

## Jim Drake Memorial - Remarks by Marshall Ganz 2001

It was my privilege to know and work with Jim Drake at the beginning of his career and at its end: from 1965 to 1977, when we worked with Cesar Chavez in the United Farm Workers and from 1996 to 2001, as Jim launched GBIO.

Born in Ohio in 1937, Jim grew up in Oklahoma until at 10 he moved with his family to Thermal, California, a farm worker town in the Coachella Valley. His father, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, taught migrant children there while his mother managed the school cafeteria. After earning a degree in philosophy at Occidental College, Jim himself graduated from Union Theological Seminary in 1962. Although planning to serve with the National Parks, at the last minute, he heard a different call, a call not unlike his father's, to serve with the California Migrant Ministry, helping a young organizer who had just set out to organize farm workers, Cesar Chavez.

In his work with the farm workers, Jim served as Cesar's assistant, organized the union's first co-op., directed its first boycott, and became a leading organizer in California, Texas, Arizona, and New York. In 1978, he left the farm workers to move to Lexington, Mississippi, where he launched the United Woodcutters Association, the first interracial organization of the working poor in that state. In 1983, he affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation and moved to the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, where he helped organize the Valley Interfaith Organization. Building on this success, in 1987 he became lead organizer of the South Bronx Churches. And in 1996, he came here to launch the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.

A person's life is many things. Jim was a husband. And his wife Miriam is with us today. Jim was father of four, and his daughter Mali is here to day too. And Jim was grandfather of two. Thank you for sharing him with us. I especially want to honor Jim today for what he brought us through his public life: his courage, irreverence, commitment to real work, and determination to pass it on.

Jim's courage was a part of everything he did. He heeded the call to serve the poor, even when he had to change his denomination to do so. He risked failure undertaking daunting challenges he had the faith he could learn how to meet — recalling a sitting Arizona Governor, uniting black and white Mississippi wood cutters, forging unity of Boston's ethnic, religious, and economic diversity. Jim understood that courage is not acting without fear, but acting in spite of fear.

Jim was irreverent to orthodoxy in all its forms; he could challenge those with whom he worked as much as those whom he opposed. If his church did not heed the call to serve the poor, why not? If MA didn't have a two party system, why couldn't GBIOI do that job? If no one had sponsored an IAF affiliated youth organization before, why not? Jim understood the voice of the prophet is not only one of hope, but also one of challenge.

Jim's commitment to what poet Marge Piercy calls "work that is real" drove his career. No "parlor general", he saw the beauty of things made to be used – a farm worker tire cooperative, a woodcutters credit union, sewers and water for South Texas colonias, a Leadership Academy for the South Bronx, Nehemiah homes for Boston. Jim understood the futility of trying to live a reality devoid of values, but also of trying to live values not translated into reality.

Jim was determined to "pass it on" – not by building buildings, writing books, or founding organizations, although he did some of that. For Jim, passing it on meant working with people, developing leadership, most of all, that of the young. The youthful organizers he led in the farm workers, students from Brown he recruited to join him in Mississippi, or the young people he has mentored here in Boston – these were his passion and inspiration. Jim understood that the future is with young people and that any idea must be embraced by the young to have a future. This was how he would "pass it on."

Thank you, Jim, for your courage, your irreverence, your real work – and most of all – for passing it on.