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

Interviewee: David Wildman

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Transcriber: Adam Parsely, ed. Ryan Nilsen

Abbreviations:

R= Ryan Nilsen

D= David Wildman

NFWM = National Farm Worker Ministry

FLOC = Farm Labor Organizing Committee

UFW = United Farm Workers

Interview Summary: In this interview, Ryan Nilsen asks David Wildman, the Executive Secretary for Human Rights and Racial Justice of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries and a board member of the National Farm Worker Ministry about how he first got involved with NFWM, how his beliefs and values have affected his involvement, how he has been impacted by his involvement, and what he would say to people who might be thinking about becoming involved. In his responses, Wildman discusses the history of Methodist involvement with workers, the Biblical foundations for Christians to be concerned with farmworkers, the diversity of the United Methodist Church, and the United Methodist Church's role in the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's campaign with the Mt. Olive Pickle company. He also comments on growing up in New York City and attending Riverside Church, connections between the farm worker movement and international peace movements, changes that come with an increasingly globalized economy, and how to talk with people in churches about the farm worker movement.

R: This is Ryan Nilsen sitting with David Wildman. It's August 28th at the very end of our National Farm Worker board meeting in Portland, Oregon. We are sitting in a dorm room in Portland State University and I want to say it is about 10 'til 10 a.m., so we'll get started.

David, how did you first get involved in the National Farm Worker Ministry?

D: I first got involved with the ministry in 2001 when I took a new position with the United Methodist church and it was part of my responsibility. So it was actually job related. I had certainly known a lot about farm workers before that, but that was the first time I was involved. Due to budget cuts we actually weren't able to participate in meetings for a year or two there it was pretty bad in 2001, 2002. So my first meeting was in Seattle, Washington in the summer of 2003.

R: What was some of the, you said you'd been aware farm worker issues before, what were some of the exposures you had before?

D: Well, I first got involved when I, myself, was a student in college and there was a lettuce boycott and I was introduced to some fellow students who had just gotten back from a year in Florida organizing with some of the farm workers with UFW, and then we were working on a campaign with the cafeteria at the college. So, that was my first introduction and then I kind of kept in touch in terms of, I never myself served in the fields but was very active in boycott campaigns over the years.

R: Can you tell me how your job with the Methodist Church has, you said it has basically been your job to be involved, but why is that a position that the Methodist Church has for you to be involved with the ministry?

D: Well, the United Methodist Church, I think, has been involved with the concern about migrant workers, various farm workers, but other kinds of migrant workers as well almost since it got started. John Wesley was visiting folks in the mines and had a very strong commitment to the concerns of what was happening and the lives of workers and how the church should be involved with that. So, that goes back several centuries but more particularly local United Methodist have been involved in various migrant ministries that over the last say, I don't know since the 1920's or 30's, then led into what become the National Farm Workers Ministries. We have always had United Methodist that have been active with the ministries since forty years ago when it officially got started including some staff at various points. So my work with the board of Global Ministries is in the area of human rights and racial justice and certainly the issues facing farm workers are very much human rights issues around working conditions, wages, safety in the fields, the right to organize. But they are also racial justice issues because it is people of color that are being discriminated against systematically and exploited for their cheap labor and their vulnerable status often times, for those that are undocumented.

R: So there's this long tradition of, it would almost be expected that the Methodist Church would be involved with all this. From a more personal perspective for you, how do your beliefs or values impact the work with the ministry here? I guess with the Methodist Church generally but with the National Farmer Worker ministry specifically.

D: Well, I think throughout scripture there's four kind of areas of priority, and I went to seminary for perhaps too many years so it's dangerous to read the Bible, but I think that is one of the exciting challenges for us in the church. That repeatedly, story after story, from Genesis to Revelation: lift up the poor, the sojourners or aliens—or there's different English translations—but really migrant workers are a central part of the Biblical stories. And God repeatedly is calling

on the faith community to be in solidarity with, and really take the lead from migrant workers. So, Ruth and Naomi were both at one point in their lives migrant workers, and clearly they played a key role. Joseph was enslaved so I think there is a close and fine line between slave labor and the experiences of folks enslaved literally and the forced labor farm workers that are really slave-like conditions. And so I think that you know in a modern kind of world where I live in New York so there's not a lot of farm work going on right in the city but certainly in New York State. We have lost touch with the agricultural roots of the Biblical stories and faith communities of how important that working the land, the relationship to the land, the relationship to one another and the problems when land owners begin to exploit the folks that are doing the work. And so that is something we really need to constantly work on reconnecting churches with but it, once you get past that first step I think people may see the connections and certainly if they have met farm workers or in any context they can't help but feel 'I need to be involved.'

R: You kind of said, or said a few things there, one of them that I am particularly interested in from some of our other conversations was that there is a scriptural warrant for taking the lead from farm workers. Not just being invested in them or interested, but in actually taking leadership. Could you expand on that?

D: Well, I think this you know Ruth and Naomi is one of example of how as migrant workers there's, not only their situation was lifted up but how they took initiative in that situation to try and address the concerns but Nehemiah the fifth chapter the people kind of returned to the land and are beginning to kind of reestablished themselves after being displaced and dispossessed. So there's a migration thing, forced migration if you will. And suddenly there is a dynamic of repression within the community itself of some people exploiting and forcing into enslaved or slaver others in the community. Now that was one small community of the Hebrew people of that time but I think that the challenges, if we understand ourselves all as children of God repeatedly over and over again the situation of farm workers is that part of the family of God's children is dividing and exploiting sisters and brothers. And so, the 'how do we stand with them?' The community organized, so, Nehemiah took the lead from people complaining and then gathering together, and I think that is you know something that is hard for us. There is a lot of charity orientations, so you know, and certainly there is a history within migrant ministries of churches of saying, 'Let's go to the fields and provide water. Let's help out with housing.' Those are critical issues. There's no question. But the step is critical for the churches to take, I think, is to say 'How do we listen to what farm workers are saying about their conditions and out of their conditions they are offering a model for us as a servant church on the way.' They are forced to serve others all the time through their labor. But you know the examples of Cesar Chavez would be a modern day example that is very Biblically connected. Folks leading out of the fields to say 'We have something to say to the powerful.' And the powerful's faith maybe restored only when they listen to and respond to the needs and cries and leadership of the farm workers.

R: You had mentioned, well I guess in other conversation with you again, we talked a little bit about the diversity in the Methodist church, and I wonder In your experience from working with the Methodist Church if you've found people to generally understand what you are saying now and to be supportive of the work of the National Farm Worker Ministry or if that has been controversial at times? Or, I don't know.

D: All of the above.

R: Yeah. [Laughs]

D: Without question the Methodist is kind of spread across the political and theological spectrum and there's been I think a concern for both stemming from Wesley but also from the reading of the scripture and the church tradition of personal holiness and social holiness. And within that range there are Methodists leaning one way or another. The challenge is, I think, is to hold on to both of those. That there is a strong pietistic of 'How do we live faithfully as individuals?' but we always live in community. So, that challenge is 'How do we express that social holiness not just with the club or little immediate community of our local congregation but the broader community?' I've met United Methodists that run farms and they will talk very faithfully about 'Oh well we wouldn't, this couldn't be a problem on our farm of migrant laborers.' And yet there are problems. So, there's challenges all around. I don't want to pretend it's easy and so there are places where there's a lot of resistance to that. The same with more broad migration issues of, like, in the United States right now there is a big struggle around documentation. But I think that part of what we've tried to do is reclaim the notion from the Bible that migration is a part of human survival. That if there's a drought, if there's a flood, you will move. And then at some point you'll move back. But also, in terms of the needs for work to provide for your family that migration has been a part of human existence since recorded history. Why is it now that certain migration or certain peoples who move are seen as illegal or problematic and don't have rights versus others that move and seen as fine? So I think that's the challenge and one of the things I've tried to do is really in talking with congregations begin to show how all of us migrate. So someone who retires from New York City and moves to Arizona or Florida is a migrant retiree, not a migrant worker—they're not working, necessarily, for paid work. So why are some migrants pitted against other migrants? And some are seen as like valued and welcome and others are seen as unwelcome or at least their rights are unwelcome. Their labor, the cheap labor is very welcome, and that is one of the challenges is why are we taking the fruits and reaping in a kind of agriculture way as a society from cheap labor but not also responding in terms of how do we cultivate and support communities that are providing this fruit for us?

R: So the freedom to migrate is one example. What are some other ways in which you see the National Farm Workers Ministry working towards some sort of Biblical vision for the future? What's the hope, basically, both kind of ideally and practically of the work of the ministry?

D: Well, I for me the National Farm Workers Ministries embodies the way the church should be living in the world better than many others organizations and expressions of the church in that it's very clear that farm workers that are always the ones on the front lines or out in the fields. They are the ones that take the lead. But it is as farm workers are organizing, whether it's the United Farm Workers, it's the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, FLOC, or Coalition of Immokalee Workers, wherever it is a farm worker movement is coming together to demand better conditions, to express their own concerns. the National Farm Workers Ministry has been very clear. We take their lead and walk with them in solidarity and accompaniment to challenge the churches also to walk with farm workers. And I think that that very literal walking with of being on the picket lines, being out in the fields, going into grocery stores to demand, college campuses with boycotts at various points, that all of that is reminding the church that we are to walk with and take the lead from those that are most vulnerable as they're organizing to change the situation so it's not just somebody who is destitute and we want to help them, but to say, 'We're standing with you to say this shouldn't stay this way and we should change the

conditions so that all of us have decent wages, decent ways of contributing and respect for human rights.’

[Siren in background.]

R: We’ll use that siren to calm down. Since you’ve been on the board through your position with the Methodist Church what have been some of your primary recent involvement with the Nation Farm Worker Ministry with which campaigns or what’s your role on the board?

D: I think primarily it’s through the, you know, being present at the board meetings and then sharing some of the stories and the struggles. Being in New York City we are not immediately connected with a lot of the farm worker struggles in North Carolina or in Florida, here in Oregon, where we are for at this moment. So, it’s how to connect the broader community of churches with these stories. And so a lot of times it’s just trying to get the stories from our gatherings when we meet with farm workers or even meet with growers or have meetings or picket lines, to share those stories and get that word out to the wider number of churches. And I think this is where even if you are in California being out in the fields is a big stretch from being in the suburbs of the cities. And so it’s that challenge of bringing the voices from the fields. And reality is farm workers are working long, long hours and if they are taking a day off to meet with people, that’s potentially jeopardizing their work and so sometimes there is a real need to have groups like the Farm Worker Ministries be able to share those stories with folks just because it’s not realistic for farm workers themselves to travel around and drop everything. They do of course their tours and then we would support the Coalition of Immokalee Workers have done sort of organizing tours beyond Florida, but it’s the personal stories that I think engage people more than the statistics. And so that’s what we try and do is lift up those personal stories.

R: Can you share a few of those personal stories that you might have used in talking with churches, maybe some that have had particular impacts on you or have provided insight into what’s going on.

D: Well we’ve gone to North Carolina a number of times and the Mt Olive Pickle Boycott from the late nineties, early two thousands. Mt Olive is owned by United Methodists, the CEO was United Methodist, and so there was a very strong connection there and that’s where I said, you know in the past we had struggles. As a big corporate CEO he commanded a lot of respect within the community of United Methodists in North Carolina. And yet there were other United Methodists who were like, wait a minute, you are one person, and you have a responsibility like anyone else to make sure fair wages are going on. And so there was a long struggle within the Methodist church as well as the struggle around the boycott. One of our meetings, and I forget, I think it was maybe 2004, we were in North Carolina and went to the fields and some of the camps where a lot of the guest workers are and in going some of the farm worker organizers showed us a map of North Carolina in 1860 and what were the counties in the state that had the highest percentage of enslaved African Americans. And then they showed right next to that a map of North Carolina in 2000 from the census of which counties had the highest percentage of Latino population within the counties. They were almost identical. Now part of that is those are the agricultural counties, but it was making the point that agricultural labor in 1860 was done by slaves, and agricultural labor today was done by farm workers, predominantly Latino, who were under, not very much slave-like conditions in terms of working in the fields with pesticides, no

protection, very harsh conditions, and as guest workers, for the ones that were guest workers, if they left those conditions they would become in effect undocumented and be even more vulnerable to exploitation. When we got there we met with some organizers who were actually arrested for speaking Spanish. And I think that that was kind of this such a bizarre thing that they had gone to the camp and of course they were organizers with the union, but they weren't arrested around organizing issues, they were arrested because they were speaking Spanish and the police couldn't understand them. And they eventually got released, but it was just that notion that the level of intimidation in the communities, to say we don't want you meeting with the communities. And, you know, in farm labor camps they're often very isolated, they don't have cars, they're dependent on a bus provided by the grower to get them from their kind of camps where they stay which is really lousy conditions in terms of just sanitation and things like that to the fields and back again. And then maybe once a week if they're lucky they're taken to a store where they can get some food and things like that. And so it's very invisible to even the folks, their neighbors, in North Carolina, let alone the rest of the country. And people coming in and talking with them about the conditions and sharing what was happening in other camps was critical to farm workers coming together and saying wait a minute, we don't have to accept these conditions, we can fight against this, and sharing their stories. And the police did not want and the growers did not want folks speaking Spanish and those stories getting out. And so they got arrested. But that then became turned around, that intimidation was so grossly unjust that even folks who were not necessarily supportive of farm workers were like, well why should somebody be arrested for speaking Spanish?

R: What was the actual charge? I mean, speaking Spanish?

D: Yeah, they were not, they were communicating in a way that the police couldn't understand. And I don't remember the exact charge, it ended up getting dropped, but the point was by being arrested that got them out of the situation and created a hostile environment and intimidating climate. So, you know, the reality is oftentimes, whether the charge is sustained or not, it is the climate of fear that is sustained is the message. Like, don't talk with outsiders or you may get in trouble. And so one of the concerns was that the farm workers couldn't necessarily leave to another place, so if they were seen as leaving with anyone from the union or even outside folks that were coming in to support their organizing efforts they would get in trouble. And that was kind of the message of this, and so was how are we going to challenge that and get that story out to others.

R: This next question will be a pretty big one. You might want to answer through stories and anecdotes to some degree like you've talked about North Carolina, but I am curious you have already commented on your kind of being in New York City, the particularity of your regional perspective. In working with a National Board and hearing stories from Florida and California and Oregon and North Carolina can you comment on how you see the work of the ministry as different in different regions of the country in supporting the farm worker movement?

D: Well certainly I'll say, you know boycotts are one strategy. So, like, in relation to North Carolina the Mt. Olive pickle boycott was to challenge a company that was the biggest purchaser of cucumbers for the pickles. To say put pressure on the growers to come...out of that process that I talked about earlier came the first kind of first three way agreement. And now there's still lots of struggles in just signing a contract. This is not the same as implementing things. So, depending on the actual agricultural products, sometimes the products steer the kind of

organizing and also the kinds of exploitative conditions that are faced. So grapes are going to be different than an annual crop. So when you need pruning and other kind of maintaining of a product like grapes, that's very different than lettuce, that's seasonal. And the same with orchards. So like, here in Portland meeting with some of the folks that are in orchards where you have apples and others, cherries, that are around for years and you have to have a kind of relationship that's different. So that's certainly one shape. I think that there's different dynamics in different countries. You know, Florida is the largest agricultural, I mean sorry, California is the largest agricultural sector. So it's big business, but there's also a very large Latino population. So, that placed itself differently than in North Carolina where the Latino population is still quite small in relation to the rest of the North Carolina population. So, there again there is some difference in terms of organizing and outreach. And, how supportive the local church is, is another matter. Often times, I know for the United Methodists, the United Methodists most supportive initially with the farm workers struggles in North Carolina were not ones in North Carolina but were outside of North Carolina. Maybe that had been working with farm workers in Florida or in California to say 'Wait a minute. Here's another struggle that's very similar and I've learned from that.' Now I will say in New York we have a large immigrant population so a huge percentage of New Yorkers are foreign born. So there are some commonalities of experiences, and there's lots of exploited migrant labor, but it's in restaurants. It's in sweatshops. And so for me one of the exciting challenges with Nation Farm Worker Ministries is to take the insights of farm workers and their struggles from rural areas and then connect that with what's similar and what's different with the struggles of immigrants that are working in a sweatshop in China town? And I think that that is a very fruitful conversation and way of kind of connecting between the different struggles, the different models of organizing that you have factory can work twenty-four seven, but, you know, when the sun goes down like there's some limits as to how much you can, you know, work in the fields. But on the other hand, the fields are outside, so you know, heat stroke and the issues that are facing farm workers still that are dying in the fields because the aren't able to get water or appropriate shade. Some times that humanitarian component becomes an entry point to churches that don't understand where their food comes from. But the other thing is we, everybody uses food every day so that you know there's a built in component to connect folks with farm workers that maybe isn't the same thing with clothing or sweatshops or with other kinds of exploitation or restaurants. Some folks won't go to restaurants that often so it's harder to connect of how do you organize?

R: Typically people, I hope people are wearing clothing everyday, but maybe not.

D: Yeah, but not necessarily purchasing it every day.

R: Yeah for sure. Whereas we consume food everyday. Can you comment, you are talking again about the diversity of the Methodist Church and how those churches in North Carolina weren't actually initially supportive or maybe at all of the Mt. Olive Pickle boycott. Can you comment you go into speaking with congregations or church leaders differently in a context like North Carolina in the South where maybe there's—where 'union' is a bad word? Compared to how you might go into a Methodist church in New York that is more, I don't know more progressive culture, at least more openly labor, open to labor.

D: Well, I think of the key things is to break through a lot of the bad rhetoric or misconceptions that are posed through the media and there's a lot of anti-union sentiment in U.S. culture generally. The union movement, overall not just farm workers, is probably at one of it's lowest

points in close to one hundred years. So, you have now maybe twelve percent of the work force. And most of that is in the public sector so in the private sector it is even less. It's less than ten percent. Whereas at one point in the fifties sort of half of workers were unionized—very different dynamic. So people don't have that immediate experience. I often frame it as looking at the right to organize and not necessarily unions per say. But should workers have an opportunity to come together and talk about the concerns that they share and raise those in a collective voice? And I say 'Just imagine if Christians did not have an opportunity to gather together to talk about our faith and express our concerns.' We would call that religious persecution. We would be very opposed to, if that's denied and there are places in the world where that is denied in a systematic fashion. So in the same way I've said, you know, 'What are we really challenging?' I mean, a union official that maybe is corrupt is not saying that the right to organize workers should be denied. And what I've found is that when you frame it in this right to organize and to come together as a community and to be able to give voice to your own concerns yourself, that that begins to break through. Now the reality is that there's still power dynamics, United Methodist and every church, that folks will know somebody personally, and if that person is a corporate manager or maybe a large farmer then that is going to affect some of their decisions because personal relationships are so important to how we express and live out faith and our values not just you know principles. And I think those personal relationships are important. If they don't know any farm workers then there's a distance there that may seem like they're just a statistic and I think that's why the personal stories are so important. And the National Farm Workers Ministries provides people within the faith community that are walking with farm workers all the time. And so from New York I can't do that and many churches can't do that but through the ministries, by sharing these stories, it's like no, there are always folks that are there that are present and let's lift those stories up and connect people to them. To then say how do we organize together, workers and churches coming together?

R: Are there any of those stories that come to mind of personal interactions with farm workers that are stories would recur when you are talking to groups and trying to get them into this mind set kind of the humanity of these workers?

D: Well, I think, you know there's that terrific campaign of *Take Our Jobs*, which you know, like please, you think this is so easy, like please, do it and you know Colbert when he offered, 'Yea, I'll do a day,' and when he interviewed Arturo Rodriguez as the head of United Farm Workers. And, I think that notion of what does it mean to walk in somebody else's shoes and to just challenge folks. I know what it's like to just kind of walk down the street on a hot day and we all think about how we need to kind of air condition our environment whether we are in the car or in an office or at home. And here are folks out in the fields and engaged in really back bending, hard labor. And I think that something that gives people that sense and then not having water and the pressure of time so you know if it's a piece rate, so how many tomatoes you pick. So I think it's those tangible comparisons. The other thing I think the Coalition of the Immokalee Workers where it was kind of one penny a pound. You know, that's kind of like a very easy; you know would you be willing, you know, to contribute one more penny? And yet the difference that made in terms of nearly doubling wages for farm workers was an entry point for folks that just recognize these are small, they're not making huge demands actually. They are making very modest demands about respect that will have significant impact in their lives, but with very little downside for consumers. In fact there's a big upside if you realize that food is well produced then safety issues in terms of pesticides affect both farm workers and consumers. And so I think

it's, at each point trying to just humanize the connections that we are in this together and some of those stories draw us closer than others. The pesticides stuff you know is just horrendous. I'll also say, you know, for United Methodists we are a global church. So about thirty five percent of United Methodist are African, Philippine, European. And certainly in Africa, in the Congo and Mozambique and Angola, in west African Liberia and Sierra Leon where we have a lot of United Methodist, many are working within agricultural communities. And maybe they're small farmers instead of farm workers, but they are facing the same kinds of issues of this push for export crops that are being sent somewhere. So they are growing food that they themselves cannot eat, in the Philippines as well. I visited banana plantations and pineapple plantations and have seen workers, they would spray the crops in the fields while the workers were there. And so they were facing very similar conditions in another country and in a global context. But to begin to kind of make those connections is really important. And when I shared with workers in the Philippines the conditions of workers in the fields in the United States they were like, these were poor, poor workers, and they were like 'Oh my God, we had no idea.' And so they began to feel this solidarity and this need to say you know, 'Our struggle is the struggle of the farm workers—the *campesinas*—in the United States as well.' And they couldn't ever make that journey and so I think a responsibility and obligation of the church and those of us in positions of serving the larger church need to tell those stories and make those connections locally and globally.

R: You've been talking about making connections and then sharing stories with people in churches. Are there times where you've seen some really significant transitions and transformations in the way that people think and respond to this issue? Are there particular stories about times when this really worked? You are kind of representing the ministry in going in and telling the stories of farm workers and trying to call people to get involved in some way.

D: Yeah, i mean, there's constant little victories of certainly like the whole Mt. Olive pickle boycott and campaign. Yeah, well and I think that like you know, often times we have this all or nothing approach in our culture in the United States so the notion that a victory is one step in a journey. And so, there can be several steps backwards afterwards and there's certainly been struggles with North Carolina in the fields. Taco Bell is another thing. So you know there's this huge victory with Taco Bell around tomatoes in Florida. But there are still large tomato consumers, you know, companies that are resisting that, and so it's like, you know, the struggle continues. But we still need to celebrate when it is that some of the most powerful people in the world have stopped and changed their practices primarily because of the leadership and the insistence of farm workers. And I've got to say that when I've talked to folks in the peace movement or other human rights movements and people are feeling kind of discouraged or in the immigrants rights movement, I've said like 'Now look. The leadership of the Taco Bell campaign and the leadership of the Mt. Olive Pickle campaign were farm workers. Many of them undocumented.' So if undocumented Latino workers, that are about as marginalized and oppressed with very few resources in a climate that is hostile to immigrants can nevertheless affect change from multi-billion corporations then there certainly is a God. There is, 'The weak do shame the strong,' as Paul says in first Corinthians. And that God repeatedly chooses the weak to say, 'We've turned God's values and God's creation upside down as a society.' And they are taking the lead and turning it right side up again. It doesn't stay right side up or doesn't get all the way but to celebrate those things. And what I've found is that in especially white middle class churches we've lost the notion largely of what it means to celebrate. And so I've found that it's in introducing middle class churches to the struggles of farm workers that they

suddenly not only learn about justice but they also learn about what does it mean to have a joyful faith? And hope is something like that has no evidence that this is likely at all. It's not like optimism or something that I think things are going to go well. But really like in the face of growers, often times folks that are armed and that they could lose their jobs and someone who talks with the union reps suddenly found that like they're fired the next day. That in those conditions nevertheless that community of farm workers is far better equipped to celebrate the joy that we have, living day to day, and the moments when we come together and things change than middle class communities with far more resources, but fear that they might lose those resources and that safety and security they think that comes from that middle class standard. So it's my sense, many of the churches are kind of imprisoned in a kind of middle class cultural captivity if you will and we need for a self-interested thing to connect with farm workers and others that are marginalized. And it's in working together that we discover that common joy of being around a table together.

R: You already began touching on it, but also I meant to ask about how you see your work with the National Farm Worker Ministry as connecting to the, what I know is a lot of your other work in the peace movement and you are also kind of bringing in this dynamic of, I don't know, middle-class conscientiousness—coming to consciousness—something more than the lives that they are living but can you comment on how your work with the peace movement and your work with the farm worker ministry and farm worker movement have complemented one another or feed into the ...

D: Well, I think, certainly in the, you know, corporations have huge influence in the political process in the United States today and frankly in the world. And the approach is really to I think shift the notion of human rights into shareholder rights. So if you think one of the exercises that I've done with churches in just kind of educational settings and workshops is to kind of look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and say what would happen if you replace 'every person has the right to decent and a living wage' and change that to 'every dollar or freedom of movement like every person has the right of freedom of movement to every dollar.' And in fact if you look at free trade agreements they to insure the right of dollars and obviously those who hold those dollars to move from one country to another, from one investment to another. And so that globalization and that organization of money, the right to organize is certainly, money is seen as having the right to organize. So I think that these values have gotten turned upside down and what's really confusing for folks that don't work on this all the time is there's a language of it that sounds you know, you can talk about rights but a corporation is not an individual even though U.S. law at the moment the Supreme Court seems to be making that mistake. It's human beings that we need to constantly rehumanize this and go back to our sisters and brothers and understand the Biblical notion but that's a constant challenge and I think it's a constant educational process. What I've found is that farm workers often can remind us of the agricultural groups if you will of many of the Biblical stories and so they get it because they're working day to day with crops. So, you know, images of everyone in Micah 4 talks about, 'they shall beat their swords into plow shares.' One of the things that's invariably happened, not just in the swords but today is when more and more resources go to making more there's less time, there's less resources to pruning the trees to plow shares. And there's a direct consequence in terms of agriculture and sustainability and the food industry. So that swords and plowshares thing that's been very powerful as a Biblical scripture for the peace movement and in New York across the street from the United Nations there's the Isaiah wall 'They shall beat their swords

into plowshares.’ Well Micah goes on to say ‘And everyone shall live under their own vine and their own victory and no one shall make them afraid.’ Well, if you look at the situation of farm workers they are being intimidated, they don’t own the land, and in many cases it’s small farmers from Mexico, from Central America who’ve been pushed off the land by large corporations, and by governments. And have been forced to kind of move so now they’re still doing agricultural work but instead of on their own land they are doing that work for someone else. And Micah reminds us, no, the image and intent of God is that each of us will be able to kind of grow the food that we need to sustain ourselves, our family, our immediate communities. So a lot of the local, you think about now there’s a movement for eating local and producing local and so folks are looking for what’s the green market, the farmers market that I can kind of connect to in New York? So in the summer season are there products that come from within a hundred miles or so that I can make available? Well that’s beginning to kind of open an entry point from a consumer stand point to the realities of what would that look like for the farm workers as well and the folks that work the land? And I think it’s a constant of like ‘How do we bring folks back together to see our common connections?’ It’s not easy because much of our society pushes us away from each other. So I don’t want to pretend that it’s at all easy but I found when folks are willing to take time to listen and then there’s a really important part of this for me is that, if you tell folks how bad things are in the fields but don’t give folks a sense of, well, where am I able to step in? What’s something I can do? Then a lot of folks are just like, you know, I’d like to hear but I can’t, I’ve got enough stress in my life, I’m struggling with just whether I’ll keep my job or not and how to provide for my family. But if you tell me something concrete that I can be a part of and I hear a way that I can actually connect and do something and that’s where the boycott campaigns are terrific. You know, it’s not ‘Stop eating.’ It’s ‘Stop buying one product to send a message of support and solidarity and to urge a company to say you need to change your practices.’ And then realize that that does lead to victories at times. It’s a huge movement, I mean, boycott campaigns take huge effort so the fact that there are not as many right now I think is a sign partly of the recognition by unions, especially the farm worker movements, that you don’t enter something like this lightly because of failed boycott or one that just calls for something and people don’t step is more disempowering, especially for the farm workers. So you want to pick your campaigns wisely of what really there’s some vulnerability for some real change to take place even if it is one step in a much longer struggle. But there is a lot of lessons from being a part of that for churches. And I would say in that that a lot of churches right now have gotten Isaiah 58, sorry Micah 6:8 backwards. I don’t know if the church is dyslexic, but it says to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God. And a lot of the church loves justice and does mercy. That’s not what Micah calls us to do. They love to hear about justice so they’ll do a film screening. They will do an event and then the outcome of it at the end maybe well let’s plan another event. And then the actions are food pantries and direct service—all of which is very important but if it’s not tied to what is the doing justice component then we’ve fallen short of what it is that God is calling us to do. And I think that’s where the organizing of farm workers and the unions have been critical to remind folks and the National Farm Worker Ministries really works to remind churches ‘Look, the church is an organized community. It’s not just an event.’ And so too, the farm worker movements and the churches walking with them are organizing movements, not one time events.

R: That seems key. I really like the way you framed that. The church has dyslexia. For instance, several other, to answer these questions and I guess maybe the way my questions are framed we are talking people kind of changing, coming to more appropriate consciousness of where their

food comes from, the people behind, the labor movement, it seems you were raised in a context where a lot of this perspective of Christianity and understanding of some of these Biblical principles from the prophets was pretty natural but were there, was there a point where things really did begin to click or there was a big transition in your understanding of the work of the National Farm Workers Ministries for instance. It sounds pretty obvious that by the time you got to the position your are in, where you are sitting on our board, that this was already your persuasion, your understanding of Christianity. Is there a story you can tell about how you came to that perspective or were you just born with it?

D: No, no I think, you know, coming from New York there's a saying that many folks use 'Well, how do you get to Carnegie Hall?' 'Practice, practice, practice.' And so I think one of the things I've learned is to just ask, do a time inventory in our lives and say if, as a parent with children, or someone who is a young persons that's growing up, what is most of your time go towards? And I've asked this especially around high school students because I've done a lot of work with high school students. Say, so in a given week what, you know, how many are involved with music, and then how many are involved with sports of some kind? And usually there's a lot of hands so in asking them 'What does most of your time go towards in music or sports?' The answer is usually, Practice. You know the game is only one day a week or a couple, you know, and there's a lot of practice. You don't just decide to step on the stage at Carnegie hall and perform. You have a lot of hard work. So then I ask them, we as a society and we as families and we as church have devoted huge time and energy and resources and sacrifices to creating space in the week, each week, week after week for music and for sports for our children and the children in our community. Where's the practice time for doing justice? For making peace? Now I think there is but have we claimed it as that, to say 'You know if we really want to be faithful and do justice and love mercy then where's our practice time for doing that?' And so for me probably one of the most key things was my parents were both very faithful and deeply rooted in scripture in terms of their living their faith so that obviously had an impact, but we went, when I was growing up, to Riverside Church in New York. Which is a multi-interdenominational, interracial, and international congregation. It's not your typical church, but we lived thirty-five miles away in a very homogenous, white upper-middle class suburb. So I grew up experiencing the most racially diverse moment of my week was Sunday morning at church. Now, W.E. Du Bois a hundred years ago or so said that Sunday morning is perhaps the most segregated hour in the United States and it still is. By my parents choices in terms of choice and where to go my most racially diverse moment in my life was not school, it was not the work place, it was not my community where I lived, it was church. And that stayed with me. And it was a church that was committed to social justice and a church committed to peace. And that rubbed off and so I had plenty of practice time of that justice happens when we are in diverse communities and connecting with folks that are not speaking the same language necessarily, or not coming from the same background of experience. So then it was very logical to say of course 'I've never worked on a farm but I've got to connect with farm workers.' Why? Because that's where church can be found. That's where God's presence is most alive if you will. Not just farm workers but you know, and so I have always been supported in some sense and I think affirmed that when we stretch out to those places where are beyond our comfort zones beyond the immediate community, that's the place that we find God. And Hebrews invites us to say Jesus suffered outside the gate. So it was out, you know when he was crucified. The crucifixions were outside the gate of the city where the Romans kind of sent the political message to the community of intimidation. And Hebrews invites us to say 'We need to also go to Jesus outside the gate.'

Well, that's the place where farm workers would be living in first century Palestine. That's the place where the landless are. That's not the place where the comfortable and powerful are. And I think that that constant invitation is one where as we begin to kind of experience those things in our lives. So for it was just easier I think that the church was not segregated. It was integrated in my own experience. So I kind of tried to find that in many places.

R: What would you say to people who maybe would be considering being involved with the National Farm Workers Ministry today?

D: To use an advertising phrase: 'Just do it.' I think it will be great. It will change your life and you will be part of an amazing community of people: the farm workers themselves. The National Farm Worker Ministries I think is one of the greatest examples of right now especially, multi-generational organizing. So you have folks in their eighties, even nineties, that had been doing amazing work for decades of being out there at you know grocery stores, at supermarkets, and handing out little flyers about boycotts and talking to officials and challenging the companies and walking in the fields with the workers and with the union. They're at it, like, for the long term. And then you have young people on college campuses and in churches that are saying you know, 'We've got to be working on this,' and how can those communities learn from each other? And that to me is one of the great strengths of National Farm Workers Ministries is it is a place where the generations can learn, we don't always do so well, I don't want you know—the National Farm Workers Ministries is not perfect but a fortieth anniversary is place to celebrate and remember that it's been a place where folks of different ages and from different parts of the country repeatedly come together and learn from working together with one another and with farm workers. And I think to have board members and active parts of the ministry who themselves grew up as farm workers and now are working positions in cities or professional jobs remember those roots. To other folks who kind were farmers, grew up on a farm, a family farm, and now are connected. And others who are completely urban, you know, have no connection to really the agriculture industry other than being consumers. That's a delightful sense of the beloved community, of how we live that day to day with farm workers and with one another.

R: Great answer. Are there any other comments you'd like to make or stories you'd like to tell before we close this interview?

D: I think there's a lot, this is, you know, being here in Oregon was kind of seeing, it was fascinating to me, kind of seeing the context of what's seen as, you know the West Coast. It's more progressive political environment and you know hearing kind of the stories. And I think one of the challenges is, 'How can we get growers and small farmers to step out of the kind of industrial corporate mindset and see the common interest that they have? And my first meeting was also out on the West Coast. It was in Washington but it was with some of the similar kind of orchards around here and there was one individual farmer who said you know, 'Under this kind of free trade agreement and stuff with apples like trying to figure what could we do to have a market of fair trade apple where workers would get good wages; where growers as a farmer could also kind of make a living?' And he was like, you know 'The distributors are just screwing us all 'cause' he said like 'I can't pay the workers that well and then when I get there there's preset prices that limit whether I can keep going with these orchards.' And you know with an orchard if you don't keep going you lose the productivity. It's not like you choose to kind of let fields lie fallow for lettuce or something like that. And that to me was a symbol early of like the globalization of agriculture. And so that all of the organizing in California or all of the

organizing here is also connected to the fact that also apples are not just grown out here. They're grown in New York, but they're also grown in Mexico. This is a global market now. And corporations can move quiet readily from one country to another, from one fruit to another, from one product to another. It's a lot harder for workers in community to do the same. And so I think the challenge now is, really in the farm, and the ministry is wrestling with this is 'What does it mean to really engage with a global production system but maintain the integrity of local struggles?' Year ago there was a friend of mine who was working actually with an auto assembly plant. And you know for years the Church has learned the lesson of like you have to think globally and act locally. And he said you know 'No amount of global analysis and thinking and no amount of local action was going to keep that factory from closing and moving to Mexico.' He suddenly said the workers realized, he is a kind of organizer from the faith community, realized that we also have to think locally about what are the conditions that are good for our community and the needs that we face and act globally. And I think that's beginning to happen that the farm workers are saying you know, 'We have to have organizing going on in Mexico as well as in the U.S. but we also need to be in touch with campesino movements in...' Now not any one organization can do that. But I think 'How can we keep learning from one another and begin to understand that we are already in all these places?' So as corporations are thinking about 'Do we grow the apples in the Northwest?' or 'Do we grow the apples in Chile?' The church is already there. The church is a global organization. Now we are not always on speaking terms with each other, sadly. But how can we tap into that global community that we have to say, you know, 'If farm workers are facing struggles here?' and this is, you know, in First Corinthians twelve, Paul talks about We're all members of the same body and if one member is suffering we are all suffering. And if one member rejoices, we all rejoice. And so I think the challenge and I think why being involved in the National Farm Workers Ministries is such a joy and privilege is that we begin to connect the different parts of the body across the country, here in the United States, but also globally. And that's just a really exciting journey to be a part of. And it's a way that faith keeps being lived out day to day for each of us. So I hope folks will join that journey 'cause we've got another forty years ahead of us, I'm sure, at least in terms of the struggle for justice.

R: Thank you so much for your time this morning.

D: Thanks.