you about...

R: One question. You mentioned, when you were describing your father early on, you mentioned charity and...and then went on to talk about him and some of his political involvement and your involvement with the boycott. Do you see a difference between that kind of, maybe, taking people in or, you said, gathering food for people, and doing more of this organizing-type work which is, maybe more of what you do with the National Farm Worker Ministry now?

L: Right. The definite difference...and I always knew it, and my dad did too, you know...Charity is good, and you need to do it when it's there in front of you,. It's about something immediate that has to happen. But if you don't get to the source of any of it, then it'll never end. And the Bible tells you, you know, the Lord said the poor will always be with us. In a way the poor are here so they can make us more human, you know? So there's a difference, they both have to happen. But we tend to do it the easy way and to me, charity is the easy way to give. It's easy, I'm done, no commitment, no, you know, that's it. But, if I do justice, you know, if I look for social change, I would work towards it. Then, it means I have to give a little bit more of myself, and I have to stretch myself often to points that I didn't think I possibly could. And it's they that changes, you know, the people that are suffering that injustice, the ones that educate us, I think, or educate me, teach me, show me, pull from me whatever it is that's necessary, you know. At the same time, I think they don't have the tools to do it themselves. So they have a voice, but they don't have a platform from which to express it. So what we try to do is help them and bring them to that platform. Take them out of the shadows and have them tell their story. And that's it. When they tell their story, there's nothing more powerful than hearing straight from the person who suffered it. With immigration reform, it's been incredible the stories that we've been hearing, that we've always known were there. But now, there is a voice, you know, with the DREAMers, we've done wonderful work, telling the suffering that's going on, and there's this energy and vitality and they lack the fear that some adults have. Oh, we can't alienate our church, we can't do this or that. That's why I'm glad I volunteer with a church, 'cause they can't fire me, and I do enough of what they want me to do that they'd rather keep me on board, I think. Of course I don't do anything terribly unorthodox or whatever, I sort of told a lie. But everything we talk about, with social justice, I can go back to Catholic all the documents, whether it's Scripture, church teaching, it's right there. They can't say "Hey. No, you can't do that." Talk to your Pope and the Vatican about this, tell me I can't do it.

R: So what are some of the documents you'd point to in a conversation like that?

L: Even without the Vatican document, there's one in there that's called *Godum Espece*. There's one beautiful line and I'll paraphrase it. In Spanish, "*Los gozos las esperanzas, los gozos las esperanzas, las...*" In essence what it's telling us is that the joys, the hopes, suffering of the poor are ours, you know, our choice, our pain, our suffering, and that we need to work towards, towards making things right for the people of God, that we are

one. That was a beautiful document about justice, they have one that's recent, *Veritati*, it's Truth and Justice, and that's an amazing piece too, that really tells our church, "Hey, you know, you have to work for social change. Things can't remain the way it is right now. And then all the teachings of Jesus, you know, everything you can point to, it's about the poor, you know. He came for them and to turn everything upside down and that's what happens; I think that's why we resist so much, because everything's so... fine for me, you know, I'm doing okay, and you're asking me to turn it upside down? I can't do that. With... I think... people think that social justice, if you're going to follow that line, that you have to be poor. Well, you don't. You should be richer so you can help more, you know? If I have more, then I should give more, and share it equally. I love to hear about, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates, you know, that they have, it seems, an ideology or some kind of deep-rooted faith in giving, you know, and returning. They didn't get rich on their own, you know? They had some money that they were able to invest, wisely, of course, and friends, or whatever, and they were able to amass a lot of money. But people, you know, caused that to happen. So the poor are... are the ones that are suffering to make so many others rich, you know, today, and I think that needs to be more equitable, especially for farm workers. They are marching... well, they started yesterday, from Madera, California, about 50 farm workers committed to march 167 miles for 13 days, from Madera to Sacramento. They arrive on the 4th of September in Sacramento at a park, and from there they go to the capital, 1/8 mile. That's the last stretch. They're marching for overtime, which means, in California they get overtime after 10 hours a day, and after 60 hours a week. Farm workers want 8 hours, the same as you and I, 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week, overtime. Since 1973 when the labor laws were established in the United States, farm workers and domestic workers have been excluded from those labor laws. I said 1973, no, 73 years ago. The conditions were different; there were a lot of families that owned farms, and I guess they didn't want to... I don't know... Things have changed, so we should have... you know, it should be level across the field. The other thing farm workers are marching for this month, these next 12 days, is for, it's called Majority Sign-Up. Majority Sign-Up would be... right now... the way the law is... and it's not about changing the law, it's an option of how they can organize and vote for a union, so they would... right now they are organizing the vote on the workplace, and they are always subject to the supervisors and growers, and as soon as they find out, of course, they start threatening, firing, taking away their Social Security, which they provided themselves, you know. So farm workers, I mean, they need a job, so they're afraid to organize. Even when they do, the growers end up violating their rights, I mean, serious violations, and there's no remedy. Once the election takes place, and it was established that the grower did violate rights, the court could find them guilty of that, and give them a fine, which is always a slap in the hand, but there's no remedy. The election is lost and there's nothing you can do but wait another year. That's costly for the farm worker, and for the union, so you can't continue like that. So the union wants what the UFW is proposing, the farm workers have signed on, and we've had some legislators come on board, a bill, which would allow farm workers to vote outside of the workplace. So they would be free of intimidation. In June, we had a 13-day, campaign in the capital every day with farm workers coming in. The first day we had a thousand, delivered a bill to the governor, and then 12 days following, we were there until the 12th day, which was the deadline for the governor to sign the bill,

and at that point, the, oh, so every day we had about two or three hundred workers coming in and staying the whole day, practically. These are workers who give up their jobs, OK, or their salary for that day, who may risk their jobs even. But they come with their families. So they make a big sacrifice, from far away, so they would be bussed in to Sacramento. So we were there, and on the last day, it was amazing. It was at the capital starting point, and we were going to have an outdoor Mass, at 1:00/2:00, but it started pouring, so we stayed in the capital, and there were about 2-300 farm workers in there. Because it was pouring, we just remained there, waiting for him to come out and say what he was going to do, talk to the farm workers, are you going to sign the bill, what's going to happen, you going to veto it, tell it to our face. And he wouldn't. It was about 11:30 and finally he called Arturo. There's all these farm workers there, and some legislators that support... Oh, by the way, while we were in the capital, of course, people were tired, and a lot of farm workers, they don't have babysitters, the luxury of leaving them with a babysitter, so they brought the whole family; the kids are there. But...so, I was amazed at the, the patience and the perseverance that these farm workers have. If I had brought even our church group, a very sophisticated, very committed faith-filled group, and if they had been in that capital for the length of time that we were, they would have been crying and telling, "Let's go now, it's time to go. Why are we doing it?" and complaining, "Why don't we have water? Where's the coffee? There's nothing to eat," whatever. They would have been complaining or bickering amongst themselves. I know that, because we're used to comfort, right? Nobody ever complained or said anything. The kids were so good; they weren't running around like little monkeys, you know, they were just very patient, very good, and I think that the people who were most aware of the farm workers and how they behaved, their composure, patience, etc. were probably the police officers there because they were there 24 hours a day. We were there for 12 days, and at the end I'm sure they almost knew some of the kids by name, from the different shifts, especially the children. Oh, and about 9:00 or so, people were tired so they started sitting on the hallway against the wall, all of a sudden the elevator started opening up, and the legislator and her aides were bringing sofas from their offices, and couches, and we had like our own living room in the hallway. I'd look around and I'd tell the farm workers: "This is our house. That's why they're doing it. This is your house, you know, this is ours." And I think they felt like, yeah, we belong here. We have to be here. But 12 or 11:30, the governor calls Arturo Rodriguez, the president of the UFW, and we have the conversation on tape. It's recorded on Youtube, but only from Arturo's end, right, talking to the governor, governor vetoes, and it happened that while Arturo's talking to him, one of the aides gives him the phone with a message that there's a press advisory already on the veto. And so Arturo tells him, "But Governor, you already vetoed, why are we discussing this?" Something like that. There was a silence, you could tell. He says, "I have the press advisory here, it already went out, you already vetoed." The nerve to come out and face farm workers to tell them you're vetoing, and why, and they argued back and forth, and the governor hung up! Arturo Rodriguez tried to visit...well, the union tried to have meetings with them, for the past 2 years, and he kept putting that off, putting it off, putting it off, so we had no alternative. The governor was mad because we were doing this campaign. Why are you doing this? You never talked to me. Well, you never called, we never spoke, we wanted to talk. The same thing's happening today and that's why the workers are marching. They're marching to re-introduce that bill, and

adding the overtime. So 50 farm workers are coming to do the 167-mile walk, and others join in in every city. My job in Sacramento is, and has been, and will be when I get back from the meeting, is to organize the churches, religious communities around to come to the action, the final rally on the 4th of September. That's going to be exciting. And it's great because I've had some great conversations with different pastors; the latest was a rabbi. He says, "Lucy, this is Rabbi Bentley. I'm ready to go." He says, "Shalom to you" and everything. "Whatever you need, you come to the Friday services at Shabbat" or something., "and we'll let you speak; we're ready to go." So that's, I think we'll have a good turnout.

R: So you maybe have already kind of gotten into this question a little bit, but I'm curious how you see, having worked with the National Farm Worker Ministry for at least a few years now, and hearing about what's going on in other regions of the country, I'm curious as to how you see the farm worker movement and the work of the National Farm Worker Ministry in California, how the states are different.

L: The...the ministry.... I think it's different in a sense because, there's a lot of other organizations that are, you know, working for farm worker justice, and what ours does is provide direct support for, especially, unions who are in particular campaigns, and need help in organizing the community, especially the religious community. So, our ability, and we can spread ourselves thin, but we've been able to focus on certain particular campaigns directly, especially with UFW, where they need, like, for Sacramento right now they need help organizing the religious community. So, I'm there and able to get in there and again because I bring those relationships to the mix, and I always throw the name in, "Oh, I work at...with the Archdiocese as a volunteer," I always say that. But I was named by Bishop Zavala, and I'm on the commission of justice and peace, named by Cardinal Mahoney, so I throw those names around, and it does make a difference; they..."Oh yes, oh yes." They make it bigger than it is, I'm not telling it was bigger, I'm just, hey, I was named and I was named, and that was it, but I can draw a bigger picture. But luckily, some of the bishops do know who I am, not personally, my name, so if anybody asks, you know, they're able to...so that.... I think with National Farm Worker Ministry and what we presently do, we're a good resource, I think, for other organizations that do farm worker ministry work. I don't know if that's what you were looking for.

R: Yeah, in your exposure to what's going on in other parts of the country, with the farm worker ministry, do you see California's work as different than what's going on in other parts of the country?

L: Probably not. No. No....it's...no. And there's some wonderful work being done in, like in Florida, with the youth. We're hoping to get some YAYA groups out our way. Sometimes being in Los Angeles sort of limits us because we don't have a direct connection with the farm workers. But the history is there, and when we started with our advisory committee, I remember some of the pastors said, you know, there's a disconnect, between the UFW or the farm workers and Los Angeles. And that's what we need to bridge, this disconnect, bringing, again, the advocacy to the church, the education

and formation. But one thing I did want to say is that the...oh, don't tell me, I think I got a senior moment....it went somewhere else. There was something I was going to say.

R: About what?

L: About farm worker ministry.

R: And?

L: And the faith and myself. Certainly I've been marked by working with National Farm Worker Ministry. I remember, too, when I started with UFW, I mentioned it to one of the priests that I knew worked closely with farm workers, and he says, "Oh, Lucy, that's good," 'cause I was going to be organizing there for two years. That was hard. It was exciting and all, but it was hard because you feel like you're up against a brick wall, with the growers, what they do. But he says, "Where you belong is with National Farm Worker Ministry." I go, "Yeah?" But I didn't know anything about National Farm Worker Ministry. I was too excited to go and work with the UFW and I hadn't even been looking for a job; they asked me. So I thought, "Oh, I'm going to go." So I had to pay attention. Years later, I come back and he just looks at me. "You're working where?" [Laughs.] I go, "Yeah." He says, "That's where you belong 'cause mostly I guess he was connecting the faith element, the church, and I think that's important for farm workers, because no matter what religion they are most of them have at least a basis, or rather some kind of Catholic faith, of some sort, and you connect, and I think we need to bring that because we noticed when we took water and shade, we shared with them. We were about to leave when I had invited some pastors from Bakersfield, and we were about to finish and leave, and I looked around, and I thought, "The pastors know what they want to do, they want to evangelize, 'cause they were evangelicals." And, I see an emptiness over here, so I asked the pastor, "Do you want to pray with the farm workers?" So he said "Yeah." They started lining up for the pastors for prayer. So...and some of them wouldn't leave them alone; they wanted to talk, you know. So there's a need for that, for them, you know, the faith element in this whole thing. So some of my work with the UFW has been to bring in people to do the prayer vigils, the prayer services, that kind of stuff. Farm worker ministry, yes, has marked me, has given me the opportunity to blend the church and the community for a very concrete....not solution, but an opportunity to come to some kind of response to solutions to the farm worker issues in our country today.

R: You say "marked me." What do you mean?

L: It has given me an experience that's deepened what I already believe but also I will never forget, you know. It's like from there, I can do whatever I do.

R: Do you think you could articulate ways in which, this marking or involvement with the ministry has impacted other areas of your life, relationships and such?

L: Yeah... It has. First it's made me even more aware that it's a job and a work or a dream that we can't fulfill alone. It has to be about coalitions; it has to be about looking for resources, whether it be people or financial, whatever. Mostly because it's the food that connects us, also because, yeah, I can't get my thoughts together. Something that we're not going to be able to do alone, and we need to do. And that's why I like the mission statement partly, it's about advocating it's about educating and informing, and it's about bringing groups together to become a response or to answer to the issue of injustice in the workplace, I think. One thing we're talking about marking, I think, walking the march marks people. It's a journey that you do with other people and this is what June's action did too. We were there for 13 days and those people were marked, you know, the officers that were there in the capital were marked, maybe some to a lesser extent but I think some were marked. The ones that stood there for some of the prayer services were marked, they had to sort of like, sort of, act stern and pretend they weren't listening, you know, and we talked to a few afterward that were very special. But when we take people to visit the farm workers and they interact, they bring to the farm worker a sense of, people care, and that's what they've expressed. And the people that go do this of course get much more from the farm worker because they see that what they're doing, it's very little but it's a worthy cause, right, and there is a possibility to change people's lives. Some of them have come out of that, some of the people that we've taken have been farm workers, and there's a real strong connection. I remember I took a few people from our advisory committee people to a board meeting, an NFWM board meeting in LA, and they listened to some of the stories of what the board members were sharing as they introduced themselves and they laughed and saw how old some of them were. There was one lady, Jeannie Gerardino. She died just recently. She came in a wheelchair with a breathing apparatus, her husband with a cane. I think she was 82, she celebrated her 82nd birthday there, and many of the others, the number of years they'd been doing this kind of ministry, we were so impressed and amazed with what they shared, and the groups were where we have the *Convocatorias* once a month, they gave a little testimony. I remember one of the ladies said, "You know, they're doing what we need to be doing, and they were all Anglos! [Laughs.] They're all Anglos, and they're out there doing what we should be doing. And for them, that was impressive. People should care, who are giving of your own, supposedly. We're all one, but you know. So they receive as much from both ends, you know, the farm workers are aware that they are cared for, that people do have a passion for making things different, so there's hope. From our end, or the people that we take, they see that, geez, there is a tremendous need and there's a place for me to help find solutions.

R: It occurred to me that you've mentioned race a couple of times, and that you were going to marry an African-American and that many of the people with the National Farm Worker Ministry are Anglos. Does race come into this work in a substantial way, and how?

L: I guess I've been either privileged, or I'd rather be in the other.... I'd rather be in churches where there's not so many Latinos, so that I can better....maybe..... stop preaching to the choir. Although many Latinos are so acculturated they forget their roots, and they're in the same place. So, race.... More than ever, it's become...it's present

there, and people are looked at differently, especially farm workers; they're dispensable. I've seen it more and more when we interact with the growers, and it's just blatant racism, I think. I've not encountered too much. I think it is there, but the face I see is more of apathy, whether they be Latinos, or Anglos, or whatever, as far as, I need to respond to any social justice, to anything that has to do with the poor. "The poor should be able to do it themselves; I did. It's just because they're lazy." And farm workers are not lazy. They are not lazy, farm workers. I mean, they know how to hustle. Not just farm workers, the poor do. They sell oranges, you know, they don't ask for handouts. They say, "I'm here because I want to work. I need to make money to feed my family." That's it. But I've not been subjected to, or seen blatantly out in my face. It's more in the form of, "No, I'm not interested," or apathy. I think it's disguising, sometimes, but not all the time. But I think that's our job, you know, to talk to those people and enter into conversations that start to tear down their own...whether they're biases or myths, or... But somehow maybe even just look at this person as a human being. One-to-one, they wouldn't do the things they do collectively, I think.

R: What would you like to tell people today that might be interested in becoming involved with the farm worker movement through the National Farm Worker Ministry?

L: I think I'd like to tell them that it's something that's not in your face all the time if you're in the city, so that we don't see it, don't know it's there. But if maybe you could remember that every time you eat a fruit or a vegetable, something that has been grown or harvested, that a farm worker touched it. If they could just start being conscious of that, and then seeking ways to inform themselves through either UFW or NFWM.org, a webpage, to find out what's going on, I think they could start there. But until they make the connection, I think that someone is providing for us in a very substantial way, very cheap labor, you know. I think the United States has the cheapest food in the world, percentage wise. We pay very little for food compared to other parts of the world. Basically it's because we're making money off the backs of the poor. If we paid farm workers, if we increased their salary, I think, to \$10 an hour, we'd end up spending maybe \$8 a year more on our fruits and vegetables, if they were paid more. It wouldn't cost us all that much, as a people, in terms of the food that we buy. The growers are the ones that are making the dough here, that's the bottom line, and they're making it off the backs of the poor. That's what we need to address and stop. So tell people, every time you eat an apple, an orange, a banana, whatever, every time you eat your vegetables, every time you sit at the table, think of a farm worker, and start looking for places to go. When you're called to sign a petition, to make a telephone call to do so and to include farm workers in your prayers all the time. But let's do the prayer in action, which would be going the next step.

R: Thank you. Are there any other stories you'd like to share or comments you'd like to make?

L: Yeah, and I think it's a statistic for the country that people in general believe that the only way to bring solutions to farm workers is through union, and I believe it's the truth because I've seen it. The fields are vast, they're huge. Like in California, there are, like,

600,000 farm workers, that harvest throughout the country, throughout the state, every year, with about 60,000 farms, and to monitor and to keep those growers honest about the work that they do or about the way they treat the farm workers, there are 200 inspectors the ones that, if there's a complaint, they will investigate. But they're never going to do it, they can't. They go to one farm, they investigate, they slap them in the hand with a few violations, they come back and most of the time the violations are taken care of, and paid, but they never return to see if it happened. So it's not going to happen. The only way that it can happen is through union. And, I would say if you're called upon to vote, or make a call about farm workers being unionized, do it, and do it right away, and continue to do it. Call your governors, your legislators, make them accountable for that. That's the only way that farm workers will ever have their say in court. They gain the respect that they need in the workplace because they need to cover themselves. They would make sure that nobody dies because they didn't have water. They would make sure that the children aren't working, you know. They would take care of themselves, and they do. None of the farms that had people who died, came from unionized growers. They were all unsupervised. That's where they came from, bottom line. That's what I would say. Do your part by supporting farm workers in that way: writing letters, call your legislators, because they're afraid, and they won't do.... Yeah. They forget, and Cesar Chavez, one of the..... Father Decker, belongs to a member organization, Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice. It's a national organization, they do some wonderful work, for social justice and worker justice issues. He wrote a letter; I asked him if he would support us and write to the governor, so he did. He knows the governor's family personally, and I asked him again for this march, he sent me the letter, and he tells the governor, "Hey, I knew your father" and he throws the name, the Purcell family, and I know that he would certainly support you signing. Then he quotes Cesar Chavez, saying something to the effect that the growers, unions, agencies, legislators, are put in power by the power of the people. So it's the people who have the power to put you in place. But once you get there, you forget and assume the power all for yourself, something like that. So he says, and I don't want this to be your case so, Governor, sign the bill. Don't veto it again. I was very pleased with that letter and I know the governor's not going to be too happy with that. Let's see if he signs this time. We don't know what he'll do. We're pushing for him to sign and to have enough legislators if he doesn't. That's why we need people to call in and to write in to the legislators so we would have enough legislators. We are hoping to get legislators so committed that they are not going to back down. Let the governor know that if he vetoes, that they would override him, and that would be worse for him. But that takes a lot of work. And give money, definitely. Nothing works without the funds. We're so limited with NFWM but we do a lot with the little that we have. So sign up and give your monthly donation or bequeath your estate. That would be fun. That's what we want.

R: Thanks.