

Presentation for SU 190 Class: Good News From the Poor

Lessons from the field My Summer at United Workers-(Slow Down)

Introduce myself-born and raised in ENY Brooklyn, Dual Degree, PI staff since 2007 where I work on Bible Studies, workshops and various programs, currently I intern at FPWA where I organize Brooklyn pastors. I work primarily within the progressive evangelical community and hope to continue justice ministry in the community I grew-up in. The values that shape my work are: respecting the agency of poor people, justice as not only a add on to faith life but as an integral part of my Christian discipleship and a desire to unite the poor in urban, rural and suburban communities.

Introduce what I will discuss: United Workers, my role as a community organizer this summer, how United Worker employs Bible Study in its organizing, an example of a faith ally working with UW and Q & A

United Workers Introduction:

The United Workers is a human rights organization led by low-wage workers. We are leading the fight for fair development, which respects human rights, maximizes public benefits and is sustainable. Founded in 2002 by homeless day laborers meeting in an abandoned firehouse-turned-shelter they were inspired by past human rights struggles. For the first years of our founding, we focused on understanding the root causes of poverty and dedicated ourselves to organizing around universal human rights. The Living Wages at Camden Yards Campaign was developed out of this process, which to date is the largest living wage win for non-union workers in American history. UW stresses leadership develop and has a poverty scholars program where workers learn about poor people's movements and organize other workers and then graduate, from this program a member has been hired as a full time organizer. UW strongly believes in the leadership of the poor and has a leadership council made up of members who approve all major decisions including hiring myself and 3 other summer organizers.

Currently United Workers is engaged in the Campaign for fair development at Baltimore's Inner Harbor and is demanding that the developers who control the Harbor shift from poverty-based development to fair development. United Workers believes that since the inner harbor is the heart of Baltimore it should benefit the entire community and not just developers. The campaign demands are: Work with dignity, healthcare for workers, and educational opportunities.

This summer I was with United Workers as a Community Organizer connecting the organization to churches, faith based organizations and community based organizations around the country in preparation for the Campaign for Fair Development. My work included researching the potential faith partners and community allies, planning actions at the Inner Harbor, attending community meetings on issues such as the proposed Baltimore Walmart and the Baltimore Living Wage Bill,

planning a series of Poverty Zone Reality Tours in New York City and Chicago and doing plenary work for tours in other cities. I met with religious and community leaders to develop relationships and obtained endorsements for the campaign. Much of my work was making the faith community aware of United Worker through email outreach, face to face meetings and networking.

Though based in Baltimore United Workers not only organizes African-Americans but Latinos and Whites as well and is committed to building a movement across color lines.

Though not a faith based organization since its inception United Workers has held Bible Studies with workers to discuss how Biblical text can speak to their current situation. United Workers also utilizes gospel music in it's action and programs. Art is also an integral part of United Workers. Many of the members are Christian from more evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic traditions and for these members their organizing comes out of their faith. The sanctity of life is an undergirding value of UW and this value connects with faith leaders. Prior to working with UW I met many strong Christians who were leaders in the organization which showed me the role faith could play in the life of an organizer. I first encountered UW in a Reading the Bible with the Poor class co-taught by United Workers members and Professor Hal Taussig they examined a parable of Jesus in light of the struggle for living wages at Camden Yards. For me studying a familiar parable with people facing similar conditions as laborers in Christ day illuminated the scriptures for me. The most valuable lesson I learned from United Workers is that as religious leaders if we are not studying the Bible through the lens of the poor we miss valuable lessons in the text.

Introduce Rev. Powers Video-Discuss ESPN, UW & Workers response, press conference, play video and discuss President of Cordish watching us. In my tradition we discuss spiritual warfare a great deal but when Rev. Powers attempted to pray at the Inner Harbor I actually saw with my own eyes what spiritual warfare was. Rev. Powers resolve gave the workers the courage they needed to testify.

Q & A