

Mass commemorates Chavez's efforts

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The statement of principle at this story's beginning, which Chavez uttered at the end of a 25-day fast in 1968, was printed in the Mass program along with a headline proclaiming, "Millions reaped what Cesar Chavez sowed."

Sister Mary Jane Mitchell, SSJ, who coordinated the day's events, said that centering the church service on the late labor leader was a top priority for her.

"To me, it's important for the workers to raise up one of their own," commented Sister Mitchell, who serves as director of the Hispanic Migrant Ministry which services Monroe, Orleans, Niagara and Genesee counties.

Chavez, who led a national farm workers' rights campaign for more than three decades, died on April 23, 1993, at the age of 66.

Longoria maintained that although the effect of Chavez's work was felt most strongly in the southwestern United States, the influence of the United Farm Workers founder also extended to western New York.

"Farmers here stopped mistreating people. Or, if they were thinking about it, they weren't doing it," said Longoria.

Despite the progress gained through Chavez's deeds, one worker with the Brockport Migrant Education Project observed that much room remains for improvement.

Kristina Stading, who tutors chil-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Juan Mya of Mexico is one of about 65 migrant workers employed by Sodoma Farms this year.

dren of migrant workers, pointed to the shabby living conditions on area farms, which many of her students' families are forced to accept.

"There are a lot of people crowded into small camps," Stading acknowledged. "Some, who are more successful, are living in apartments. But I know of a three-bedroom apartment where there are 21 people. To me, it's amazing that people can live in these conditions."

In addition, Sister Mitchell pointed

out, "Many New York state labor laws exclude farm workers."

Javier Castañeda, who resides in Brockport year-round, said that although he's been satisfied with the wages he receives as a worker for Martin Farms, his feeling may not be widely shared.

"A lot of the people complain about how much they get in pay. They say, 'I work so hard for so little money,'" Castañeda remarked.

Chavez

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In its first, most important phase, it pitted Catholic Hispanic migrant laborers against Catholic grape growers.

Chavez first came to national attention in 1965 when the infant union he had formed in 1962 called a strike against southern California's table-grape growers. This action gave birth to numerous Chavez-led protests that came to be known as "La Causa."

A committee of Catholic bishops mediated the grape dispute and brought the two sides to the bargaining table after a five-year strike and national grape boycott.

A historic agreement, signed in Chavez's home town of Delano, Calif. — which served as the United Farm Workers headquarters — was struck between the union and growers. The pact accepted the union as bargaining agent for the workers, increased wages, improved medical conditions in the fields and — for the first time — gave medical benefits to workers and their families.

Yet the Delano agreement did not end the struggle. While the California fields were quiet, agricultural workers in other states took up the cry for justice and human dignity — although few succeeded beyond minimal improvement of substandard wages and working conditions.

Chavez continued to promote "La Causa," using his strong Catholic faith as an anchor. Masses marked the starts and ends of strikes, and union picketers often carried the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and knelt to pray on the picket line.

Like Mahatma Gandhi and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Chavez insisted on non-violence. In February 1968 he faced a challenge to those principles by rival leader Reies Tjerina, who called for a more militant approach. Chavez answered with a 25-day, water-only "fast and penance" that drew national attention to "La Causa."

Chavez's leadership inspired farm laborers who previously had enjoyed only brief successes in unionizing, in large part because of the almost insurmountable obstacles posed by their exclusion from the protections of the National Labor Relations act.

He also inspired hundreds of Catholic priests, nuns and seminarians who gave up summer vacations or took sabbaticals to help picket, organize or promote his national boycotts of grapes and lettuce.

"What (Chavez) is for me is another Jesus Christ. He lived his faith... I think he was a saint," said Jesuit Father William Wood, head of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference's board and former California Catholic Conference director.

Yet some of the most bitter attacks against Chavez also came from Catholic leaders.

Father Daniel Lyons, a conservative Jesuit priest who was later laicized, regularly used his newspaper, *Twin Circle*, to accuse Chavez of communism.

Chavez's activism continued right up until this year; in fact, just a week before his death, he had ended a private 37-day fast that focused on justice for farm workers.

Chavez died long before achieving his vision of dignity, just wages, and safe working and living conditions for agricultural workers across the country.

But, according to his son-in-law, "La Causa" will live on.

"He gave us enough work to do for the next 100 years with all the dreams he put before us," said Rodriguez.

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@bituary

Sister Gleason; former teacher

PITTSFORD — Sister Teresa Angelica Gleason, SSJ, who taught for three decades in diocesan elementary schools, died on Wednesday, June 2, 1993, at the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Infirmary, 4095 East Ave. She was 82.

A native of Rush, Sister Teresa Angelica entered the Sisters of St. Joseph from Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church in 1930. She was a graduate of Nazareth Academy and Nazareth Normal School.

Among the schools in which Sister Teresa Angelica taught were: St. Peter and Paul, Elmira; St. Francis de Sales, Geneva; St. Patrick, Seneca Falls; St. Mary, Auburn; St. Mary, Canandaigua; Sacred Heart, Perkinsville; St. Lucy, Rochester; and Sacred Heart, Auburn. Illness forced Sister Teresa Angelica to retire to the convent infirmary in 1964.

She is survived by a sister, Alice Gleason, of Rochester; nieces and nephews; as well as her sisters in the congregation of St. Joseph.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated in the motherhouse chapel on June 4, with Monsignor William H. Shannon presiding and Fathers Robert Donovan, John Hayes and Donald Curtiss assisting. Burial was in the Sisters' section of Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

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