

Loyola chaplain issues appeal

Grape boycott support urged

By RAY DOUCET

Canadian involvement in the current boycott of California table grapes and iceberg lettuce is "essential to the future of Mexican-American farm workers," says Rev. Bob Gaudet, chaplain at Loyola College.

Father Gaudet, a member of a Canadian inter-church committee studying the problems of farm workers in the United States, says Canadians must contribute to the boycott "because our involvement as consumers who profess a religious faith demands a moral awareness and response."

"We cannot be apathetic to the farm labor problem in the U.S., since these workers are among the poorest in the world — the victims of unjust labor practices."

Father Gaudet was among a Canadian delegation of 10 persons who recently visited the California region to meet with growers, union officials and civic leaders.

The recommendations of the group have been presented to church leaders in Montreal and Toronto. The report supports the attempts of the United Farm Workers (UFW) union, headed by Cesar Chavez, to organize the farm workers.

It strongly criticizes what it describes as efforts by the Teamsters Union to "steal" existing contracts from the UFW.



Father Gaudet

Major conclusions of the report are:

● All Canadians must refrain from the purchase and consumption of non-UFW table grapes and head (iceberg) lettuce from California and Arizona "until free secret-ballot elections are held for union representation."

● The farm worker issue is more than a simple struggle between two unions, involving as well the "life-and-death" attempts of an indigenous social movement that is fighting for the "basic human rights of tens of thousands of people."

● The UFW represents the "best interests of the

California farm workers."

● The UFW is in a better position than any other organization to end the "traditional abuses of farm labor."

● Farm laborers in California have been denied the basic right to choose in a democratic and properly-supervised fashion the union of their choice for negotiations with grape and lettuce growers.

In California, the heartland of attempts to organize farm workers, the agriculture business runs to nearly \$7 billion a year. Grapes amount to about six per cent of the business.

Efforts of the UFW to organize the grape workers are a first step in organizing all other farm workers, but the opposition has been so stiff that the struggles of the last 10 years have often proved fruitless.

Father Gaudet says that "once the grape workers are finally entrenched in a solid union, then other parts of the agri-business would be organized."

"However, there is so much political abuse, with power plays by the growers, that the task at times seems overwhelming."

He said the UFW gained a "magnificent" contract under Mr. Chavez in mid-1970. However, when it expired April 15, 1973, the grape growers made a "sweetheart deal" with the Teamsters, dropping the UFW.

"The laborers had no idea of the contracts and everyone was shocked that a union would be granted contracts without consulting the membership" Father Gaudet said.

Even the California Supreme Court termed the Teamsters' contracts illegal, but nothing has been done about the collusion.

"The whole matter is ter-

ribly complicated, but if the boycott is respected in Canada there is some hope for the farm workers."

Although there is no picketing at farms struck by the UFW members after the Teamsters got their agreements, many workers are touring the U.S. and Canada to get their message to the population.

These people live on charity, getting only \$5 a week from their union. There is a group of five in Montreal, their rent being paid by Loyola students.

"All we ask is that there be free elections so that these workers can choose the union they want," says Father Gaudet. "Then perhaps we can begin giving them the justice they have never really had."

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