

Labor in the Pulpits 2011

The Interfaith Council 3 – 5 minute Speaker Guide - General

Good morning. Thank you Fr./Rev. _____ for sharing your pulpit with me today. My name is _____ and I am representing the Interfaith Council for Economics and Justice.

Labor Day weekend is the time we honor work and workers. We remember that the economy is made for people. For this reason we advocate for food justice that protects human life and human dignity, and promotes well-being in our community.

We focus on the plight of food-chain workers who plant, grow, harvest, process, or sell our food. We point to the need for personal justice, that is, the right to fresh local food for ourselves and our families.

We are a long way from seeing this justice in our County. Nearly 1 of 3 kids under 5 in our County is over-weight because they eat the wrong kinds of food, not because they eat too much food. Obesity leads to diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol, asthma, and psychological problems.

Many of us can't get healthy food. There are 4 times more fast-food restaurants than produce vendors or markets selling nutritious food.

Local nutrition agencies worry that tight budget times will prevent people from getting government food assistance in the future.

Justice also eludes those whose work provides us with food. Nationally, the average salary of food system workers is \$21,692 – well below the self-sufficiency standard. So many who we rely on to produce our food are immigrants – who are exploited by false legal threats and made vulnerable under our laws.

SELECT ONE SHORT STORY: Rufina or Family in Food Desert

OPTION ONE: Rufina

Today I'd like to share the story of one of these workers here in our valley.

Rufina came from Mexico and has lived 5 years in San Jose in pursuit of the American Dream. Working in bakery department of a local ethnic supermarket she gradually saw her pay increased from \$7.25 to \$9.50 an hour. She worked six-days per week, her supervisors rarely gave her rest breaks and they complained if she went to the bathroom too much. She suffered an accident at work once when she fell while stacking metal trays that caused her to miss a week of work and lose the baby she was pregnant with. She was not paid for the week of work she missed.

Some time later she came to work and was among many workers called individually into the manager's office for a long interview with the supermarket's "secret police person." He accused her of stealing supermarket food for her lunches and showed her a stack of computer discs on which he said she had been recorded stealing food on security cameras. Yet the men in the room would not play the recordings for her to see and threatened to give her name to immigration authorities if she continued to ask for the recordings to be played.

There is no justice here.

What can you do to put your faith into action and bring justice into the food system for families and workers like Rufina in Santa Clara County?

OPTION 2: Low-Income Family in Food Desert

What does “food justice” mean for a family of four struggling to survive in Silicon Valley when both parents make less than \$11 an hour, which is what one in five workers here earns?

It means you live in an area where you probably share an apartment with another family and the food sources that are within walking distance – because you can’t afford a car – are probably fast-food restaurants instead of supermarkets with nutritious food such as fruits and vegetables. \$1 buys many more calories at a hamburger stand than a grocery store, and the convenience of quickly prepared food makes sense when you are working multiple jobs, raising children, helping elderly relatives and relying on slow public transit.

These areas are called “food deserts” because healthy foods are hard to find and difficult to get to in poor neighborhoods. Food deserts exist throughout San Jose where there are four times as many fast-food outlets as there are fresh food markets.

And food deserts illustrate the injustice that poor people suffer through no fault of their own.

What can you do to put your faith into action and bring justice into the food system for families and workers in Santa Clara County?

[HOLD UP FAITH FOR FOOD JUSTICE CARD]

- Keep and use this resource card which depicts the vision of just food.
- Go to the website – www.svjustfood.org – for resources to get you started.
- Support urban farms and gardens, such as Veggielution, Full Circle Farm and La Mesa Verde.
- Find your local farmers markets.
- Learn how you can stand up for Farm Workers and save lives.
- Support Mercado and food service workers who seek to provide for their families.
- Go into your corner stores and tell them you want healthy foods.
- Teach your children the importance of a healthy balanced diet and model for them by eating one.
- **You can start today. I invite you to fill out the tear-off section on the card in order to receive an invitation to the first Silicon Valley Food Justice Summit.**

Please join with me and others working to bring justice to all aspects of our food system.