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Behold my servant...

Fred Eyster, 1939-1986

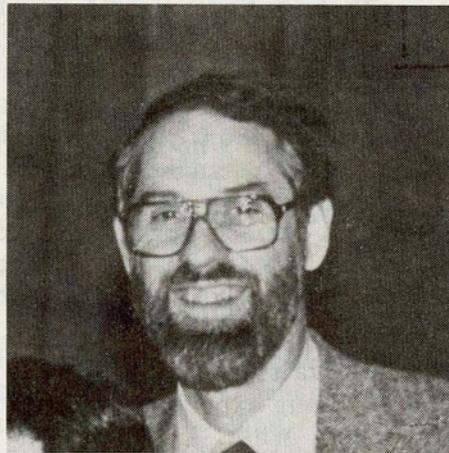
Our friend and brother, Fred Eyster, died on December 17, 1986. The faithful servant passage from Isaiah (42:1-7; 61:1-3) read at Fred's Memorial Service best describes this man who felt a strong calling to serve in the farm worker ministry and literally gave his all.

"The bruised reed he did not break, the dimly burning wick he did not quench, but faithfully brought forth justice. ...I, the Lord, have called you, taken you by the hand and kept you; given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind...to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of prison to those who are bound; to give the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord."

"Fred was a determined fighter for social justice, especially for farm workers," said Cesar Chavez, UFW president, at the December 20 memorial service at First Congregational Church in Alameda, CA. "This is an immeasurable loss for us."

coma for 8 days. He died of complications of his long-term diabetes.

Fred is survived by his mother, Mary, of Carlisle, PA, his children, Kendall, 22, Carleton, 19, and Elizabeth, 16, of Hayward, CA; a brother, David, of Colorado Springs, a sister, Sue Meeham, of Carlisle, PA, and his covenanted partner, Michelle Hartson, of Tallahassee, FL.



Fred was born in Altoona, PA, grew up in Hagerstown, MD, and was educated at Franklin and Marshall College and Union Theological Seminary, NYC. He was ordained in the United Church of Christ in June 1965, and served churches in Keene, NH, and Bethlehem, PA, before joining the National Farm Worker Ministry staff in September of 1972.

He served the farm worker

in whom I am well pleased.

movement in California, Arizona, Texas, Florida and the Mid-west. Proposition 22, the Gallo March, Proposition 14, the San Francisco Bay Area boycott office, the Florida Christian Migrant Ministry, the Campbell boycott and the NFWM Mission Department all benefitted from his talents.

In 1982 he became NFWM Executive Director urging the board to appoint Sr. Pat Drydyk as Associate Director at the same time. A year later the board designated them co-directors.

"To be a co-director with Fred was a privilege," according to Sr. Pat. "It was a taste of what is yet to come in the world at large. Equality and mutuality were part of Fred's breathing in and breathing out."

Fred had resigned from NFWM at the December 1986 board meeting because of increasing problems with his diabetes. Farm workers and supporters gave him a rousing recognition program in Delano at that time, complete with tributes, skits and songs.

We will miss you, brother, but we know that your spirit continues to work among us; we are better people for having been touched by you! The world is a better place because of you, Fred Eyster!

Fred entered Peralta Hospital in Oakland on December 9 for routine eye surgery. His heart stopped in the recovery room and he remained in a

Journey of a Soul

Many a time, Fred Eyster's theology was shared in this editorial space. It is only fitting to reflect on some of his thoughts over the years. The first comes from his application to work with NFWM in 1972.

To the question of why he wanted to do this, he replied: "I was first captivated by Chris Hartmire's presentation of this ministry as a truly Christian endeavor, i.e., service in the cause of the gospel of liberation. This would be a real test of my intention to be a "radical" Christian, i.e., working directly at the root needs of making people and society more fully human. Too long have I been an "arm chair" radical;...there is a feeling of a "call" for the first time in my life. The work appears to be the kind many could do, but I know many won't; so I feel the urging to respond.

He identified with the deep faith and hope of the farm workers in the struggle, comparing them to David, the Shepherd boy, who knew that 'the battle was Yahweh's.' "Their confidence is in God and their cause is just. Against all odds, the cry is still, 'si se puede!' It is possible! Ever the underdog, farm workers struggle on, believing the ultimate victory will be theirs." (Newsletter, September 1983)

His theology of servanthood surfaced over and over: "Our ministry's true calling is to servanthood. We must be ready to accept the fact that farm workers know very well what they need, and what works for them, in order to win freedom and dignity. Our place is not to dictate but to ask what is needed from us. As Jesus said to the woman who tugged at the hem of his garment, 'What do you want of me?' What the farm workers want of us now is to boycott grapes." (NFWM Newsletter, Fall 1985)

Fred learned of God in the waiting as well as in the action, particularly when his diabetes confined him to his apartment for many months. "I've been waiting and thinking ...about all those things that are 'long-expected': peace on earth, justice for farm workers, etc. What I learned is that the only long-expected coming that is realized is Jesus. The incarnated love of God really did show up among humanity and bring a foretaste of the kingdom... Just as friends visiting Nicaragua bring some witness for peace, boycott pressured elections bring some justice to farm workers in the Midwest... Yes, though not fully realized, the kingdom has come. Jesus was born to set people free." (Advent Letter, 1985)

Fred Eyster's life increasingly exemplified that freedom of the people of God as he allowed God's power to work through his powerlessness.

Let us say a loud Amen, Alleluia!

Fred Eyster Memorial Established

At the time of Fred Eyster's death, his family requested that a special fund be established in his memory.

Contributions to this fund will be used for the new Ministry among Pesticide Victims, a new program which Fred helped plan and initiate among the families of the children who have cancer and birth defects caused by pesticides.

Checks should be made payable to NFWM-Fred Eyster Memorial Fund and sent to P. O. Box 302, Delano, CA 93216. Individual contributions of \$50 or more entitle the donor to become an Associate Member and receive monthly updates on the new program. An organization can become an associate member by contributing \$250 or more. This also entitles them to send a representative to one of the Pesticide Seminars in Delano with no charge.

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A Tribute to the Life of Fred Eyster

by Rev. Paul Burks

It was like one great gathering of that Christian family which is committed to building a better world, in Christ's name. And Fred brought us together.

They were all there, over 300 strong, filling that warm, worshipful First Congregational Church in Alameda, California --Fred's spiritual home.

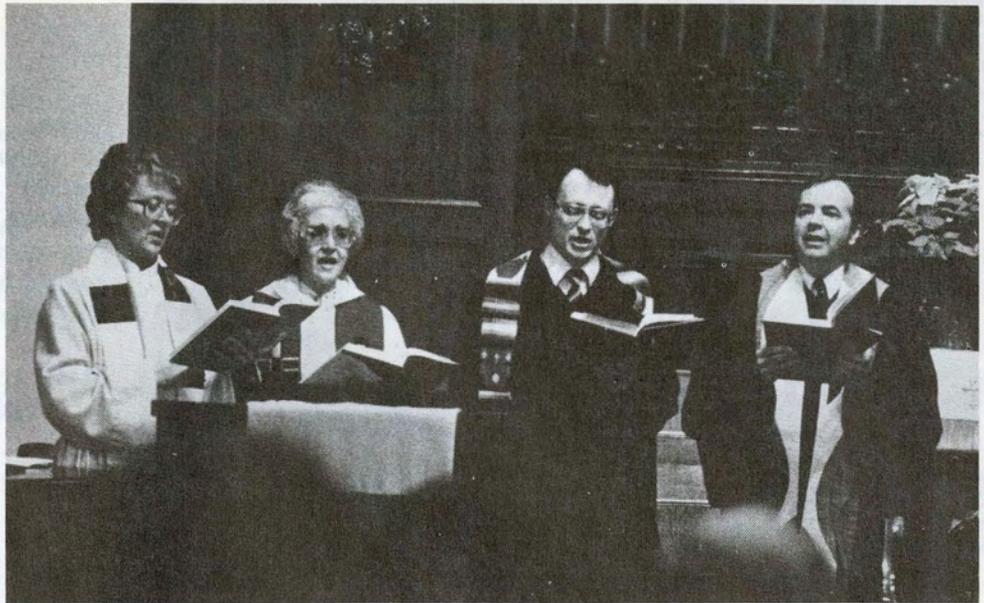
Protestant and Catholic (probably some of the Jewish faith, too); priests, nuns, ministers and laity; union leaders and denomination heads: They were all there together in one place and one spirit.

Cesar Chavez himself and Dolores Huerta were there to honor Fred. And Fred Ross, Sr., who recruited and trained Cesar.

And the magnetic Chris Hartmire who, after he moved on from the East Harlem Protestant Parish, created the Migrant Ministry which evolved into the National Farm Worker Ministry: he was there as a beloved group cheerleader for Fred, who he had recruited to the NFWM almost right out of Union Theological Seminary.

I tell you, if the boiler in that Church had blown up that day, most of the nationally-known, church-related organizers for justice in the U.S. would have moved on to join Fred! . . .

People tend to forget that the farm worker movement is first, last, and always a movement of concerned Christians, rooted in worship and action for justice. And this service of



thanksgiving and praise, with its comforting and powerful scripture passages and stirring hymns -- "Morning Has Broken," "Amazing Grace," "Be Thou My Vision," and "For All the Saints" -- united and lifted up this great company in their sorrow, their remembrance, their hope and continuing commitment. Cliff Crummey said it was an experience of being crushed down and lifted up repeatedly, an experience of death and resurrection.

How was Fred's life reflected back through the many who responded to Chris Hartmire's invitation to share? Most commonly, it was in friends, family, co-workers, organizers, and farm laborers saying in very different ways that "Fred made me believe in myself."

Jock Brown said Fred always had time for you, even in the midst of his many responsibilities and busy work schedule. "I told a friend one day that Fred Eyster was my best friend." Whereupon the friend replied to Jock, "That can't be, he's my best friend."

It came back in many ways that Fred, who could make mistakes and goof up as well as anyone, was a child of the church, a lover of farm workers and their movement, an organizer from beginning to end, and a friend of everyone.

We celebrated Fred's life, shared in the rhythmic and militant UFW handclap, and acknowledged that the work to which Fred was so committed is not over. Wage and labor conditions battles lie ahead; struggles to organize yet more workers, to end use of poisonous pesticides, will require our renewed commitment and shared efforts. No, it's not over yet, one nun resolutely observed, with the betrayal of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) by Governor Deukmejian in mind.

We left lifted up by the celebration of Fred's life, renewed, recommitted to the work which lies ahead by the God who is ever with us. . .

(Reprinted with permission from the Northern California Ecumenical Council newspaper.)



FLOC Convention - 1982

"Fred gave of himself fully so that the dignity, self-respect and rights of farm workers might be improved and protected...May his legacy of commitment continue through our collected efforts."

Most Rev. Roger Mahoney
Archbishop, Los Angeles



Conducting demonstration against Connecticut Life Insurance in Bay Area, 1977

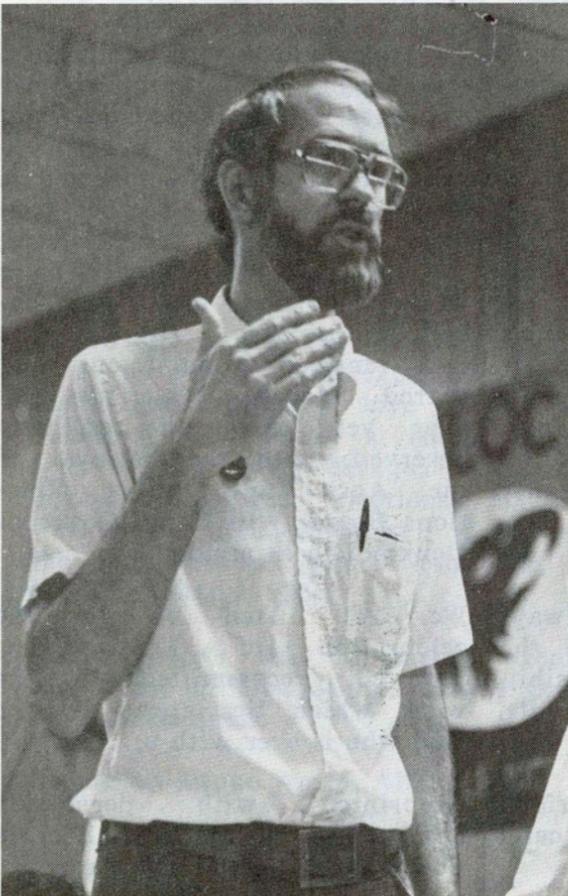
"I believe that it is only because of a strong faith life that a man can give himself so generously and lovingly for so many years. Fred has been an example to the rest of us who struggle to be faithful to the Gospel."

Sr. Lucille Martinez, NFWM Board Member representing Our Lady of Victory Noll Missionary Sisters



UFW Twentieth Anniversary Celebration, La Paz, 1982

Media tour with Baldemar Velasquez, San Francisco 1984



Receiving UFW National Representative Award from Cesar Chavez, March 30, 1985, along with Lupe Murgia (L) and Chris Hartmire (R).

"What a loss his death brings to the ranks of those who constantly fight for justice for farm workers."

Doris Younger, General Director, Church Women United
Frances Kennedy Ecumenical Action Office

"Fred Eyster was a man both gentle and tough in his ministry of service to God and farm workers."

John Nastrom, NFWM Board Member representing the Lutheran Council, USA

"To leave behind such a legacy of love and concern is something few of us attain."

Midge Roberts,
St. Louis Support Committee

"Like Oscar Romero, some people are taken away ahead of their time so that their values may live in others less brave."

Rev. Joe Tobin, OSSR
San Francisco

"I recall Fred's repeated advice: 'servanthood, brother, servanthood!'"

Harvey Baker,
Florida supporter



With NFWM staff - Dee Cole-Vodica, Sharon Streater, Sauni Walton, Oakland, 1984



NFWM Mission Department Meeting, 1980

"His spirit continues to be a source of great strength and inspiration to me and to many who labor in the cause of justice."

Rev. Benton Rhoades, NFWM Board Member representing Agricultural Missions, Inc.

"A great friend, a great apostle!"

Rev. Martin J. Farrell,
Chicago Archdiocese

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

In OHIO Farm Labor Organizing President Baldemar Velasquez says, "We're at a 'make it or break it' stage in the negotiations with Heinz Company officials and growers. The next month should tell if an agreement is going to be reached."

Until the ink is dry, letters are still appropriate to:

Anthony O'Reilly, President
H. J. Heinz Company
600 Grant St., 60th Floor
Pittsburg, PA 15219

Meanwhile, Ohio pickle growers contracted to Campbell's (Vlasic) continue to resist signing three-way contracts similar to those with the tomato growers.

"The Vlasic growers were importing union busters from California," according to Velasquez, "including lawyer Joe Herman who was involved in grower attempts to decertify UFW and cripple the original intent of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act." Agribusiness agents gathering in Orlando invited Jodi Stearns, Ohio Vlasic grower, to keynote the conference with a speech on how to stop FLOC.

NATIONWIDE, the Wrath of Grapes campaign continues to gain momentum. If you or your group have not yet seen the Wrath of Grapes video, write to the NFWM office for a copy. Endorsements are still needed also.

DELANO, CALIFORNIA, will be the site of UFW's 25th Anniversary Celebration on May 23. Mark your calendar and come to Forty Acres!

FLORIDA supporters reinstated the idea of an Annual



Meeting, February 13-15 in Avon Park. Representatives of denominations, support groups and organizations joined in reflection, input and commitment. The meeting closed with a Memorial Service in honor of Fred Eyster who had been NFWM Florida Director for five years.

NORTH CAROLINA's own Joan Papert Preiss is recovering from a heart attack in March. She made a point of wearing a grape boycott button in the hospital and leafletting her doctors! Some folks go to unusual lengths to get the word around. Viva, Joan!

In TEXAS the Memorial Public County Park Messina Pavilion was dedicated to the memory of Sr. Carol Anne Messina, former NFWM staff person who died in 1985. A photo and resolution commending the work she did in the Valley for the poor hang inside the building. The park is located near Mission, TX, in an area of many farm worker colonias.

In the cities of Texas, farm workers have been visiting local store managers to educate them about the grape boycott. Several have agreed not to advertise or sell California grapes. One even endorsed the boycott! Si se puede!

Over 150 UFW members in Texas attended an all day workshop on pesticides on October 25. Dr. Marion Moses was the keynote speaker.

In OHIO the NFWM-sponsored Farm Witness Project released a report of farm worker intimidation in Vlasic labor camps of Northwest Ohio. Seventy three observers visited 41 farms, interviewing 375 workers and found that "growers and their hired representatives systematically threatened farm workers with the loss of their jobs if they speak with union organizers or sign membership cards." Survey results were sent to the Dunlop Commission since "These actions are outside the legal rights of growers and clearly represent unfair labor practices."

The Health Services Department of the State of California is continuing its investigation of the cancer cluster in McFarland. The evidence seems to eliminate nitrates in the water as the cause and points with ever stronger probability to the pesticides.

During this time the families in Delano and McFarland have witnessed two more deaths within the second week of March. Hector Bolanos, 7, lived with his family in a notoriously squalid migrant camp in Richgrove, California. He died of Leukemia and his mother accompanied his body to Mexico for burial.

Lydia Gonzalez, 27, had contracted polymyocytis in 1984 and died the same week as Hector. The families feel that whatever threatened their lives in the peak period of 1983-85 still lurks among them. They are committed to tell their stories so that the most dangerous pesticides will be banned.

The National Farm Worker Ministry is sponsoring Pesticide Seminars in Delano for church organizations to learn more about the crisis. If you group would like to attend one of these one and a half day workshops to meet the families, tour the area, talk with local growers, health officials and pesticide experts, please contact the NFWM office, P. O. Box 302, Delano, CA 93216.

Fred Eyster Memorial Fund Contributors

Organizations:

Cumberland Presbyterian Church
Loretto Literary and Benevolent Institute
National Assembly of Religious Women
Sarasota Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Service Committee, Unitarian Society, Santa Monica, CA
UFW-NY Boycott Staff
United Methodist Church Board of Global Ministries
United Methodist Church, Rio Grand Conference
United Methodist Church Board of Global Ministries-Women's Division

Individuals:

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Neal and Sharon Berinhout
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Sr. Theresa Grekowitz, a former cancer patient who has worked for many years in the farm worker movement, spent some special time with the families of McFarland and Delano in March to share with them the macrobiotic philosophy. It is a way of life and a way of eating that has helped many to put their cancer into remission.

Muchas gracias, Theresa, and to Dr. Joyce Hartsfield, of Detroit, who also spent several days consulting with the families.

15th Annual Farm Worker Week

The 15th Annual National Farm Worker Week will be observed April 27-May 3, 1987. Focused on the pesticide issue, resources include:

Posters - 18"x22" \$5.00
Bulletin inserts - \$3.00/100;
Wrath of Grapes Videocassette rental - \$10.00;
With These Hands, photo-essay book - \$9.95

All items may be ordered from NFWM, P.O. Box 302, Delano, CA 93216 or call (805)725-7446.

Grapes of Conflict
by Sid Smith

Grapes of Conflict is the story of the farm ministry from 1920 through the early 1970s; it is the story of the faith community serving farm workers in their struggle for self-determination and justice.

Grapes of Conflict is available in paper back for \$9.95, in hard cover for \$16.95 and in a special edition for \$25 from Hope Publishing House, 1821 West Third Street, Bloomington, IN 47401. Add \$1.50 shipping and handling per copy.

"*Grapes of Conflict* is a story and an analysis of the unusual relations between the religious community and the creative and progressive UFW...." John C. Bennet, Union Theological Seminary, NY.

"All those concerned about the relationship of the churches to issues of social justice will find help from *Ministry of the Dispossessed*." Robert McAfee Brown, Pacific School of Religion.

Ministry of the Dispossessed
by Pat Hoffman

Ministry of the Dispossessed is an account of how the church was challenged and changed by Cesar Chavez' movement of farm workers. Drawn from numerous interviews as well as the author's own experiences, it is a case study to be learned from and remembered.

Paper back is \$8.95 and is available from Wallace Press, P. O. Box 83850, Los Angeles, CA 90083. Add \$1.25 for shipping and 6.5% sales tax for Californians.



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