

**Affirming the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Boycott of Wendy's**  
**A Resolution of Witness submitted by Justice and Witness Ministries to the UCC Board of Directors**  
**May 12, 2016**

**Summary**

For ten years the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a farm-worker organization based in Immokalee, FL, has been asking fast-food chain Wendy's to join the [Fair Food Program](#). This partnership among growers, farm workers, and retailers is a worker-designed program governed by a Code of Conduct with a zero-tolerance policy for slavery and sexual harassment, a grievance procedure, and a pay raise. But for ten years, Wendy's has refused to join the Fair Food Program. So in March, 2016, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers called a consumer boycott of Wendy's. The United Church of Christ Board of Directors endorses the boycott of Wendy's.

**Biblical and Theological Rationale**

God's concern for the poor is at the heart of our Christian ethic of economic justice. Our biblical heritage teaches us that caring for the poor, the least among us, and the stranger are central to our understanding of God's mercy and our willingness to welcome Christ among us. As people who follow the example of Jesus by lifting up the image of table as a primary understanding of Christian life, fellowship, and stewardship, we must humbly acknowledge and confess that those who harvest the food for our dining tables are unable to feed their own families due to unjust wage structures.

There are thousands of farm workers in the state of Florida who labor under difficult and harsh conditions to provide us with food. These workers suffer injustice from discrimination, sexual harassment, poverty wages, dangerous working conditions, and deplorable housing. Our sacred scripture expressly forbids such treatment, saying: "You shall not withhold the wages of the poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). James wrote, "Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:4). We are called to ensure that God's abundance, given to us all, is equitably shared so everyone lives in the fullness of life. Within a capitalist system of wage labor, this means that everyone must be paid a living wage and be treated with dignity on the job.

God envisions a world where all God's people have everything they need to thrive, live lives of wholeness, and have the opportunity to be the people they were created to be. To make God's vision a reality, God calls the Church to action, to "loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke" (Isaiah 58:6). We are called to answer God's call to be co-creators with God of a world "where justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

**Background**

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is a 23-year-old organization of farmworkers based in Immokalee, FL, who primarily harvest tomatoes. Farmworkers endure difficult and dangerous conditions in the fields, very low pay, and few benefits, and must deal with sexual harassment, racial discrimination and even slavery. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers has had remarkable success in combating these ills. Today, 14 major food retailers participate in the [Fair Food Program](#) which has eliminated modern-day slavery and sexual violence in the Florida tomato fields, improved farmworker wages for the first time in decades, and guaranteed basic protections for workers. Participating retailers agree to purchase

exclusively from suppliers (growers) who meet a worker-designed Code of Conduct which includes a grievance procedure and a zero-tolerance policy for slavery and sexual harassment. Retailers also pay a “penny-per-pound” premium which is passed down through the supply chain and paid directly to farm workers by their employers.

For over 10 years, the CIW has been asking Wendy’s to join the Fair Food Program. Wendy’s major competitors including McDonalds, Burger King, Subway, and Taco Bell all participate. Since 2013, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers has had a special focus on Wendy’s with rallies, marches, letters, and other efforts. But Wendy’s has resisted joining. Moreover, starting last year, the firm halted all tomato purchases in Florida and instead is buying from growers in Mexico where, according to an in-depth [investigation](#) by the *LA Times*, “many farm laborers are essentially trapped for months at a time in rat-infested camps, often without beds and sometimes without functioning toilets or a reliable water supply, ... [where]some camp bosses illegally withhold wages to prevent workers from leaving during peak harvest periods, [and] it's common for laborers to head home penniless at the end of a harvest.” In short, Wendy’s has turned its back on successful efforts in Florida to protect workers’ basic human rights and has moved its supply chain to Mexico where human rights abuses are rampant.

### **Text of the Motion**

WHEREAS, farmworkers are among the most oppressed workers in the United States;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has long supported farmworkers’ struggle for justice;

WHEREAS, in 1973, General Synod IX suspended most of its work for 24 hours while nearly 100 pilgrims travelled from St. Louis to California’s Coachella Valley to stand with farmworkers threatened with violence;

WHEREAS, in 2001, when the Coalition of Immokalee Workers called for a boycott of Taco Bell (the company that would eventually become the first to sign on to the Fair Food Program), GS XXIII [endorsed](#) the boycott and the United Church of Christ became the first denomination (of many, eventually) to support it;

WHEREAS, in 2005, GS XXV passed a resolution that [celebrated](#) Taco Bell’s entry into the Fair Food Program (then called the Fair Food Alliance) and encouraged the United Church of Christ to “*support the CIW in its efforts to extend this new model of corporate social responsibility throughout the fast food industry*” (italics added);

WHEREAS, in 2009, when GS XXVII met in Tampa, many United Church of Christ members devoted a portion of their lunch break to [march](#) to a nearby Publix grocery store to encourage that supermarket chain to join the Fair Food Program;

WHEREAS, two years ago a letter calling on Wendy’s to join the Fair Food Program, signed by nearly two-dozen faith leaders [including](#) the United Church of Christ’s General Minister and President Rev. Geoffrey Black, was presented to Wendy’s board of directors at the 2014 shareholder meeting;

WHEREAS, numerous United Church of Christ congregations and members have marched, hosted marchers, participated in rallies and other events, sent letters and postcards, held workshops, and acted in a variety of ways to support the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and pressure Wendy’s to join the Fair Food Program;

WHEREAS, 10 years of activities and efforts to encourage Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program have not been successful;

WHEREAS, a boycott is a major undertaking, not to be embarked upon without great care, it is now a necessary next step given the failure of the great many efforts made over the last ten years to encourage Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program; and

WHEREAS, the UCC Florida Conference at their Spring Gathering (April 29-30, 2016) endorsed the boycott of Wendy's.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the United Church of Christ Board of Directors endorses the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' boycott of Wendy's.

*The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.*

*The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.*